

Toll free line to increase and facilitate access to SRHR information by youth in fragile context.

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CONTEXT

The high proportion of youth between 10 and 24 YO (33% of the total population in 2010) in Cameroon, is an important factor for all development strategies.

- Youth are confronted with significant sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) problems related to low use of contraceptives and protection against STI / HIV and poor access to health services.
- The use of not always reliable sources of information, ignorance and lack of sexuality education, degradation of morals, etc. affects the national indicators that are still low:
- High early fertility with a rate of 127 ‰ among 15-19 YO. The Far-North is the region with the highest fertility rate (6.8). (ii) The median age at first intercourse is very early:
- 16% of girls and 9.3% of boys have had their first sexual relations before the age of 15. The region with one of the highest rates is the East. (iii) HIV prevalence among youth is respectively 1.2 among 10-19 YO and 2.2% among 20-24 YO.
- The security context in the Far-North and East due to an influx of refugees and rebels, increases the vulnerability of youth by limiting their access to services and information.
- All the youth calling are registered in the DHIS2 system.

METHODOLOGY

Program intervention/activity **tested:**
In 2015, PSI Cameroon/ ACMS launched a toll-free line

In July 2016, with support from the Jeune S3 programme (which is a SRHR alliance led by Cordaid and funded through the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the toll-free line was extended to the Far-North and East of Cameroun.

The toll-free line is a four-digit number “8188”, which is available from Monday to Friday between 8am and 5pm. It is free for all mobile phone networks. With well-trained and opened- minded operators,

Youth can have access to information in French, English and Fufuldé (local language well spread in the Far-North) and can interact on all subjects (early marriage, illiteracy, rape etc.) concerning SRHR.

Several communication channels are used to create awareness on the toll free line: radio programs, a magazine, communication during SRHR campaigns, training and advocacy workshops, during meetings with parents' associations, and the use of Jeune S3 youth Ambassadors to encourage their peers to use the toll-free line.

CONCLUSION

The toll-free line has proven to be an effective means of providing young people in fragile contexts a way to discuss and get support for issues pertaining to their SRHR.

The toll-free number, through its referral function, can promote the use of SRHR services by youth, such as family planning counseling and the provision of family planning methods, psychological support for young people living with HIV and for cases of gender-based violence including incest and rape.

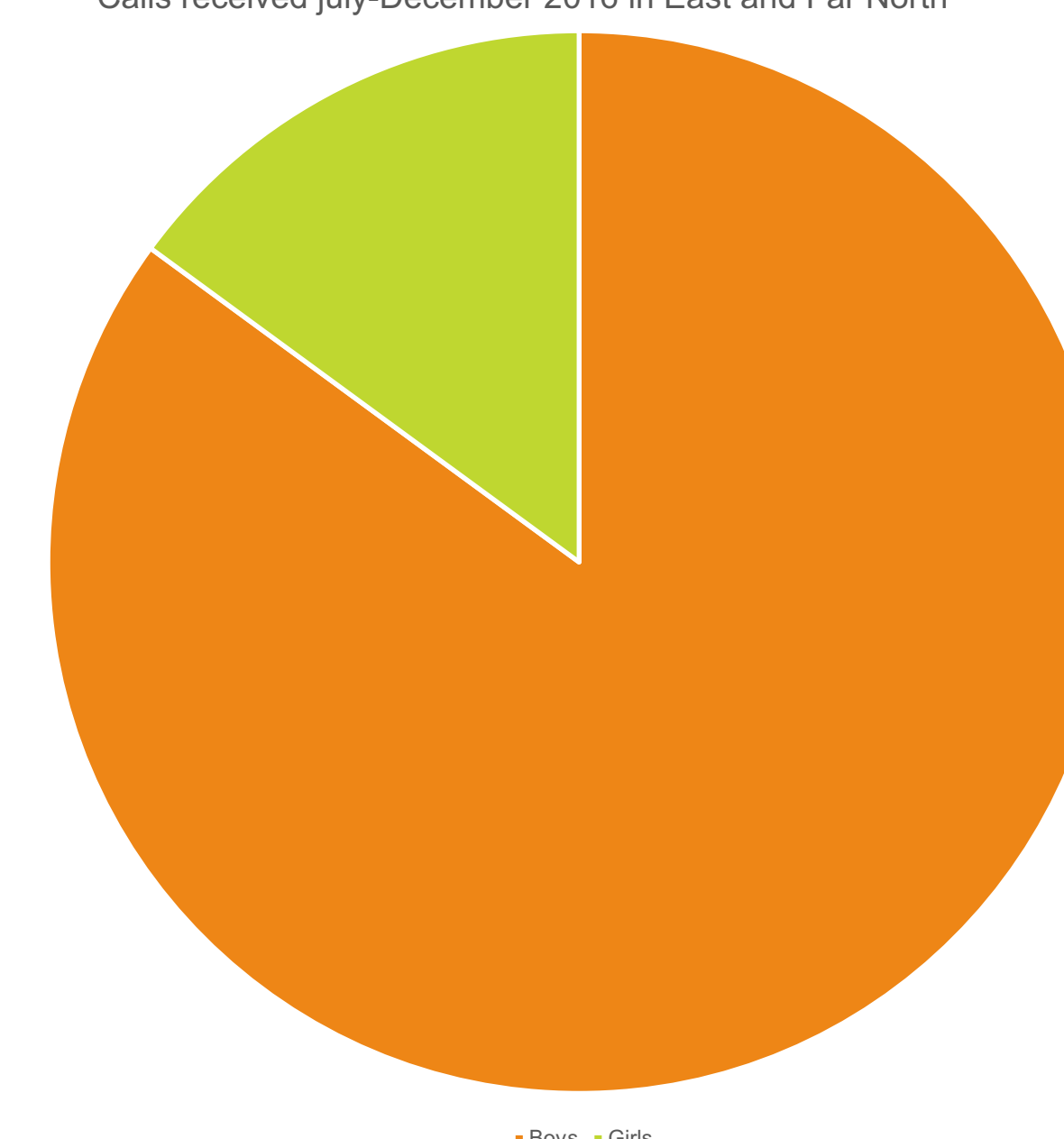
Youth from the Far-North that cannot express themselves openly find that the toll free number can help them to address their problems without being pointed at. For some youth the call to the toll-free line is their first conversation about SRHR issues.

The lower number of girls that called clearly indicates the need to continue to invest in empowering young girls and sensitizing their influencers (parents, teachers, boys, traditional leaders) for girls to be able to take ownership over their own health.

RESULTS

The toll-free line has been operational for 3 years and has received several calls from young people across the country, including the East and the Far-North. Only in 2016 (July-December), PSI Cameroun/ACMS received 2,646 calls in general among which 1,439 calls from the East and Far-North. 215 girls against 1, 224 boys were effectively registered among these 1,439 calls disaggregated as follows:

Calls received july-December 2016 in East and Far North



Given the cultural norms in these two regions that are subjected to early marriage and low access to education, especially for girls, it is still a challenge to ensure the use of the toll free line by girls.



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