



...empowering the youth

SABOBA YOUTH CENTRE (SYC)

BRIEF PROFILE

Saboba Youth Centre (SYC) was set up in 2010 to create a common platform for young persons in Saboba to meet, learn and share ideas and experiences, and take up the opportunity to develop their communities. The creation of the Centre was facilitated by Youth Empowerment for Life (YE/L) an NGO based in Tamale. Membership of the SYC is made up of Youth Groups and individuals who are committed to volunteering to bring a positive change to society.

We are recognized as a District Youth Organisation by the Saboba District Assembly, National Youth Authority, the Traditional and Religious bodies and other Government and Non-governmental organizations in and outside the Saboba District. SYC was recently registered with the Registrar General's Department in April 2017 to fully operate as a legal and recognized organization. We have transitioned from just creating a platform for young people to meet and discuss issues to becoming an Empowerment and Advocacy body championing young people's needs and general development of the Saboba District through projects.

For the past few years of the SYC existence, we have built good relationship and rapport with many bodies culminating in strong partnerships and the implementation of projects and activities both locally and internationally.

STRUCTURE

All members at the SYC are volunteers who have dedicated and committed their services to the development of their communities. The Centre has a key Volunteer and a Seven (7) member Youth Centre Management Committee who oversees the efficient manning of the Centre. Members constitute the AGM and meet annually to look at the issues of the centre and take decisions to address and promote its interest.

The Chairman, Vice, Secretary, Deputy, Finance Secretary, Organizer and Deputy, constitutes the Management Committee of the Centre.

THEMATIC AREAS/FOCUS

The Youth Centre generally operates in four main thematic areas aimed at developing young people and communities.

1. THEME ONE: Youth Empowerment

We use various approaches to empower young people in our district. The empowerment takes the form of social, economic and political.

Economic Empowerment using the VSLA Approach: A Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) is a group of people who save together and take small loans from those savings. The activities of the group run in cycles of one year, after which the accumulated savings and the loan profits are distributed back to members. The purpose of a VSLA is to provide simple savings and loan facilities in a community that does not have easy access to formal financial services. The VSLA is a more transparent, structured and democratic version of the informal savings groups found in villages and slums in many parts of the developing world. The main difference is that the VSL methodology is a better organized and more accountable system that even the least literate, least influential member of the group can understand and trust.

Groups usually hold annual elections. The roles and responsibilities of the five-person management committee are clearly defined and highly decentralized. This is to encourage the participation of all members in the operations of the group; and, moreover, to protect the group from being dominated by a single individual. Each group is composed of 15 to 30 self-selected individuals. Groups meet weekly or most appropriate periods and members save through the purchase of shares. The price of a share is decided by the group. At each meeting, every member should purchase between 1 and 5 shares. The share-price is set by the group at the beginning of the cycle and is fixed for the entire cycle.

The system is very simple; but the result is powerful. In a VSLA, savings is flexible across members and over time. Members do not have to save the same amount as each other; and they do not have to save the same amount at each meeting. Also, by saving more frequently in very small amounts, the poor can build their savings more easily; and this contributes to improving the security of the household.

Over the past year of implementing this concept at the SYC, we have been able to establish eleven (11) VSLA groups in six communities in the Saboba District aimed at alleviating poverty in those communities.

Social and Political Empowerment using the Youth Parliament Approach

Generally, youth participation in governance processes at the local level is low in Ghana and Northern region in particular. The absence of suitable platforms for productive engagement between the youth and duty bearers remains a challenge. This has resulted to widening the information gap on governance and youth development issues between the youth population and their local authorities. Information is power and therefore lack of access to adequate information has waned the youth's confidence and interest to exercise their civic rights and responsibility to take active part in decision making process, demand accountability and responsiveness from duty bearers at the local level.

The situation is worse viewing it through the gender lens. Physical insecurity, low confidence, lack of access to information and stereotyping are key factors limiting young females and persons living with disabilities' participation in governance processes at the community and district levels in the proposed project districts. The far-reaching consequences are that young females have no voice or influence in the decision-making process, lack the confidence and capacity to demand accountability and responsiveness from duty bearers at the local level, resulting to little or no conscious efforts to promote interventions or provide public goods and services to address their special needs. The concept seeks to create conditions which will enable equal and active participation of both young females and males including persons with disabilities in the governance processes at the community and district levels.

Youth Parliament is the key strategy to be used to achieve the main objectives. The Youth Parliament approach takes inspiration from Ghana's parliamentary system. It is a platform created for young people to discuss/debate on issues concerning the young people and their community development. There are **Minority** and **Majority** caucuses. Issues that require government's attention are tabled by the minority whilst majority caucus takes on issues which demand citizen's attention. It provides space for the youth to invite duty bearers to respond to development issues and make commitments to resolve them.

This strategy will capacitate the youth, especially young females, create space for engaging duty bearers and bridge the information gap between the duty bearers and the youth especially as the debate will be done in a local language and English, bearing in mind the ethnic diversity in the proposed districts.

Unlike the usual civic engagement forums, the youth parliament presents an opportunity for young persons to build their confidences, nurture the youth for leadership positions. The fun of it as youth parliamentarians also makes it more convenient to be used by the target beneficiaries to demand accountability, transparency in local governance while demanding actions on development issues in their communities from duty bearers. It is also easy to ensure gender equality using this approach by deliberately selecting equal numbers of young females and males.

Aim

- i.** Enabling the youth to influence decisions and local level policies through dialogue;
- ii.** Promoting dialogue by affording the young Parliamentarians the opportunity to dialogue with duty bearers
- iii.** Promoting female and Persons living with Disabilities participation by providing equal opportunity for both males and females to contribute positively to societal development by sharing their knowledge and experiences on a common platform.
- iv.** Serving as a platform for youth of different communities to participate in discussing common issues affecting the society/community.

Outcome so far

1. Increased youth participation in governance processes in the Saboba district.

2. Enhanced engagement between the youth parliament and local government.
3. Increased capacity of youth parliamentarians.

2. THEME TWO: Youth in Environment, Health and Sanitation.

The CLTS Approach: Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) is an innovative methodology for mobilizing communities to completely eliminate open defecation (OD). Communities are facilitated to conduct their own appraisal and analysis of open defecation (OD) and take their own action to become ODF (open defecation free).

At the heart of CLTS lies the recognition that merely providing toilets does not guarantee their use, nor result in improved sanitation and hygiene. Earlier approaches to sanitation prescribed high initial standards and offered subsidies as an incentive. But this often led to uneven adoption, problems with long-term sustainability and only partial use. It also created a culture of dependence on subsidies. Open defecation and the cycle of fecal–oral contamination continued to spread disease.

In contrast, CLTS focuses on the behavioural change needed to ensure real and sustainable improvements – investing in community mobilization instead of hardware, and shifting the focus from toilet construction for individual households to the creation of open defecation-free villages. By raising awareness that as long as even a minority continues to defecate in the open everyone is at risk of disease, CLTS triggers the community’s desire for collective change, propels people into action and encourages innovation, mutual support and appropriate local solutions, thus leading to greater ownership and sustainability. The SYC has with support from the World Vision have facilitated 10 communities to be declared Open Defecation Free in the district.

Monthly Sanitation Exercise

The Ghana government in 2015 launched the monthly clean up exercise which happens every 1st Saturday of a month. We as a youth group decided to adopt this day to clean our communities. We do this by mobilizing young people to clean identified areas in the district capital.

Tree Planting

Climate change is a global emerging issue and as part of our approach to contributing to mitigate its impact in our communities, our dream is to have communities and schools plant trees to ensure environmental friendliness and ensure positive impact of climate change.

3. THEME THREE: Education and Mentorship.

Education continues to be the most significant commodity to lift people out of poverty and the surest best for general development of a society. Our approach has to do with organizing ***education related activities*** (example, finalists summit, mentorship sessions, quiz competitions, etc) to sensitize and equip students with requisite knowledge to be able to excel in their education.

Scholarship/Sponsorship: We also try as much as possible to support some brilliant but needy students by paying part of their school fees, tuition fees, books, transportation cost to and from school, etc, this is a form of scholarship/sponsorship for them to be able to continue their education. Currently, we have only two students receiving little support in this regard.

4. THEME FOUR: Youth in Sports and Culture for development

We have been engaged in using sports and games to preach and promote the need for peace in our communities. We are using sports as a Tool for Development and also to foster the peace that exist between and among various groups in the Saboba District. Our target mostly here are young people and their youth groups and communities as well, they engage in local football matches, volley ball and other indoor and outdoor games.

The culture aspect also targets students and community youth groups however; we have not been able to do much in this area yet.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender is a cross-cutting issue in our activities. we consciously try to have gender parity in our work. Supporting young girls to be included in the process and helping them fight for their rights remains a topmost priority. Girls are faced with a lot of challenges and therefore, our activities look at working with girls and their communities to at least minimize the challenges. And so our education support target more girl children and we have child rights activities for all.

STRATEGIES

We use the following ways in our work and approaches; this is not exhaustive

- ✓ Advocacy
- ✓ Engagements
- ✓ Radio programming
- ✓ Games
- ✓ Forums
- ✓ Parliamentary sittings
- ✓ Community journalism
- ✓ Community durbars
- ✓ Trainings
- ✓ Seminars
- ✓ Social media

KEY PRINCIPLES

The Youth Centre is guided by the principles below:

- Spirit of volunteerism
- Learning by doing

- Peer-to-peer
- The “I Can Do” spirit
- Patriotism and Commitment to Duty.

KEY SUCCESSES

- ✓ Formed eleven (11) VSLA Groups.
- ✓ Built the capacities of over 1000 young people.
- ✓ Facilitated and supports youth groups in some communities.
- ✓ Started the first **youth parliament** in Northern Region.
- ✓ Advocated for the work on the Yendi-Saboba road.
- ✓ Contributed to achieving ODF in six communities.
- ✓ Successfully carried out **two score card** exercises (RING Project and Health Insurance Scheme) and the 2017 **Communities Action Plans** for the Saboba District Assembly.

CHALLENGES

- ❖ Inadequate funding.
- ❖ Struggle for office space.
- ❖ Transportation and office equipment difficulties.
- ❖ Lack of sustained opportunities for members.