

SWEDD SERIES: OPERATIONAL BRIEF

SAFE SPACES

The research informing this brief was led by the Population Council and relates to the SWEDD project. The information will guide the implementation of SWEDD+



This operational brief is part of a series that retrospectively documents the process of implementing the interventions of the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project. It describes the good practice, challenges and lessons learned in running community Safe Spaces (SS). It summarizes the literature review and conversations with key respondents in Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania and Niger between January and February 2023. The implementation experiences described in this brief and the guide of the same name can be used to inform the implementation of SWEDD+ Safe Spaces and other Safe Spaces projects in the Global South, particularly in West and Central Africa. The Safe Spaces activities took place in three phases.

According to global best practice, the essential elements of Safe Spaces include:

- ▶ Adaptation to the target population and the specific context;
- ▶ A curriculum tailored to participants' tailored to the type of participant group, with engaging and dynamic sessions and links to other relevant community resources;
- ▶ An appropriate and feasible monitoring, evaluation and learning plan;
- ▶ Multisectoral approaches that combine life skills with financial and economic knowledge;
- ▶ Accompanying activities with community members, boys and health services.

Population Council 2021; Temin and Heck 2020

Phases in the implementation of Safe Spaces

Phase 1: Design and planning

- ▶ A learning period that includes presentations to government stakeholders on global good practice, stakeholder visits to existing Safe Spaces projects and regional consultations with SWEDD countries, the World Bank and the UNFPA Regional Technical Secretariat (UNFPA-RTS).
- ▶ Safe Spaces planning, including the development of checklists and forms for start-up and supervision, the selection of localities based on predefined socio economic criteria, and the selection of agencies (such as NGOs) to manage the implementation of Safe Spaces interventions.

Phase 2: Implementation

- ▶ Adapting the regional curriculum to produce a national version specific to each country, reflecting the realities of the participants.
- ▶ Selection of Safe Spaces communities, beneficiaries and mentors.
- ▶ The involvement of leaders and awareness and advocacy campaigns to enable communities to better understand and support Safe Spaces.

Phase 3: Monitoring, evaluation and learning

- ▶ The development of data collection tools that would be required for the Safe Spaces interventions.
- ▶ The creation of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation (e.g. community monitoring committees in Côte d'Ivoire).
- ▶ The use of monthly reports to monitor the progress of participants and the effectiveness of the programme and mentors.
- ▶ Involvement of the local divisions of the various ministries.

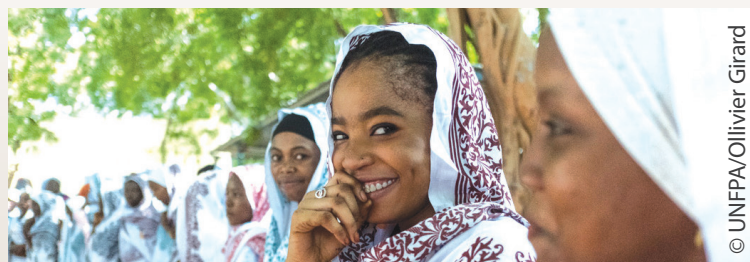


Participation in Safe Spaces programme helps teenage girls develop skills to strengthen social cohesion in their villages.

Expert NGO service provider, Côte d'Ivoire



Safe Spaces are an intervention model targeting adolescent girls and young women, aimed at improving their knowledge, life skills and attitudes, particularly concerning reproductive health, gender and human rights, financial capability and economic empowerment. In the SWEDD initiative, Safe Spaces are implemented in schools and in the community. In the community, Safe Spaces also offer literacy courses for teenage girls from disadvantaged backgrounds who have never been to school or who have dropped out.



“Monitoring and evaluation must be conducted on a regular basis. It is not necessary to wait until the end of the activity to start a monitoring and evaluation process. It will be absolutely necessary to engage in regular monitoring.”

SWEDD project management unit expert, Mauritania

SUMMARY OF KEY LESSONS

Phase 1: Design and planning	1	Draw on the experience of other projects similar to SWEDD and learn from visits to the project countries, given that the Safe Spaces model may be unfamiliar to certain key actors.
	2	The national planning team must visit the field regularly before implementation in order to understand the context, meet the communities and develop an environment conducive to Safe Spaces.
	3	Throughout the project, and especially during the design phase, engage with additional community actors, in particular traditional and religious leaders in the intervention areas.
	4	Select intervention areas and beneficiaries through a systematic review of information.
	5	Avoid the red tape that slows down the approval of planning documents and their implementation.
Phase 2: Implementation	6	Calibrate the number of Safe Spaces and mentors to the size of the community and the target beneficiaries.
	7	Adapt the schedule of activities to the availability of beneficiaries, especially in peak agricultural periods, in line with best global practice.
	8	Encourage the active participation of teenage girls and young women by developing an engaging programme of activities and involving them in the choice of the Safe Space venue.
	9	Offer a range of opportunities to beneficiaries to meet their multiple needs.
	10	Ensure an adequate budget for designing the programme.
Phase 3: Monitoring, evaluation and learning	11	Give adolescent girls and young women an active role in monitoring, including through qualitative contributions.
	12	Measure changes in the community in addition to changes in adolescent girls and young women.
	13	Use the lessons learned from monitoring, evaluation and learning throughout implementation to avoid potential problems and inform programme decisions.

Sources: Population Council. 2021. The guide to minimum standards for safe spaces: design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning. New York. Temin M and Heck C. 2020. Close to Home: Evidence on the Impact of Community-Based Girls' Groups. *Global Health Science and Practice* 8(2):300-324.

This brief is based on a guide that sets out in detail the process of implementing a Safe Spaces programme. It was developed by the Population Council with the technical support of UNFPA and the World Bank.

For more information on the documentation of the processes involved in this intervention and on the SWEDD project, visit the SWEDD project's virtual resource platform: <https://sweddknowledge.org/>