



# MORE THAN A GAME: SOCCER-BASED HEALTH PROGRAMMING FOR ADOLESCENT BOYS AND YOUNG MEN

## GRASSROOT SOCCER

Playing soccer, shooting pool, and drinking at the tavern – that is how many young men spend their free time. Despite facing many health challenges, young men tend to not go to clinics, contemplate their long-term health, or consider the harmful gender norms that leave them sick, unhappy and struggling to form healthy connections with the people who matter most to them. Adolescent boys and young men (ABYM) need effective interventions to improve their health, transform gender norms, and end sexual and gender-based violence, but they are difficult to reach.

Harmful gender norms drive poor health-seeking behaviors and outcomes for ABYM, violence against women and girls, and men's power over women in relationships. Adolescents with inequitable gender beliefs are more likely to have early sex, unsafe sex, STIs, and their relationships are more likely to involve intimate partner violence. Men who adhere to dominant masculine norms have worse mental health and general wellbeing and are more likely to avoid health care clinics.



Adolescent boys and young men have diverse needs, interests, beliefs and unique barriers to accessing health services. Effective programming engages with the complex influences shaping their attitudes, decisions and behaviors; resonates with their lifestyles, identities and life stages; reaches them in spaces they already use; creates positive associations with health services; and sees men and boys as potential agents for positive change rather than viewing them as “the problem”.

Grassroot Soccer harnesses the power of soccer to engage young men through a medium they know and love. Over 900,000 adolescent boys and young men have graduated from our programs and show improved knowledge of key protective behaviors for HIV, knowledge of, demand for, and uptake of local sexual and reproductive health services, and have more equitable gender beliefs.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH ADOLESCENT BOYS AND YOUNG MEN

Grassroot Soccer's approach to working with adolescent boys and young men emphasizes five principles:

- 1 **Use Soccer as a Hook and Platform**



Soccer is the world's most universal interest: Roughly 3.5 billion people identify themselves as soccer fans

- 2 **Train Male Mentors that Show Alternative Ways of Being**



Trusted and relatable messengers, mentors and role models are key to motivating ABYM – and the qualities of effective male mentors can be **LEARNED**

- 3 **Create Positive Experiences with Health Systems in Non-Clinical Settings**



ABYM benefit from opportunities to reflect and ACT – we bridge connections to health systems and help both providers and ABYM connect and increase uptake of health services (VMMC, HTS, Care and Treatment)

- 4 **Design for Non-Traditional Champions**



We design materials and programs that work for diverse and often unconventional educators (e.g. soccer coaches) to bring about large-scale change

- 5 **Transform gender norms**



We use a gender-transformative approach, with intentional designs for engaging both men and women, boys and girls in single and mixed-sex programming

# PROGRAM AREAS

## PROGRAM AREA 1: TRANSFORMING GENDER NORMS AMONG ADOLESCENT BOYS

Grassroot Soccer's trained male mentors ("Coaches") deliver programs for adolescent boys to transform harmful gender norms before adulthood. Grassroot Soccer's programs challenge the toxic masculinity promoted in soccer spaces and culture, redefining the soccer pitch as a place where soccer, gender equality, and health are mutually reinforcing.



In Nigeria, Grassroot Soccer and Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI) designed an 11-session, soccer-based program for adolescent boys 13-16 that facilitates discussions on masculinity, gender equality, sexual health, violence, and substance abuse. Program evaluations from Nigeria and South Africa have highlighted the potential of Grassroot Soccer's single-sex interventions for adolescent boys to shift harmful gender norms.



## PROGRAM AREA 2: EMPOWERING YOUNG MEN TO LIVE HEALTHY OFF THE PITCH

Grassroot Soccer uses semi-structured discussions to create opportunities for dialogue about gender, health, and health services. Soccer-based events use positive peer pressure and provide mobile, on-site, and integrated health screenings to reduce stigma, normalize service utilization and drive the uptake of HIV Testing Services (HTS), Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC), and care and treatment services.

"Make the Cut", a single, 60-90 minute session designed to generate demand for VMMC and link ABYM to VMMC service providers, has recently been selected as best in class for HIV prevention demand creation "Demonstrated Impact" by the USAID OPTIONS Consortium and has been highlighted by UNAIDS and PEPFAR as a priority intervention.

## PROGRAM AREA 3: TRAINING EFFECTIVE MALE MENTORS AND HEALTH EDUCATORS

Coach-participant connectedness is central to our work: Multiple studies on Grassroot Soccer programs have found that the coach-participant relationship is highly valued and directly contributes to learning and shapes actions among adolescents and male coaches. Trained and effective coaches are a prerequisite for successful programs. Grassroot Soccer delivers differentiated male coach/educator trainings; creates user-friendly manuals for them to communicate men's health messages; and provides ongoing support through routine visits and personalized feedback.

**"TO HAVE SOMEONE WHO CAN ACTUALLY TELL YOU ABOUT [VMMC] WAS INTERESTING, BECAUSE ALL MY LIFE I HAVE NEVER HAD SOMEONE WHO CAN TELL ME ABOUT THINGS, AND FOR HIM TO BE OPEN LIKE THAT MEANT A LOT"**

CIRCUMCISED MAKE THE CUT PARTICIPANT, ZIMBABWE

Grassroot Soccer and the South African Football Association (SAFA) have designed a 5-day coaching course and simplified sexual and reproductive health, gender, and HIV-prevention curriculum that soccer coaches deliver to their teams on the soccer pitch. The training provides soccer coaches with applicable adolescent-friendly teaching concepts and techniques and fun, educational games to use seamlessly during their soccer practices.

### ABOUT US

Grassroot Soccer has implemented health programs for 2 million adolescents in 50 countries. GRS's sport-based approach is designed to build young people's ASSETS – their health knowledge and confidence to use it; improve their demand for and ACCESS to health services; and promote ADHERENCE to healthy behaviors and pro-social norms.

### CONTACT

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