



BREAK THE BIAS

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2022

BIAS.

Noun- Inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair. A bias is a disproportionate weight in favor of or against an idea or thing, usually in a way that is close minded, prejudicial or unfair.

Women in society for the longest time have been victim to bias and stereotypes which have led to their concerns and rights getting neglected if not abused. To mark international women's day Pathway's policy institute participated in the Road trip 4 a cause, an initiative powered by Drawing Dreams Initiative and supported by Pathways Policy Institute, BATUK, NIBC Entertainment, KSG youth center, RedP Kenya, Dress for change initiative and chill and grill Kitchen. This is an opportunity for likeminded organizations and youth from different sectors to come together and engage communities while having fun.



The day, 5th march, 2022 began with a drive to Isiolo by a team of 65 people from Nairobi, Nanyuki and Isiolo for the commemoration of the International Women's Day. The team met at Kisima as they geared up for a day of breaking biases that affect women which was in line with the theme of this year's IWD, 'BREAK THE BIAS'. Clad in maroon T-shirts the smiles on their faces showed the excitement that all participants felt

about this day. First came an introduction and cake cutting session celebrating everyone in attendance. The agenda of the day was for the team to be separated into to groups that would engage adolescents and youth at two different locations. These locations included Pepo la Tumaini center and Almasi children's center in Isiolo.



On arrival at Pepo la Tumaini center, the team was treated to a surprise welcome of song and dance from the children at the center who were so happy to receive guests. They also surprisingly found a group of women waiting patiently to also participate in the talk which initially had been meant for adolescents. Their reason for this was to know what information was being given to their children and the children at the center. The session began with a brief high energy introduction before they were split into three groups namely, pre-pubescents, adolescents and youth and the women too were put into a group. The topics for the respective groups were based on age to ensure all groups received gender appropriate information. The prepubescents who were between 6- 10 years were introduced to the topics of puberty and the changes that one experiences. They giggled and cupped their faces when the physical changes were mentioned but were very excited to learn more and displayed this by raising their hands to answer questions, they also had a session on careers stating what their dreams were.



#BreakTheBias

The second group which was the adolescents and youth whose ages varied from 11- 18 years. They tackled in-depth, the topic of adolescence, focusing mostly on menstrual health and hygiene. This was done through a demonstration session whereby they were able to touch and examine different menstrual hygiene products. Many of them were in awe of the tampons and the menstrual cup and giggled and cringed as they touched them. The boys shook their heads in disbelief at the different sanitary products buy after the explanations on use displayed relaxed faces showing empathy for their female counterparts. They also had a brief career talk whereby they described qualities they needed in order to ensure they excelled in school and pursued their dreams. The third group was the women's group, who weren't afraid to explain that they wanted to hear the info that is given to their children since they had been having difficulty knowing how to package this information for their children. Some admitted to never talking to their children about puberty and menstruation at all. They claimed that that information was shameful and they did not know much about it since they too had never been talked to about it. After a description of puberty and menstruation, the demonstrations on the sanitary products began, many of the women admitted to only knowing pads as the product for use during their period before the demonstration session. The looks of horror on their faces were a sight to see especially when the tampons and menstrual cups were brought out. Some had the fear the tampons and cups would disappear in their bodies never to be found again or cause pain on insertion. After a brief anatomy discussion, the horror turned into being impressed by the products and a zeal to give them a try. The sessions were ended with a question-and-answer session during which one of the women stood and pointed out that at the beginning she had been skeptical when she saw men among the team facilitators and when they were asked to bring their sons for the talk but by the end, she saw it as an important way to break the bias caused by lack of information by the menfolk that has led to women being discriminated against.



The sessions in both venues ended much later in the afternoon with the giving out of sanitary products to the girls present. Each of the 115 girls out of the 135 prepubescents, adolescents and youth in both centers received a dignity pack containing two packs of sanitary towels. The teams came together despite the blazing Isiolo sun and with their hands crossed in front of their chests chanted the IWD2022 theme 'Break the bias' pledging to continue these conversations while including boys and men to ensure the menstruation conversation stops being stigmatized.

After a successful session the children and women assembled to have lunch as both teams converged in readiness to proceed to Esipil camping grounds in Ngarendare- Isiolo. Where the road trip 4 a cause would continue. On arrival at the grounds only a cacophony of excited voices and spoons and plates could be heard as the team had their supper under a star lit sky and continued the conversation on ways to continue breaking the bias that continues to lead to women's rights being overlooked in society. This continues on into the early hours of the morning.

Across town, approximately 2 kilometers away, the second team was also engaging the children at Almasi children's center, a center that offers children with neurological disabilities physiotherapy sessions and soft skills like sewing. This acts as economic empowerment for the children that are able to pick these skills ensuring that they are able to work later in life and contribute to society. The sessions began with a talk about puberty and menstrual health management with the adolescent girls in the center. Many of them could recognize a pad but did not know how to properly use it. The care takers and the therapists made it known to the teams that some of the girls had severe neurological disabilities that made them require extra attention especially during their period. They explained that this support is not always forthcoming from the government and the society since they do not have access to these sanitary products. They also explained that the public has been exposed to false information that has in turn made them think that persons living with disability do not require to have access to sexual and reproductive health information or have their rights met. The caretakers explained that people living with disabilities from this bias fall victim to sexual assault and once assaulted do not get help from law enforcement since there are no people who understand them at the police stations for example.



The teams woke up to breakfast in the bush followed by a brief walk to the Ngarendare water fall that was not too far away where they socialized and swam as they said goodbye to the beautiful scenery. This moment in the fresh air prepared the team for the drives back to their respective localities and as the team said their goodbyes the smiles on their faces displayed pride in the conversations and impact that had been participated in for the two days.

All people have the right to access health care services including and not limited to Reproductive Health Services and information. In addition to this, persons with disability also have unique Health care needs and therefore need equity in consideration.

