



HUMAN INTEREST STORY

Building a Better Future: A Youth Leader Promotes Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The eldest of nine children, **Japhet** is a vibrant, 23 year-old, university student at Institut Supérieur de Techniques Appliqués in Goma, the capital of Nord Kivu province, where he studies electronics and mechanics. Japhet liked to work with his hands. His dream is to establish a training center where young people in Goma can learn a trade and basic life skills that will enable them to fulfill their own dreams. Japhet believes that unemployment and lack of access to good information and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services are two of the biggest challenges faced by young people in a part of the country that has been touched by more than two decades of conflict.

In a survey conducted by CARE and the National Adolescent Health Program in Goma, 34% of people aged 15-19 years and 81% of people aged 20-24 years said they were sexually active. Nearly one third of girls and young women who were ever pregnant reported having an abortion. Unplanned pregnancies often have devastating consequences for young people, especially for unmarried girls. Once the pregnancy becomes visible, they face social marginalization and expulsion from school and even their own home. Adding insult to injury, the father of the child usually bears few, if any, consequences for his role in the affair, often denying any involvement.

Japhet wants to make sure that their dreams are not jeopardized by unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. So, for the past year, he has volunteered with CARE as a peer leader for an initiative to improve young people's access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and services. This initiative is implemented in partnership with several Protestant churches in Goma that operate a schools and primary health centers that serve the larger community.

As a peer leader, Japhet engages adolescents and young people in a variety of interactive activities designed to equip them with the information and skills they need to protect themselves against unplanned



Japhet, youth leader and advocate for ASRH, at CARE's youth-friendly space in Goma

pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection and to treat their sexual partners with respect. These activities take place in a youth-friendly space located next to a church-managed primary health center. Japhet and his peers designed this space, the first of its kind in North Kivu, to be a safe space for youth to meet and get quality SRH services from a friendly health provider 24 hours per day and 7 days per week.

Japhet also seeks out adolescents and young people in the neighborhood to talk about sexual and reproductive health and to refer them to the youth-friendly space for information and services. Japhet's strategy for engaging people in a conversation is to describe a difficult situation in which a young person might potentially find themselves – say pregnant while still in school – and then ask what would happen in such a circumstance and what could have been done to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Japhet enjoys helping adolescents to get the information and services they need to protect their health and their futures. He is deeply motivated by the belief that, if he helps one person, that person will help another, who will help another, and so on, making the world a better place in the process.

CARE International is reducing unintended pregnancies and deaths from unsafe abortion by supporting high-quality service delivery in 48 primary health facilities that serve more than one million people in four health zones in North Kivu province in eastern DRC. Between June 2011 and December 2016, CARE reached 57,265 new family planning users with a wide-range of contraceptives methods. Adolescents comprise 17% of all new family planning users, choosing long-acting and reversible methods three out of four times.

CARE is committed to reducing poverty and social injustice by empowering women and girls and enabling them to exercise their right to decide whether, when and how many children to have. For more information about CARE's family planning and SRH work in DRC, please contact Elizabeth Noznesky at enoznesky@care.org or visit CARE's wiki <http://familyplanning.care2share.wikispaces.net/>.

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