



CONCEPT NOTE

Project Title: Strengthening Access to Vocational Skills for Young Women and Adolescent Mothers at UMALA VTC Through Care & Support Initiatives

SUBMITTED TO

We One Action Network (WOAN)

BY

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1. SIMUN Profile

Siaya Muungano Network (SIMUN) is a non-profit, non-partisan, community-based organization, established in 2013, led by youths and committed to advancing women's rights and youth development in Siaya County, Kenya. As a youth-led organization, SIMUN empowers women, adolescent girls, and youth to realize their full potential and thrive politically, socially, and economically. This is achieved through advocacy for human and social justice rights and providing training, mentorship, and coaching opportunities.

SIMUN operates in rural communities, recognizing the numerous challenges facing women, girls, and youth, including economic dependency, illiteracy, limited skills for job creation, gender inequality, marginalization, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), conflicts, from laws and policy gaps. These issues significantly impact the survival and well-being of individuals and their communities.

The organization envisions a society where women and youth live in dignity, enjoy equal rights, and actively influence decisions that shape their lives and communities. SIMUN contributes to building a more equitable and resilient society by investing in their empowerment. Through its holistic approach, SIMUN continues to champion transformative change in the lives of vulnerable populations in Siaya County.

2. Background Of Umala Vocational Training Centre

Umala Vocational Training Centre is a government-registered public institution located in North Alego Ward in Siaya County. It was established in the year January 2020 to provide Vocational training to youth who wish to acquire technical and practical skills to improve their employability and self-reliance. It has a student enrolment of 76 youth students composed of 51 girls including teen mothers and 25 Boys participating in various learning activities in the Institution. The center offers programs in various fields, including Computer Operations, Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy, Dressmaking, electrical installation, Welding, and Masonry, and also offers short-term courses in Information Communication technology to school leavers to bridge the digital divide on emerging technological advancements and skills that are requisite for the current world industries.

3. SIMUN collaboration with WOAN and UMALA VTC in 2024

In current year (2024), Siaya Muungano Network collaboration with We One Action Network (WOAN) provided a holistic support to Umala VTC in Siaya County, Kenya. This has outlined the need to continuously identify mechanisms to promote retention and completion of vulnerable young women and adolescent mothers in Vocational Training Centres to acquire skills for job creation. This is was a step further in promoting realization of SDGs at the grass root level especially SDG's 1, 3, 4, 5 and 8 respectively. Our collaboration ensured the young women, adolescent mothers, children and male youth in Umala VTC had access to food and good nutrition through the feeding programme in all the terms, increased access to peer learning spaces through the mentorship sessions and access to training equipment's especially for the tailoring and hairdressing team. The results of 2024 collaboration and support are demonstrated by the increased retention rate of not only young women and adolescent mothers in Umala VTC but also the overall trend in population of students in the entire institution as monitored throughout the year. This is further demonstrated in the self-esteem levels of students from the life skills sessions and their continuously need for similar sessions every month which demonstrated the impact created by the discussions held with the students by SIMUN team.

4. Problem Statement

In Siaya County, young women and adolescent mothers face significant challenges in accessing education, deeply intertwined with the county's socio-economic struggles. With a Human Development

Index (HDI) of 0.46, which is below the national average of 0.56¹, the county's underperformance on key socio-economic indicators creates systemic barriers that disproportionately affect these vulnerable groups². One critical issue is poverty, with 33.1% of Siaya's population living below the monetary poverty line and 70.1% of youth experiencing multidimensional poverty. Poverty limits access to education as families struggle to afford school fees, learning materials, and associated costs, forcing many young women to abandon their studies. The situation is exacerbated by the high prevalence of unintended pregnancies at rate of 21%³, with adolescent girls often dropping out of school due to stigma, lack of support, or caregiving responsibilities.

Gender-based violence (GBV) at a rate of 24%⁴ and harmful cultural practices further compound the challenges experienced by young women and adolescent mothers in Siaya. Early marriages and sexual exploitation are prevalent, reducing opportunities for young women to pursue education and skills development opportunities. The young women and adolescent mothers who find opportunity to enroll in vocational training centres to access vocational skills for job creation, are faced by different challenges of balancing between care for their children and being in class for the training session. Secondly, due to the continued discrimination and stigma they experience in their respective households, communities and by their peers after being pregnant and dropping out of school, majority of them undergo mental stress and a feeling of depression and therefore require support system to rebuild back their self esteem and regain confidence and hope in life.

The concept outlines a proposal to establish a traditional workshop at the Vocational Training Centre (VTC) to enable the empowerment of teen mothers with hands-on skills and also provide a safe and supportive environment for their children while they train. This initiative aims to bridge the gap between education and caregiving, enabling these young mothers to achieve economic independence and a brighter future for their families.

5. Justification

The young women and adolescent mothers already enrolled at Umala Vocational Training Centre need support and care mechanisms that would encourage them to acquire the skills for future job creation, help them balance child care and learning and improve their retention and completion rate in the VTC. If community groups ignore these group of young women and adolescent mothers in the VTC, their experiences will diminish the existing motivation to access vocational skills and thereby increase their vulnerability further and their ability to take care of their children. Without access to vocational skills for job creation, the young women and adolescent mothers will remain in cycles of poverty and dependence which exacerbates exploitation including sexual exploitation.

Therefore, Siaya Muungano Network will work closely with Umala Vocational Training Centre in Siaya in partnership with We One Action Network to scale up the already existing models put in place to support young women and adolescent mothers in the institution to improve their wellbeing and that of their children while making the environment conducive to acquire the vocational skills.

6. Project Goal

To increase the retention rate of young women and adolescent mothers in Umala Vocational Training Centre to acquire skills for self-transformation and economic independence.

6.1. Specific Objectives

¹ United Nations Development Programme (2020). *Human Development Report Kenya 2020*.

² Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2020). *Kenya Economic Survey 2020*.

³ Kenya Demographic Health Survey Report, 2022

⁴ Kenya Demographic Health Survey Report, 2022

- To provide children friendly play space to support young women and adolescent mothers balance between taking care of their children and learning while at Umala Vocational Training Centre
- To build and strengthen the young women and adolescent mothers' self-esteem, confidence and their resilience through life skills and peer to peer learning sessions
- To increase access to food security and good nutrition for young women, adolescent mothers and their children at Umala VTC.

7. Beneficiaries

The primary target group for the proposed project include; young women and adolescent mothers enrolled in Umala VTC and their children. However, other beneficiaries include the male youth enrolled in Umala VTC who will be targeted for life skills, mental health and career talk sessions during the period and become ambassadors to protect their female colleagues from violations and related discrimination in school and outside school. The young women, adolescent mothers and the male youth will work together to support the food forest model in the VTC farm as an approach to increase food security and good nutrition thereby sustaining the school feeding programme.

Community members will indirectly benefit and be involved to promote and support access to vocational skills for the youth including young women and adolescent mothers, they will also benefit by providing market to the products from the food forest which its income will be redirected to support feeding programme. The pool of skills created through the trainings will be relevant to community members in different fields from dress making, electrical installation and hair dressing.

8. Proposed Interventions

- **Establish a traditional children friendly play space at Umala VTC compound:** This will support the young women and adolescent mothers with children who find it difficult finding where to leave their children back at home and attend training sessions at Umala VTC thereby forcing to drop out. The space will be decorated with children's friendly items which not only allow the children to play but promote early learning and development stimulation.
- **Conduct monthly life skills sessions for students at Umala VTC:** There will be two sessions per month targeting both the female and male youth in the school facilitated by SIMUN team of mentors and community champions. Drawn from the previous experience, SIMUN will conduct monthly needs assessment using a tool to ensure the life skills sessions are targeted and responds to the priority of the students in the school.
- **Establish a model food forest in Umala VTC:** This is to promote food security and access to good nutrition for the students in Umala VTC especially young women, adolescent mothers and their children. Through the food forest model, the students will be involved in production of indigenous vegetables and fruits using organic methods thereby promoting access to nutritious and safe food for consumption in school. The food forest will equally be an Income Generating Activity (IGA) for Umala VTC by selling to vegetables to the community and the local markets around thereby generating income that will further support other items required for the feeding programme hence promoting sustainability. The food forest model will also promote learning for the students to understand the value of agribusiness as a source of employment thereby enabling them to extend the initiative at individual households for food security and income.

9. Intermediate Results

- Improved retention and completion rate of young women and adolescent mothers in Umala VTC with vocational skills to march the available self-employment opportunities.
- Improved access to a safe and secure play and learning space for young women and adolescent mothers to leave their children during skills acquisition at Umala VTC.
- Increased food security and access to good nutrition for youth and children at Umala VTC
- Improved children development stimulation through the friendly play and learning space at Umala VTC

- Increased adoption of agribusiness through the food forest model by the students at individual households for income generation and household food security.

10. Sustainability Plan

SIMUN model of implementation is anchored in community ownership and community-led approach. Therefore, the whole concept of ideas presented has been drawn through consultation with Umala VTC team including feedbacks from 2024 partnership and hence sustainability approach is first ensuring that all the interventions proposed are driven and supported by the students and Umala VTC family as a whole. This will promote continuity and developing of innovations that will sustain the interventions beyond the support to be provided in partnership with WOAN.

11. Monitoring and Evaluation

A monitoring and evaluation approach will be implemented to track the progress made from the project initiative. Key performance indicators will include; Monitoring the project implementation to ensure activities align with objectives and timelines and evaluating the project's impact on the socio-economic status of teen mothers. Other indicators are ensuring adherence to child safeguarding standards and documenting lessons learned for future scaling or replication.

12. Technical and Financial Reporting

To uphold our commitment to integrity and communicating impact stories, SIMUN will provide detailed progress and status reports to WOAN including photos. SIMUN & Umala will utilize platforms such as twitter, Facebook and YouTube channels to share stories, photos and reports of the interventions. The financial reporting process will include an Expenditure Analysis (Cash Book) that provides a comprehensive breakdown of expenses.

13. Project Call to Action

This initiative offers a transformative opportunity to break the cycle of poverty among rural young women and adolescent mothers by equipping them with vocational skills and providing a safe environment for their children. The dual approach of skill-building and child safeguarding ensures a holistic support system that addresses the unique challenges of young women and adolescent mothers. By investing in this project, our organizations and partners will contribute to empowering a vulnerable population and fostering sustainable development in our community. Together, we can create a future where young women, adolescent mothers and their children thrive through education, empowerment, and economic independence.

