



LIVING CASE STUDY
SELF-CARE ADVOCACY
IN ACTION
UGANDA



CREATING AN ENABLING POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR SELF-CARE IN UGANDA

BACKGROUND

Uganda is another self-care guideline trailblazer country, with implementation of its National Guideline for Self-Care Interventions for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights already being piloted in one district. As the spotlight on self-care continued to grow over the past couple of years, so too did the realization that relevant national policies and laws were not keeping pace with integrating self-care concepts, especially as laid out in the national guideline. While the National Self-Care Guideline is crucial for informing programming and practice, the guideline itself is not legally binding, and it must operate within existing policy and legal frameworks. Therefore, advocacy to embed self-care within related, multi-sectoral policies and laws is necessary to ensure the National Self-Care Guideline is widely recognized and fully implemented. This became a priority advocacy agenda for the Center for Health, Human Rights and Development (CEHURD), a leading health and human rights organization in Uganda with expertise on litigation and advocacy.

APPROACH

CEHURD joined the national self-care conversation in 2020 when the National Self-Care Guideline for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) was under development and provided legal and technical expertise to ensure that human rights were woven throughout the guideline. First, it led a **stakeholder mapping** exercise to identify who was working on self-care, how, and where, with a special focus on mapping sectors beyond health (gender, education, labor, social development) and groups historically excluded from power (LGBTQI+, persons with disabilities). The mapping itself helped bring new self-care supporters into the Uganda self-care movement. Next, CEHURD conducted a **self-care policy and legal analysis** at the country and regional levels to identify gaps.



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The Center for Health, Human Rights and Development (CEHURD)

serves as the Uganda self-care advocacy focal point under the SCTG and is an active member of the Self-Care Expert Group. CEHURD is a nonprofit, research, and advocacy organization that focuses on critical issues of human rights and health systems in East Africa such as sexual and reproductive health rights, trade and health, and medical ethics that affect less-advantaged populations. For more information or to get involved, contact Annah Kukundakwe at kukundakwe@cehurd.org.

The analysis revealed that most national policies were outdated and not reflective of the latest evidence and recommendations on self-care. CEHURD then set out to support the government in reviewing some of these policies like the National SRHR Policy and the National Adolescent Health Policy and Strategy, to ensure self-care's adoption as a key health intervention in both policies and strategy.

Seizing a timely advocacy window, CEHURD organized a series of meetings to inform and influence the policy development process. It first convened a meeting in collaboration with the Reproductive Health Division, Ministry of Health (MOH) to explore opportunities for self-care integration in the National SRHR Policy, as this policy was on a faster timeline. During the meeting, CEHURD provided an orientation to self-care and the draft National Self-Care Guideline, discussed how self-care is fundamental to advancing human rights, presented key findings from its self-care policy and legal analysis, and offered specific policy recommendations, especially those focused on those promoting bodily autonomy for adolescents. CEHURD replicated this approach for the National Adolescent Health Policy and Strategy, again partnering with the Reproductive Health Division, MOH to organize a retreat for the Adolescent Health Technical Working Group to review and incorporate self-care into the policy and strategy.

OUTCOMES

In both cases, the MOH was convinced of the value of self-care and approved its incorporation into the National SRHR Policy and National Health Policy and Strategy. Specifically, both policies clarified consent to enable adolescents to make informed, autonomous decisions about their sexual and reproductive health—a cornerstone for practicing self-care. Other rights-based self-care priorities were included in the policies such as the right to information, the right to decide whether and when to have children (and use self-administered contraceptive methods), the right to access sexual and reproductive health services (including over the counter commodities).



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INSIGHTS GAINED

CEHURD was able to quickly and successfully advocate with the MOH to incorporate key self-care principles and recommendations into two relevant national policies—including on adolescent health, which can be a contested issue. Insights gained include:

- **A strong relationship with decision-makers is key.** CEHURD enjoys a longstanding, positive relationship with the MOH, which sees CEHURD as a trusted partner with valuable legal and policy expertise. The MOH also views CEHURD as a self-care expert. This relationship and standing facilitated rapid adoption of CEHURD’s self-care advocacy recommendations into the National SRHR Policy and National Adolescent Health Policy and Strategy.
- **Silos still exist and must be broken.** During stakeholder and policy mapping, CEHURD learned that various government line ministries are working in silos. Yet, the institutionalization of self-care in all national policies and programs requires a multi-sectoral approach and strong collaboration across government ministries and agencies. Self-care advocates must create opportunities for inter-ministerial dialogue to promote collaboration and coordination among government bodies.
- **Don’t treat self-care as a “unique” or “stand-alone.”** Rather, self-care should be seen as part of the ongoing health and human rights issues that a country must focus on. Positioning self-care from a human rights lens helped CEHURD mainstream the concept among key decision-makers and influencers in Uganda.

NEXT STEPS

Through the policy and legal analysis, CEHURD identified two bills up for debate that will be critical for aligning and embedding self-care priorities: the National Health Act and the National Health Insurance Scheme Bill. These present an opportunity to make the legal environment for self-care more progressive than what is currently reflected in the National Self-Care Guideline. Additionally, CEHURD will continue its advocacy to socialize self-care and institutionalize it across different sectoral areas and stakeholders, especially gender, education, and universal health coverage (UHC). Finally, CEHURD will also continue to grow the self-care movement at the national level through development of a national advocacy strategy for self-care to guide implementation of advocacy interventions on self-care and SRHR.



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Policy and Legal Frameworks to Support Self-Care during COVID-19 and Beyond: The Role of Rights-Holders and Duty-Bearers
- Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis Report on Self-Care in Uganda
- Legal and Policy Mapping on Self-Care in Uganda
- Case Study: Developing National Self-Care Guidelines in Uganda and Nigeria

