

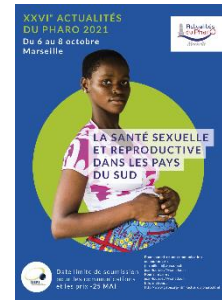
## Actualités du Pharo 2021 – Session 3

### The safe space approach in Koutiala, Sikasso region, Mali

Keywords: safe spaces, reproductive health, gender, Mali

**Boubacar TRAORE**

[boubacar.traore@asdapmali.org](mailto:boubacar.traore@asdapmali.org)



As in the rest of Mali, in the Sikasso region certain traditional practices prevent women from enjoying their rights. The choice of Koutiala was justified by the strong cultural roots of these practices, the strong belief in myths and rumours, the lack of knowledge of women and girls of their rights, the persistence of taboos on sexuality, and the strong resistance to change. The safe spaces approach, based on safe spaces for exchange and learning where a woman mentor and girls aged 10 to 24 years old can speak freely in small groups, is one response. It aims to improve access to quality health information and services, develop life skills, and promote economic empowerment through learning trades. The components are: Sexual and reproductive health; Gender and human rights; Life skills; School support; Literacy and simplified management in entrepreneurship. Then the Husbands and Husbands-to-be Clubs initiative was introduced to provide young husbands and husbands-to-be with knowledge and skills on gender equality and positive masculinity. The manual covers six topics, gender and power dynamics, sexual and reproductive health rights, prevention of gender-based violence and the distribution of unpaid work. The facilitation is done in 40 weeks for girls and 20 for boys. Indirect beneficiaries are other community members through communication activities.

Results achieved since 2018,

- 24 safe spaces for girls and boys
- 3,466 mentees, 532 husbands and 700 future husbands have completed the sessions, i.e. 96.28%, 100% and 97.63% respectively
- 296 mentees who were exam candidates benefited from academic support with a success rate of 65.54% higher than the local rate of 56.31%.
- 32,032 people reached
- 835 new and 1,839 former family planning users.

However, challenges remain, such as the delay in enrolment and also the low attendance rate of beneficiaries due to domestic activities.

The prospects are to formalise the girls' new skills through vocational training; to support economic and social empowerment factors, and to make them and the club members champions of change in their communities by relaying the concept of safe spaces and positive masculinity.