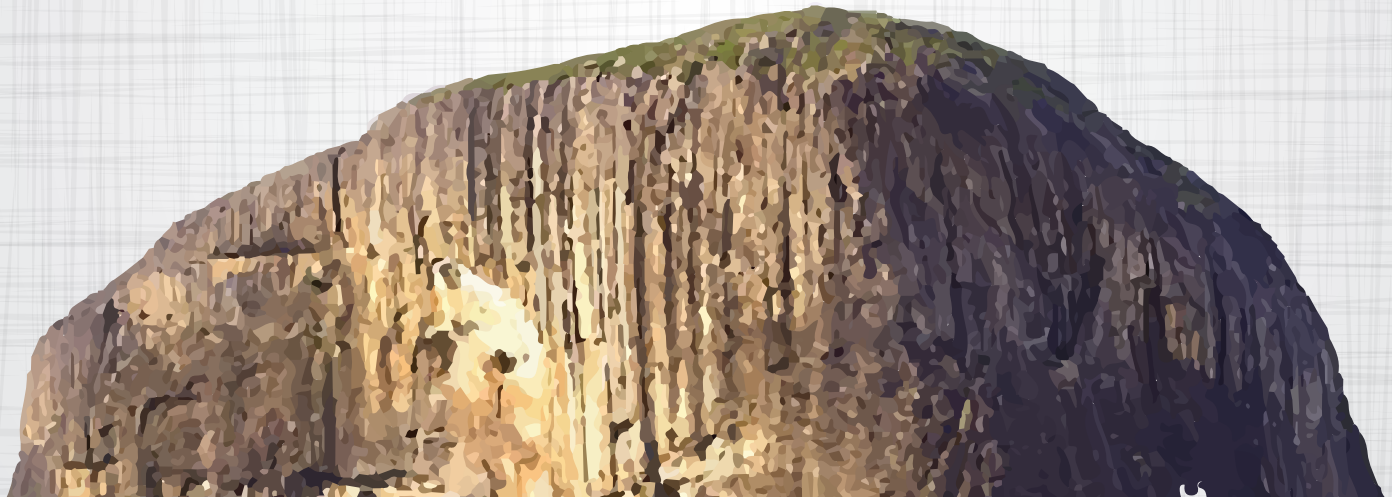


A Niger Story



About Niger State

Niger state is in the north central region of Nigeria and the largest state in the country. The state capital is Minna. Other major cities are Bida, Kontagora & Suleja. The state was formed in 1976 created out of the defunct North Western state. The Nupe, Gbagyi, Kamuku, Kambari, Gungawa, Hun-saare and Koro form the majority of numerous indigenous tribes of the state, constituting over 3,954,772 of the total population.


About SWAG Initiative

Stand with a Girl (SWAG) Initiative is a registered youth-led organisation dedicated to ensuring that every girl in Nigeria is empowered to fulfill her maximum potential no matter where she is born or found.

About the DMS Project

The Data Made Simple for Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health emerged as a Global Knowledge Management (KM) Champion Innovation through a global competition to find game-changing ideas in Knowledge Management for Family Planning/ Reproductive Health programmes. The Data Made Simple for AYSRH Pitch was selected as one of the four (4) KM Innovations from sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. The project strengthened the capacity of Youth Data Advocates, Adolescent Health Desk Officers and Monitoring and Evaluation officers to interpret AYSRH data and simplify it objectively using creative tools to develop compelling AYSRH storybooks. These storybooks were then used to engage subnational policy makers, community gatekeepers, development partners and donors. The Project was implemented in 5 States in Nigeria namely; Niger, Ogun, Plateau, Taraba and Edo States.

Disclaimer

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, business, events and incidents are the products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental 

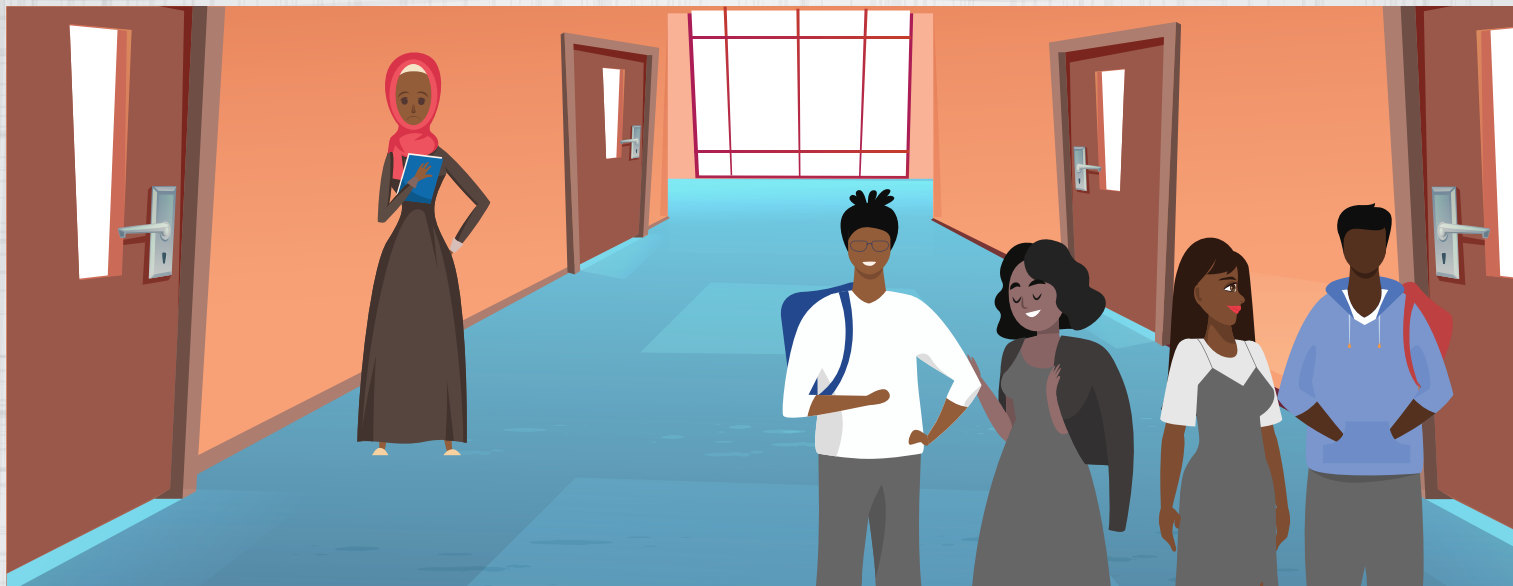
The upcoming marriage of a prominent Emir's daughter has become the talk of the town. The rich, poor and influential were all excited to be in attendance. Lantana and her friend Binta were not left out of the jamboree. They arrived at the park very early with great excitement and enthusiasm and boarded the first bus to town. While discussing how the Emir's daughter and her husband-to-be were an unlikely but beautiful match, a voice from behind them chimed in jokingly, "when would Allah bring my own now." Turning behind, Lantana saw Hauwa and Zainab sitting behind her. They exchanged pleasantries and noticed that they were all heading for the same wedding celebration.



Binta noticed Hauwa was wearing a long face, so she asked her what was wrong? Hauwa was quiet for a while but later responded with a question, “This wedding just has me thinking, with my condition, will I ever see a man to marry me?” “What condition?” Binta asked? Hauwa began to narrate.

Zainab, Maimuna, and I were a clique of friends. We were all between 15 to 19 years old then at government secondary school Niger state. We made a pact to have boyfriends and become sexually active as a symbol of our maturity and transition from adolescence into adulthood before we graduated from secondary school.





I was the youngest in our clique and a late bloomer, that made me feel insecure, and over time it led to my low self-esteem. Two months before our final examination, Zainab and Maimuna mocked me for not fulfilling the pact, and I became disturbed because I hadn't fulfilled our agreement; the only one not yet mature. I became friendlier with boys around my school and neighborhood just to feel among and reduce the peer pressure from my friends who were now sexually active and 'mature.'



Kabir was a secondary school dropout and a drug addict, but he was always nice to me. After a series of advances, I finally accepted Kabir's request to be his girlfriend. Not long after I started my relationship with him, a Health Educator visited our school to sensitize and educate us on the need and use of

Life Planning for Adolescents and youths, emphasizing the positive effect of abstinence. After the awareness class, Maimuna and Zainab advised me to disregard all the warnings and teachings from the Health Educator on abstinence and child spacing methods and that unprotected sex with my partner was the best. She also stressed I would most likely end up barren and would find it difficult to please my man sexually if I listened to the advice given by the Health Educator. This suggestion made me very afraid and doubtful of the Health Educator's advice.





When I got to his house, he was already high on drugs unknown to me. Shortly after my arrival, he started making sexual advances towards me, but I declined because I knew I wasn't ready to be sexually active. Kabir got angry and started beating me while he forced himself on me.

One day, Kabir invited me to his house for a visit which I discussed with my friends, and they encouraged me to visit him because they believed that I would finally be a part of the 'mature' clique. I dressed up that fateful day in my favorite blue dress and set off to see my newfound love, Kabir.



Months passed, and I started experiencing painful urination, smelly vaginal discharge, weakness, and depression. I started self-medicating but did not get any better. Thereafter, my condition worsened, and I collapsed. I was rushed to the hospital by my neighbors, and there, some series of lab tests were conducted, and I was diagnosed with HIV and syphilis.



Hauwa sighed and said, “You see why I can’t help but wonder if I would ever find a nice man to marry me?” An informed young girl sitting in front of the bus who unknowingly to Hauwa was listening to her story responded that she would get her own man to marry in God’s time; “there is someone somewhere for everyone,” she said. The young, informed girl went on to say, “if only life planning information and services are passed to young people through their parents, teachers, traditional or religious leaders, etc the rate of teenage pregnancies, STIs, illegal/unsafe abortion, and sometimes death due to misconceptions and poor advice from uninformed people wouldn’t be rampant among adolescents.” Binta nodded in agreement and said, “Lantana and I had a similar experience, Lantana, please tell her our ordeal.”



She added that 7 in every 10 young adolescents who have correct knowledge of contraceptive methods and are sexually active are not using any child spacing method, just like Maimuna and Zainab



More so, 2 in every 10 young adolescents are not adequately informed on Life Planning for Adolescents and Youths, leading to some young girls being infected with one or more STIs.

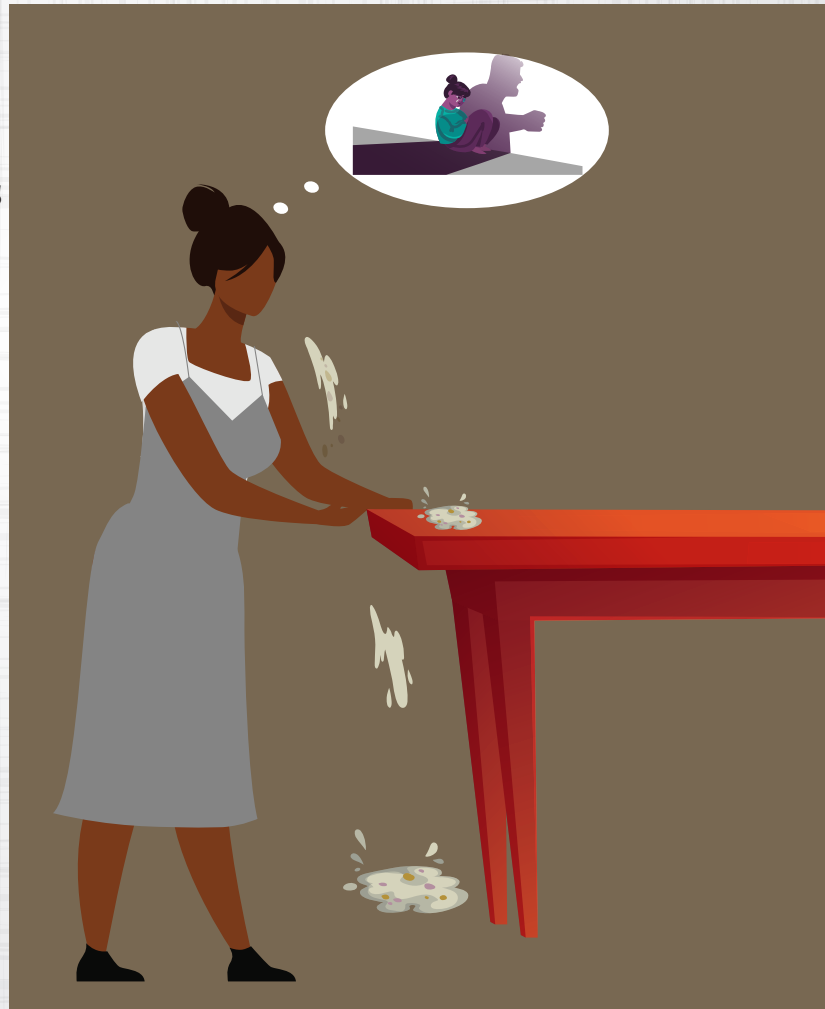
🗨️ I had just celebrated my 15th birthday when Binta and I got into boarding school. It was where we met. We got talking, and I shared with her how my mother had warned me that I would become pregnant if I ever indulged in sex. Binta disagreed and informed me that I would only become pregnant if I had sex during my ovulation period. After my first week in school, I met Kolo, and we quickly became fond of each other. Kolo insisted he wanted to have sex with me as proof of our love, but I was too scared because of what my mother had told me.



One morning, I was having menstrual cramps and decided to visit the school clinic. A few steps into the clinic, I heard the Nurse and Binta in a dispute. Binta had reported seeing rashes around her vagina when the Nurse immediately rebuked and began accusing her of being promiscuous to the hearing of other students; “As small as you are, you are already opening your legs from one man to another. Why won’t you be sick? Shameless girl, your mother must hear this,” said the Nurse. Then Binta ran out of the clinic in tears.

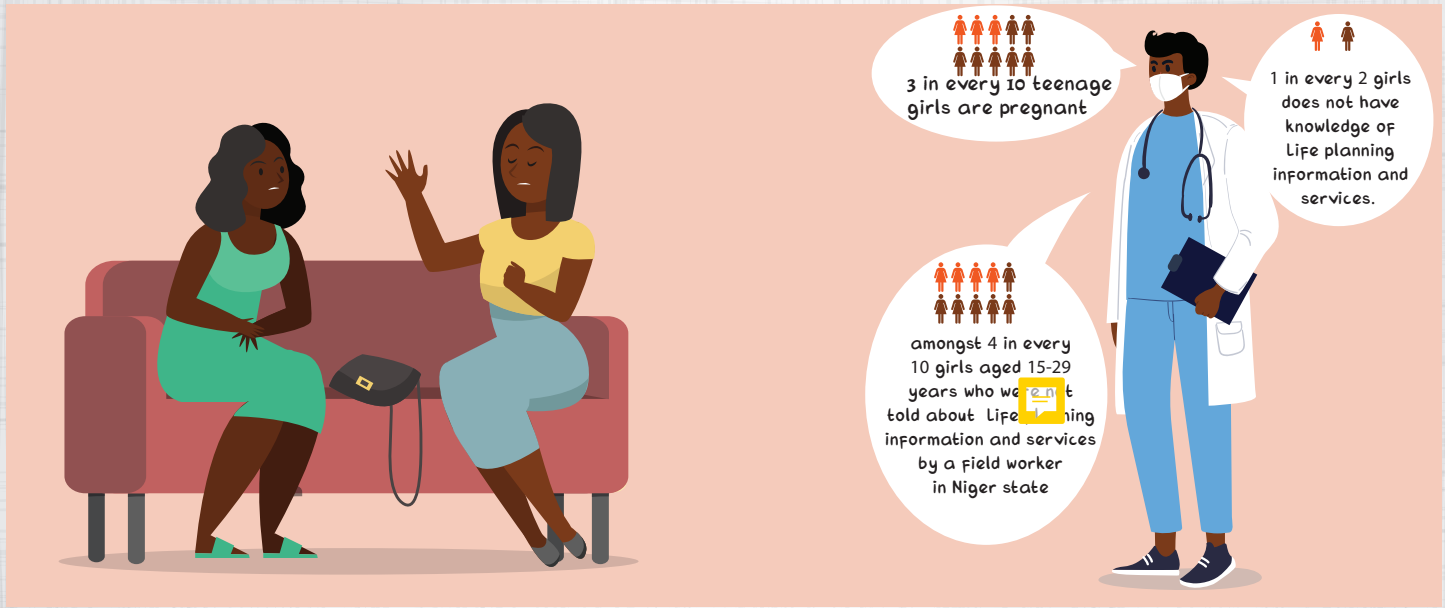


Unknown to everyone at the time, two weeks before resuming school, Binta's stepfather had raped and shamelessly told her how he had kept a record of her menstrual cycle calendar. He also mentioned that she shouldn't worry about being pregnant since she was not currently ovulating.





Lantana squeezed Binta's hand in affection and continued her story; after witnessing what happened between Binta and the Nurse, I decided not to inquire anything from her. So, I ended up asking my school mother, Ummi, to advise me on what to do about Kolo's persistence. Ummi told me that it was okay to go ahead and have sex with him, but I should make sure I drink soda and salt immediately to prevent me from getting pregnant. At the same time, Binta resorted to self-medication since she couldn't go elsewhere for help. I followed Ummi's advice and had sex with Kolo, but a few weeks after having sex with Kolo, I realised I had missed my period. Binta's rashes also had become sores, bringing out pus and blood due to constant itching.



The term ended, and we finally could go for proper medical care. At the hospital, we learned that our story wasn't an isolated case in Niger state, 3 in every 10 teenage girls are pregnant, and 1 in every 2 girls does not have knowledge of Life planning information and services. We were amongst 4 in every 10 girls aged 15-29 years who were not told about Life planning information and services by a field worker in Niger state.

Zainab smiled and said, “it's true, if only I had this knowledge, I would not have had a child at the time I did.

My introduction to sex started during one break time in school, my friends and I were discussing it, and I was not comfortable with the conversation because I did not know much about sex. Out of curiosity, I got home that day and asked my mom to tell me about sex. Unfortunately, my mom rebuked me, as she thought it was too early for me to be involved in such conversations because I was only fifteen (15) years old.

Incidentally, my dad overheard us and warned me never to ask such questions again.”

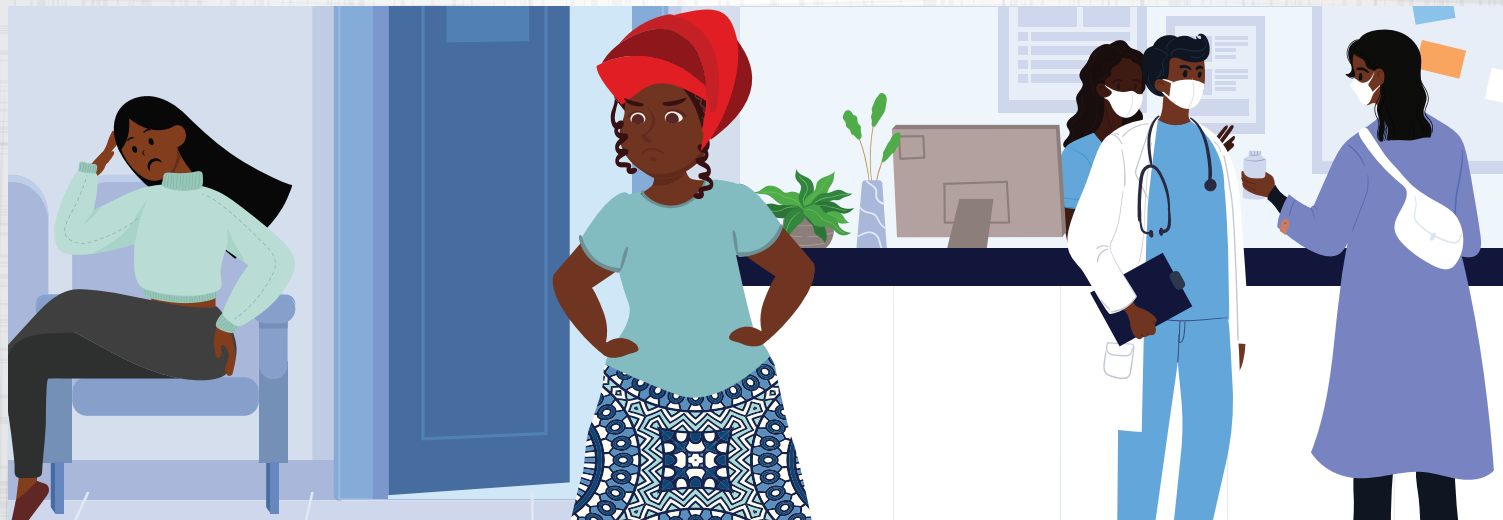


Despite being ignored by my parents, I did not relent. I wanted an adult opinion of what sex was all about because I knew how naughty and unserious my friends could be. I went to the last person I believed could tell me about sex, and that was Musa, my uncle's son living with us, who was 10 years older than me. The following day, I walked up to Musa and asked him to tell me about sex. He smiled and responded without hesitating to show me the practical aspect of sex, and eventually, we began having unprotected sex.





I was naive at the time and didn't even understand that he was taking advantage of me. Four months later, my mom began noticing some changes in me. She took me to the primary health care center nearest to our house, and after a series of questions and tests, the result showed I was 3 months pregnant.



Realizing the situation, my mom became confused and devastated. My father blamed my mom for my outcome. Much information wasn't given or even asked for at the health facility because of the attitude and judgement we faced from service providers. Due to the stigma associated with my pregnancy, I had to stop school and was sent to my grandmother's place to live until I gave birth.



Hauwa sighed, “oh my God, we are not that different from each other.” Young women should be informed about their sexual and reproductive health through Life Planning for Adolescents and youths. I pray to see the day all these issues will no longer exist”. “Amin,” “Amen,” the other



women said in unison. At that moment, the Conductor shouted, “everybody make una come down we don



reach bus stop.” The four girls came down and exchanged phone numbers with a promise to meet at the wedding venue.

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Reference

‘All data used in the creation of this storybook was sourced from the Nigeria Demographic Health Survey 2018’

Call To Action

Niger State Ministry Of Education

- Domesticate and implement the national Family life and HIV Education (FLHE) curriculum in all schools.

Media

- Disseminate integrated life planning messages via TV, Radio, Print, Social media, and community mobilizers during campaigns and outreaches in the state 

Niger State Ministry Of Health and House of Assembly

- Create budget for adolescent and youth health friendly services and life planning programs, and ensure the timely release of funds.

Traditional & Religious Leaders

- Organize community sensitization on AYSRH including life planning among parents, religious and traditional leaders, women and youth leaders' etc.

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The information provided in this storybook is the sole creation of Stand With A Girl (SWAG) Initiative and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, the U.S. Government, Knowledge SUCCESS, or The Johns Hopkins University.



STAND WITH A GIRL
SWAG
INITIATIVE

Motto: When the society invest in girls, everyone wins