



Planning My Life

THE TARABA STATE STORY

About TARABA STATE

Taraba is a state in North Eastern Nigeria, named after the Taraba River which traverses the southern part of the state. Taraba state was created out of the former Gongola state on 27 August 1991 by the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida. It is a region in Nigeria with the most languages spoken, around 75 spoken as the first language of its residents with the state capital in Jalingo.

Taraba State is bounded in the west by Nasarawa State and Benue State, northwest by Plateau State, north by Bauchi State and Gombe State, northeast by Adamawa State, and south by Nord-Ouest Province in Cameroon.

Taraba State lies largely within the middle of Nigeria and consists of undulating landscape dotted with a few mountainous features. These include the scenic and prominent Mambilla Plateau.

Taraba State has a total Population of 3,502,527 persons and counting.

About **SWAG** Initiative



Stand with a Girl (SWAG) initiative is a registered youth led organisation dedicated in 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



Our Data Made Simple for Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health (AYSRH) 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. Our Data Made Simple for AYSRH pitch was selected as one of the four (4) KM Innovations from Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

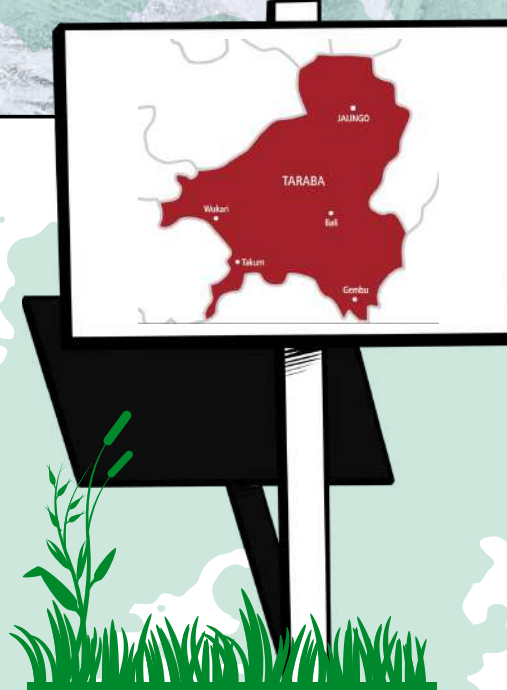
The DATA MADE SIMPLE Project was implemented in 5 States in Nigeria namely; Niger, Ogun, Plateau, Taraba and Edo States.

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.

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.

Margaret, a serving corps member, was posted to Taraba state for her National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), a scheme set up by the government to promote national development and foster unity among Nigerians.



Before her posting, she had gathered adequate and accurate knowledge on Adolescent and Youth Sexual & Reproductive Health. She was determined to pass the knowledge in her new place of primary assignment.

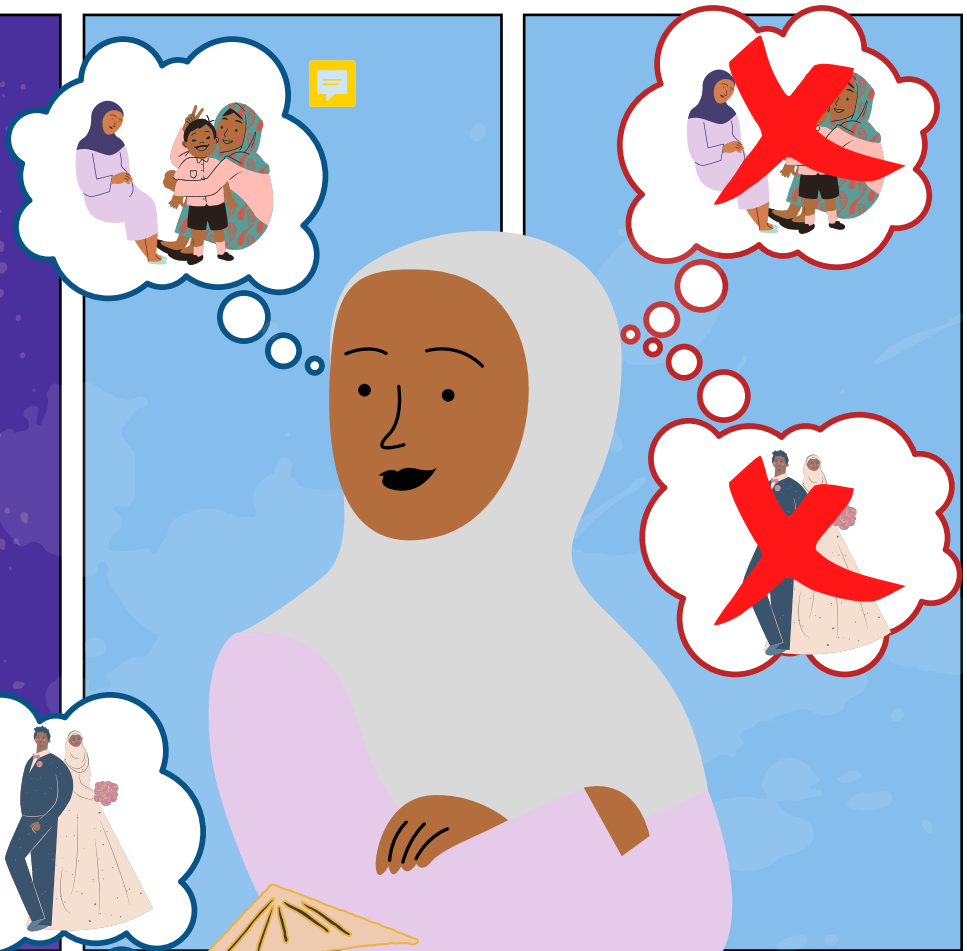
On reaching the community, she engaged with several girls and noticed that they had limited knowledge and bitter experiences on the issue. She then decided to organize an awareness campaign. She invited community members and three (3) girls among the young people she had previously interacted with and were willing to share their experiences.

To begin, she called on the first speaker - Jummai, who narrated her story



My name is Jummai, and I come from a little village called Monkin. I was 15 years old and lived with my parents and siblings close to the center of the village square.

I was a troubled adolescent who saw how my sisters ended up in early marriages, and I never wanted to end up like them, so I decided that I would never get pregnant until I was ready to choose when and how. Unknown to me, there were several challenges in living up to such a decision, especially in my environment.



Jummai's Story



On a fateful day, my parents began their usual pressure on me to get married, so I went to school sad and approached my teacher. I told my teacher my story, but she only encouraged me to be obedient to my parents.

Because I was dissatisfied with my teacher's advice, I confided in my friend, Diana, who was older than me. She advised me to run away from home like other girls who are pressured into early marriage. I followed her advice, and she also introduced me to partying and hanging out with other young adults who were into alcohol and other drug use. After one of such night hangouts, on our way home, some boys attacked us on a lonely dark road but luckily, I escaped, sustaining bruises, but my friend was unfortunately raped.



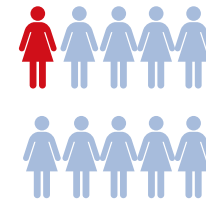
I am free!



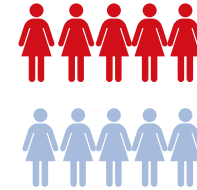
After escaping, I quickly called for help, and we were rushed to Monkin Primary Healthcare Clinic for treatment. While at the clinic, I thought I could share my traumatizing experience with the service provider. Unfortunately, instead of counseling us on how to professionally manage the situation and provide treatments and methods of preventing unplanned pregnancy, the service provider focused on judging us for going to the party.



I wanted to ask questions on how to prevent unplanned pregnancy because my friend's rape had shown me that circumstances beyond my control could affect my decision to abstain from sex. From her response, I knew I would be judged for even asking. No wonder only 1 out of 10 girls between the ages of 15 to 19 years in Taraba are exposed to Life planning information and services. Meanwhile, 5 out of these 10 girls are already engaging in unprotected sex.



1 out of 10 girls between the ages of 15 to 19 years in Taraba are exposed to Life planning information and services



5 out of these 10 girls are already engaging in unprotected sex



That day, I left the clinic more devastated because my questions were still unanswered. Thankfully, months later, I met Margaret, who gave me a clearer understanding of life planning information and services.

Margaret came forward appreciating Jummai saying, "This is why every adolescent and youth in Taraba should have access to friendly and affordable life planning information and services." She proceeded to call on Talatu to share her story.

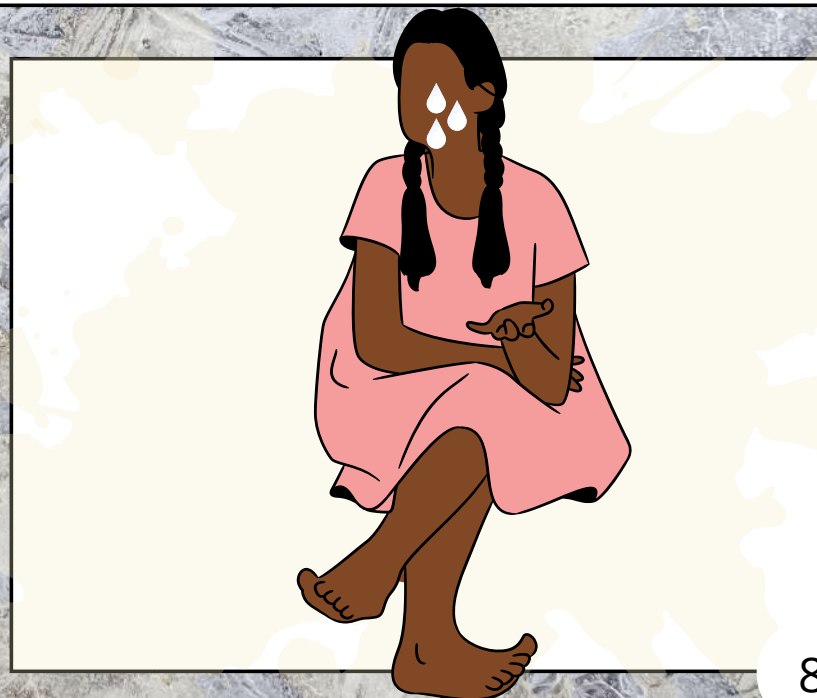
Talatu's Story

My name is Talatu. I was 18 years old living with my parents in Jalingo, Taraba State. My parents were petty traders and could barely provide for the family due to financial issues; paying school fees was a great challenge, so I had to stay at home for a while without going to school.

My next-door neighbor, who was 22 years old, and popularly called Zimbo, a very notorious drug addict, and a school dropout, promised me that he would pay my school fees if only I would come to his room to collect the money. I innocently believed him and went to his room when my parents were away to collect the fees from him.



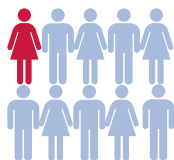
On reaching Zimbo's room, the music was loud. He then asked me to come and sit close to him on the bed, which I did. Unfortunately for me, Zimbo forced himself on me and raped me. After he was done, he threw the money at me and threatened to never mention it to anyone, else he would kill me. I left the room bleeding with bruises. Sadly, my story is not uncommon. At age 15, most girls would have already had sex, whether willingly or forcefully. After recovering from the first experience, I knew of no other option than to return to Zimbo because I needed to pay for another term's school fees. Knowing that he would give me money in exchange for sex, I returned, and we had unprotected sex.



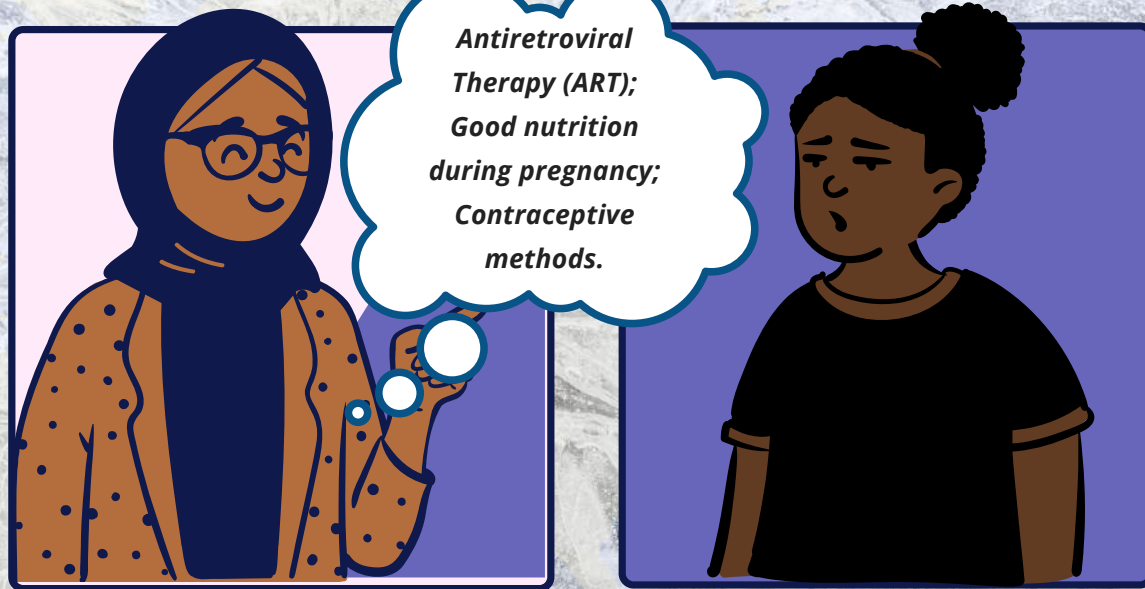
After some time, I felt sick and went to the hospital, where I was attended to by a health worker and was asked to run some tests, which confirmed that I was pregnant and HIV positive. On hearing this, I burst into tears and ran out of the hospital in total confusion. On my way crying, I bumped into Margaret, who noticed my teary eyes and asked me what was wrong. I couldn't utter a word, so she held my hands and gave me the biggest hug I had ever received. She then asked me again what the problem was, and I told her all that had happened.



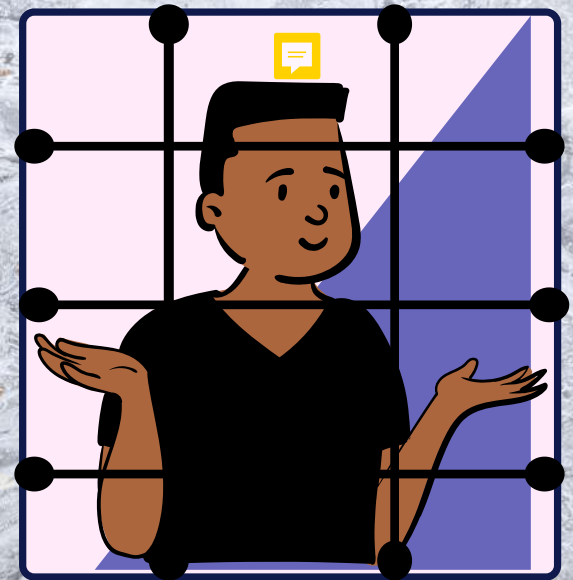
She encouraged and counseled me before leading me back to the hospital to get all the necessary information. On our way, I blamed myself for going back to Zimbo, especially without using any form of protection from pregnancy and HIV. Margaret said I was not the only one, as only 1 out of 10 adolescents in Taraba between 15 to 19 years have ever used any form of prevention from pregnancy among those who have ever had sex. She also said I should stop blaming myself for being raped because I was a minor and could not consent.



1 out of 10 adolescents in Taraba between 15 to 19 years have ever used any form of prevention from pregnancy among those who have ever had sex



*Antiretroviral
Therapy (ART);
Good nutrition
during pregnancy;
Contraceptive
methods.*



At the hospital, the health provider counseled me on Antiretroviral Therapy (ART), good nutrition during pregnancy, contraceptive methods, and the need to report Zimbo to the appropriate authorities. This is my story, and I am grateful for this opportunity to share it with you all, especially having the courage to talk about my HIV status. This is never the end of life. By taking ART every day, I can live longer and healthier. Thank you.

Margaret hugged her and invited Tata, who was the last speaker, to share her story.

Tata's Story →

Hello everyone, my name is Tata, I am 16 years old, and I live in Anguwan Gadi, Jalingo. My friends and I attended Federal Government Girls College, Jalingo. Buma was my closest and dearest friend because we shared our secrets and always gave each other advice. Although Buma was older than me, we still related well.



One day, my friends and I sneaked out of school for a party at the GRA nightclub. While we were having fun at the club, I noticed someone was staring at me, as I turned I saw a handsome guy with a charming smile approaching, I quickly looked away. Not minding my reaction, he came closer and introduced himself as Timaya, who was in Jalingo on a business trip. He went on to say my dancing moves got his attention, but when I turned, he saw that I was the most beautiful girl in the hall, and that captured my attention. Timaya held my hands and we began dancing intimately and affectionately while he whispered sweet words into my ears.



I was uncomfortable because I had not done that before and I didn't know him. He noticed my reaction towards him, which made him request that we step out for a conversation. We got into his car, talked, and in the process, he made me feel very relaxed. He kissed me and made love to me, but it was not pleasant as that was my first experience. The following day, my friends and I sneaked back to the hostel.



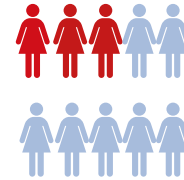
A few weeks later, while preparing for a class, I felt sick, so I proceeded to the clinic for a check-up. After the health worker had examined me, she asked me to wait to get tested. While waiting for the results, Buma came to see me at the clinic, and I told her how I was very sick and nauseous. She quickly got worried, guessing that I might be pregnant because her boyfriend, a pharmacist, had informed her about pregnancy and modern contraceptives. After waiting some time, I overheard the health worker discussing with a colleague, saying that a student was pregnant, which made me scared. Seeing that I was the only student at the clinic that morning, I decided to leave the school before the information got to the school authority and became public knowledge.



When the school found out that I had left, they quickly informed my parents that I was pregnant. During my pregnancy, I had to stay indoors to avoid stigmatization until I successfully gave birth. This kept me away from school for over a year.



During my visit to the hospital after I gave birth, I met Margaret, and we got talking. She encouraged me not to relent in my pursuit of education and mentioned that I was not alone as 3 out of 10 teenagers get pregnant, ages 15 to 19 years in Taraba State. I'm so grateful to have met Margaret because she has taught me so much about my health and making informed choices.



3 out of 10 teenagers get pregnant, ages 15 to 19 years





Margaret came forward, hugged Tata, and proceeded to talk to traditional and religious leaders, representatives from Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations, service providers, adolescents, and youth present at the awareness campaign, saying, “teenage pregnancy can be reduced if adolescents are provided with adequate knowledge on Life Planning, including contraceptives.”

CALL TO ACTION

MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND PRIMARY HEALTH CARE DEVELOPMENT AGENCY


- **Improve implementation of adolescent and youth-friendly services into routine health services in the 168 wards of Taraba state by training and providing monthly supportive supervision to Health care workers by December 2022.**
- **Disseminate integrated Life planning messages via TV, Radio, Print, Social Media, and community mobilizers during other campaigns (like immunization, HIV, etc.) in the 168 Wards in the state by January 2022.**
- **Inaugurate technical working group on adolescent and youth health-friendly services and Life Planning to coordinate adolescent issues in the state by January 2022.**
- **Improve the budget for adolescent and youth health-friendly services and Life Planning programs and ensure timely release of funds by December 2022.**

CALL TO ACTION

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

-  Integrate, implement and monitor adolescent and youth health information in school clubs and other activities.

TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

- Increase and/or integrate  Life planning messages during Church and mosques meetings/sermons.
- Increase dissemination of Life planning messages to community leaders/village heads in every community.

MEDIA

- Integrate Life Planning messaging into programs, especially on high point days (Taraba Day, World Population Day, International Youth Day, Children's Day, World Contraception Day, etc.) to dispel myths and misconceptions.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

1. Alh Aminu J. Hassan
2. Alh Zakari Usman Chindo
3. Dr Kenet Tijos Minge
4. Usman Isa Kunini
5. Salihu sule Isa
6. Vibos Michael
7. Adamu Mohammad Bashir
8. Bakari Bala yunusa
9. Ibrahim suleiman musa
10. Emmanuel Akenumi Andokari
11. Shuaibu usman
12. Dominic Samuel Vakkai
13. Kabiru Sadiq
14. Diana Solomon Mundat
15. Meshach Diana Louna
16. Winkle Timothy Samuel
17. Joyce Haruna



REFERENCES

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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