

RESILIENT CITY FOR ADOLESCENTS (RCA) PROJECT

FROM PARTICIPATION TO INFLUENCE

*Reflections, Systems Shifts & Stories of Change from Sunyani, Ghana
2023 – 2026*



A Learning Product under the Healthy Cities for Adolescents (HCA-II) Initiative

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IWEN



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Background and Rationale:

Rapid urbanization is reshaping cities across the world, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where growing urban populations continue to place increasing pressure on health, education, social protection, and governance systems. Globally, urban populations are projected to reach nearly 5 billion by 2030, with a significant proportion of this growth occurring among young people in the Global South. Secondary cities such as Sunyani are increasingly experiencing these pressures, yet many city systems remain underprepared to respond to the complex and evolving needs of adolescents.

In Ghana, urbanization and demographic growth continue to accelerate, with young people constituting a significant proportion of the population. Sunyani, as one of Ghana's rapidly growing secondary cities, faces increasing socio-economic and service delivery challenges affecting adolescents, including limited access to youth-friendly health services, unemployment, mental health vulnerabilities, inadequate safe spaces, and weak participation of young people in governance and decision-making processes. These realities are further compounded by poverty, gender inequalities, harmful social norms, and limited access to information and opportunities.

The Resilient City for Adolescent Project-RCA:

The Resilient City for Adolescents (RCA) Project was implemented in Sunyani, Ghana, under the Healthy Cities for Adolescents (HCA-II) initiative in response to growing concerns that adolescents in rapidly urbanizing secondary cities continue to face significant gaps in access to services, participation, and economic opportunities. Baseline findings revealed major disparities between access to education and broader wellbeing outcomes. While 94% of adolescents reported being in school, only 21% accessed health services, 13% received counselling support, and just 12% had access to safe spaces. In addition, 66% of adolescents perceived that city leaders did not prioritize their needs, 60% lacked clarity on who was responsible for their wellbeing, and 92% had never participated in decision-making processes affecting their lives. These findings highlighted deeper systemic challenges, including weak adolescent inclusion in governance, limited access to services and opportunities, and low institutional responsiveness to adolescent needs.^{W3}

Project Approach and Summary of Results:

To address these gaps, the project adopted a systems-strengthening and participatory approach that positioned adolescents as active contributors to city development. The project combined Adolescent leadership and governance platforms, innovative adolescent-friendly service delivery models, skills and economic empowerment interventions, and evidence-based advocacy to strengthen both adolescent agency and the responsiveness of city systems.

Over the implementation period, the project directly reached 4,102 adolescents and indirectly reached more over 12,000 young people through radio, digital, and community-based platforms. More than 3,500 adolescents were engaged through innovative service delivery models, including the adolescent clinic and radio outreach clinics, which created safe and interactive spaces for discussions on sexual and reproductive health, mental health, counselling, and personal development. The project also strengthened Adolescent leadership through the establishment of Adolescent Parliament and Adolescent Journalist platforms, directly engaging over 65 adolescents in leadership, advocacy, and evidence generation. Through these

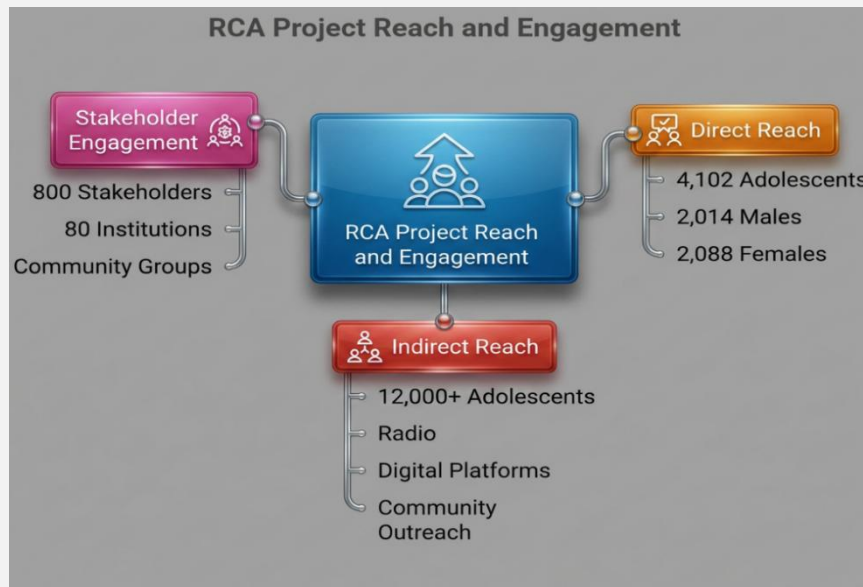


Figure 1: Summary of project Reach

platforms, young people increasingly participated in policy dialogues, municipal planning processes, and stakeholder engagements.

Under the economic empowerment component, adolescents were equipped with ICT, vocational, and entrepreneurship skills, while vulnerable adolescents, including teenage mothers, received seed capital support and industrial sewing machines to strengthen livelihood opportunities and self-reliance. The project further strengthened

collaboration among institutions through the Intermediary City Ecosystem Platform (ICEP), which brought together stakeholders across sectors to promote inclusive dialogue and coordinated responses to adolescent wellbeing.

One of the most significant outcomes of the project has been the growing institutional recognition of adolescents as legitimate actors within governance systems. Adolescents now participate in municipal planning processes, Assembly committee meetings, and public policy dialogues, while their advocacy has contributed to renewed attention to issues affecting young people, including educational infrastructure and safe spaces. These developments reflect important early systems shifts toward more inclusive, responsive, and adolescent-centred governance.

The RCA Project demonstrates that when adolescents are meaningfully engaged, equipped with opportunities, and connected to responsive systems, they become powerful drivers of social change and inclusive urban development. The project offers practical lessons and scalable models for strengthening adolescent wellbeing and participation within secondary cities across Ghana and beyond.

The RCA Approach / Theory of Change:

The Resilient City for Adolescents (RCA) Project adopted a systems-strengthening and participatory approach that recognized adolescent wellbeing as both a development and governance issue. Rather than focusing only on direct service delivery, the project sought to strengthen the broader city ecosystem by improving how institutions, stakeholders, and governance systems respond to the needs and aspirations

of adolescents. The approach positioned young people not as passive beneficiaries, but as active contributors to planning, accountability, advocacy, and decision-making processes within the city.

The project was implemented through four interconnected pillars that collectively addressed the social, economic, governance, and wellbeing needs of adolescents. The first pillar focused on strengthening adolescent participation and engagement with city stakeholders through platforms such as the Adolescent Parliament and the Intermediary City Ecosystem Platform (ICEP). The second pillar focused on knowledge generation, learning, and evidence-based advocacy through baseline studies, policy dialogue, adolescent journalism, and community engagement. The third pillar promoted access to adolescent-friendly services and safe spaces through innovative approaches including the adolescent clinic, radio outreach clinics, school forums, and community dialogue sessions. The fourth pillar focused on entrepreneurial, digital, and leadership skills development to improve employability, self-reliance, and economic resilience among adolescents.



Through these integrated interventions, the project generated outputs that strengthened adolescent capacity, improved access to services and opportunities, and increased interaction between adolescents and institutions. Adolescents became more informed, skilled, confident, and organized, while duty bearers and stakeholders became increasingly exposed to youth perspectives, evidence, and advocacy. This contributed to important medium-term outcomes, including increased adolescent participation in governance processes, stronger institutional responsiveness, improved access to adolescent-friendly services, and expanded opportunities for skills development and economic empowerment.

Over time, these outcomes contributed to broader system shifts within the municipality. Adolescents began participating in municipal planning processes, Assembly committee meetings, stakeholder dialogues, and public accountability platforms. Institutions increasingly engaged adolescents as partners in development, while evidence generated through the project informed planning, policy discussions, and local advocacy efforts. The project also demonstrated how innovative and youth-centered engagement models can strengthen trust, dialogue, and collaboration between adolescents and service providers.

Ultimately, the RCA Project contributed to a growing shift toward more inclusive, responsive, and adolescent-centered city systems. By embedding participation, innovation, evidence, and collaboration into governance and service delivery structures, the project established practical and scalable models for advancing adolescent wellbeing and strengthening inclusive urban development in secondary cities.

System Map of the RCA Project:

The RCA Project System Map illustrates how the project strengthened connections and collaboration among adolescents, institutions, and community structures within the Sunyani city ecosystem to improve adolescent wellbeing. At the center of the system are adolescents, positioned not only as beneficiaries but as active participants and contributors to governance, advocacy, and development processes.

Through platforms such as the Adolescent Parliament, Adolescent Journalists, and the Intermediary City Ecosystem Platform (ICEP), the project created structured linkages between adolescents and key actors including the Municipal Assemblies, Ghana Health Service, Ghana Education Service, Social Welfare Department, National Youth Authority, civil society organizations, traditional authorities, schools, media platforms, and community leaders. These relationships enabled continuous dialogue, evidence sharing, joint planning, and coordinated responses to adolescent needs.

The system map further demonstrates how knowledge generation, advocacy, service delivery, and skills development interventions interacted to strengthen institutional responsiveness, improve access to adolescent-friendly services, and promote inclusive participation within city governance structures. By connecting stakeholders across sectors, the RCA Project fostered a more collaborative, responsive, and adolescent-centered city system that supports long-term wellbeing and sustainable urban development.

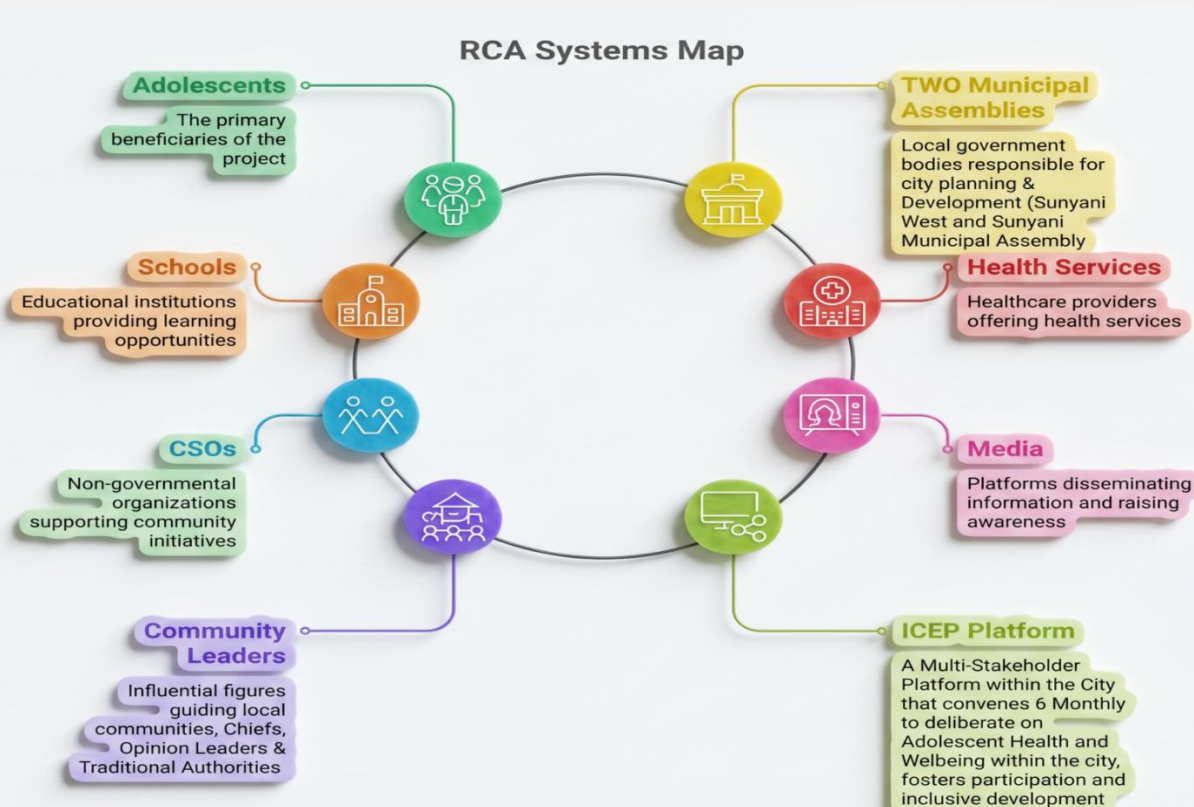


Figure 2: ICEP Membership by institutions

What We Implemented:

The Resilient City for Adolescents (RCA) Project implemented an interconnected and systems-oriented set of interventions designed to strengthen adolescent participation, improve access to adolescent-friendly services, enhance economic opportunities, and promote evidence-based engagement within the Sunyani city system. The project was intentionally structured to create linkages between adolescents, community structures, local government institutions, service providers, media platforms, and policymakers, ensuring that adolescent voices informed both dialogue and decision-making processes.

At the center of the governance and participation component was the Adolescent Parliament, where adolescent representatives were elected as Members of Parliament to represent the concerns and aspirations of young people within their communities. These adolescent MPs engaged their communities through quarterly community forums and interactive sessions where evidence, experiences, and concerns affecting adolescent health and wellbeing were gathered directly from young people. The evidence generated from these engagements was then presented through the Intermediary City Ecosystem Platform (ICEP) and the Policy Hearing Platform, which convened over 70 city-level stakeholders, including Municipal Assemblies, government institutions, civil society organizations, traditional authorities, and development actors.

The ICEP platform created structured opportunities for dialogue on key development issues affecting adolescents, including access to health services, sanitation, education, safe spaces, security, and employment opportunities. Adolescents actively presented evidence from their communities, advocated for their priorities, and submitted policy recommendations and position papers to the Municipal Assemblies as the local government institutions responsible for implementation and planning. Through this process, adolescents increasingly became recognized as contributors to governance and accountability processes within the city system.

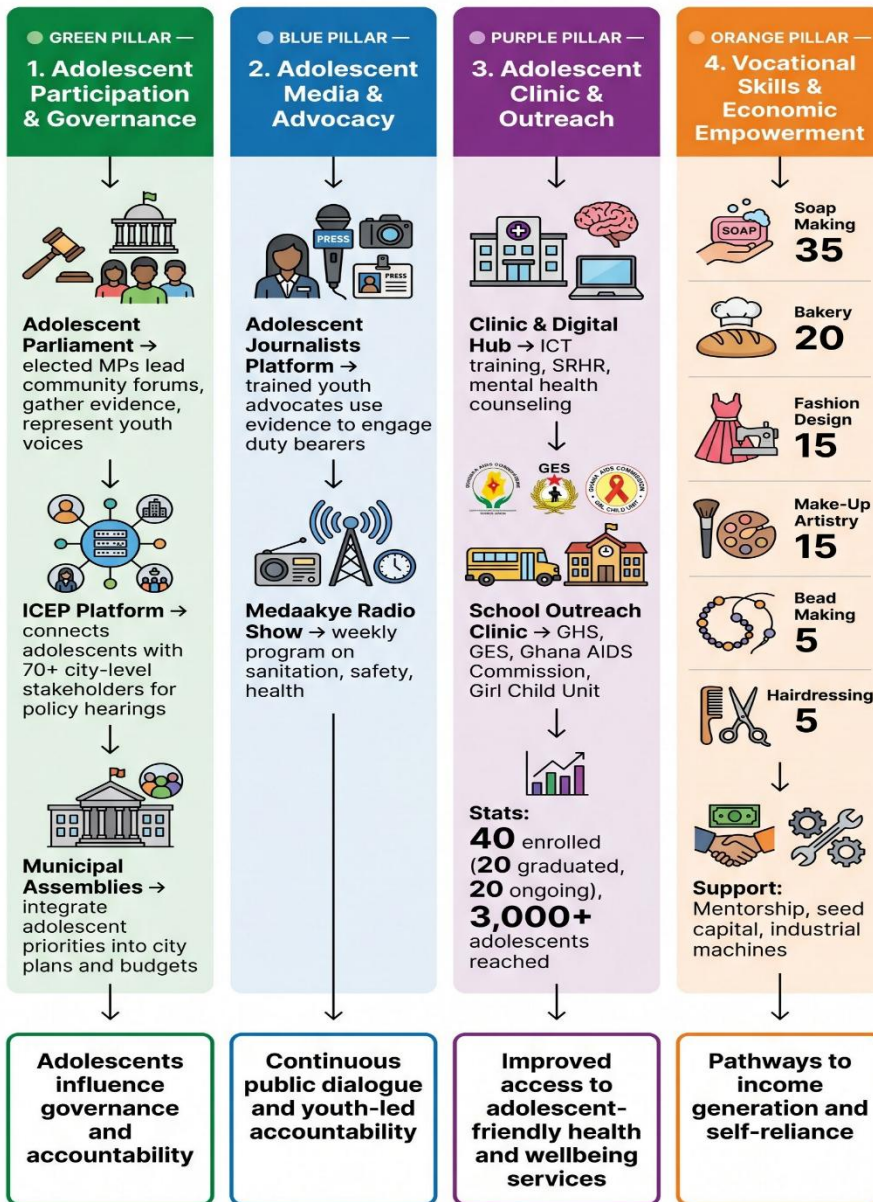
The project further strengthened advocacy and civic engagement through the Adolescent Journalist platform, where adolescents were trained and mentored as youth media advocates and evidence gatherers. These adolescent journalists continuously used evidence and stories generated from communities to engage sector authorities and duty bearers through a weekly radio advocacy programme known as the *Medaakye Show*. Through this platform, institutions and sector leaders were formally invited to respond publicly to issues affecting communities, including water and sanitation challenges, lack of safe spaces, poor street lighting, insecurity, limited access to health services, and other social concerns affecting adolescents and young people. The programme created an important accountability and public dialogue mechanism that amplified adolescent voices while strengthening responsiveness from stakeholders and institutions.

Another major component of the project was the establishment of the Adolescent Clinic and Digital Hub, which served as a safe and inclusive space for ICT training, mentorship, counselling, and referral services for adolescents. The clinic provided adolescents with access to counselling and guidance on sexual and reproductive health, mental health, and personal development while also serving as a center for digital innovation and skills development. Since its establishment, 40 adolescents have been enrolled into the ICT and digital training programme, with 20 successfully completing their training and another 20 currently

enrolled. The clinic also strengthened referral linkages with health and social support institutions to improve adolescent access to essential services.

Linked to this intervention was the School Outreach Clinic, which extended adolescent-friendly health education and counselling services into schools and communities across the city. The outreach activities

RCA Project Interventions Overview



were implemented in collaboration with the Ghana Health Service (GHS), the Ghana AIDS Commission, and the Girl Child Unit of the Ghana Education Service (GES), all of which played key roles in delivering information and support around sexual and reproductive health, mental health, and adolescent wellbeing. Through a combination of in-person sessions, radio engagement, and online streaming, the outreach clinics created safe and interactive learning spaces that connected adolescents to quality information, counselling, and referral pathways. Collectively, these interventions directly reached over 3,000 adolescents across schools and communities within Sunyani.

The project also implemented a targeted vocational skills and economic empowerment intervention aimed at supporting vulnerable

adolescents, particularly teenage mothers and young people who had dropped out of school or were unable to continue their education due to financial constraints. Through this intervention, more than 95 adolescents were enrolled and graduated from vocational and entrepreneurship training programmes designed to improve employability and livelihood opportunities. Training areas included makeup artistry, bead making, hairdressing, soap making, fashion designing, and bakery. The programme was further strengthened through entrepreneurship mentorship, business guidance, seed capital support, and the provision of industrial sewing machines to selected beneficiaries transitioning into income-generating activities and self-employment opportunities.

Key Results & Systems Shifts:

Governance Shifts: Adolescents as Active Participants in Local Governance:

One of the most significant shifts achieved through the RCA Project has been the increased participation and visibility of adolescents within local governance and decision-making systems. Through the Adolescent Parliament and ICEP platforms, adolescents transitioned from passive beneficiaries into recognized contributors to governance, planning, and accountability processes within the municipality.

Adolescents actively participated in Municipal Medium-Term Development Planning (MTDP) processes, annual planning sessions, stakeholder engagements, and Assembly committee meetings focused on sanitation, gender, health, security, and youth development. Importantly, the Speaker and representatives of the Adolescent Parliament participated in Municipal General Assembly meetings, creating practical opportunities for adolescents to engage directly with local government systems and understand decision-making processes affecting their wellbeing.

Key Governance Shifts

1. Adolescents Integrated into Municipal Planning Processes

A major shift under the project was the formal involvement of adolescents in municipal planning and development discussions. Through engagements with the Sunyani Municipal and Sunyani West Municipal Assemblies, adolescent representatives participated in Medium-Term Development Planning (MTDP) and annual planning sessions where they contributed recommendations on issues affecting adolescent wellbeing. Notably, adolescent recommendations on the need for safe recreational spaces contributed to the inclusion of child-friendly park and playground initiatives within local development planning processes, including the ongoing development of the child park/playground at Abesim.



Figure 3. Adolescent Members of Parliament joined the Sunyani Municipal Assembly's Medium-Term Development Planning meeting, contributing youth perspectives to local governance.



This flowchart titled “Adolescent-Led Change in Sunyani” illustrates the step-by-step process through which young people drive development and accountability in their city.

It begins with Issue Identification, where adolescent MPs and community members pinpoint challenges affecting youth. Next, Evidence Gathering captures data and stories through surveys and documentation. In Advocacy Planning, adolescents craft messages and strategies to engage municipal authorities. Engagement with Municipal Authorities follows, as youth present findings and recommendations to decision-makers. These inputs lead to Policy Integration, where adolescent priorities are incorporated into city plans and budgets. Finally, Implementation & Monitoring ensures that tangible outcomes are delivered and tracked by adolescents themselves.

Together, the flowchart shows a clear pathway from youth-identified issues to policy action and monitoring, demonstrating how adolescents in Sunyani actively shape governance and community development.

Policy Influence & Adolescent-Led Advocacy:

The RCA Project strengthened evidence-based advocacy by creating structured platforms where adolescents could present community concerns directly to stakeholders, duty bearers, and policymakers. Through the Adolescent Parliament, community forums, the ICEP platform, and media engagement, adolescents increasingly influenced public discussions and local development priorities using evidence gathered from their communities.

One of the strongest examples of adolescent-led advocacy was the campaign on the abandoned Bono Regional Library project. Through parliamentary sittings, stakeholder engagements, and media advocacy, adolescents consistently highlighted the impact of the incomplete facility on learning opportunities and youth development within the region. This sustained engagement contributed to renewed public commitment from government authorities toward the completion of the project, including announcements made by the Minister of Education and reaffirmation by the Regional Minister and Municipal authorities during parliamentary engagements.

The project also strengthened adolescent participation in local planning and policy processes. Through their engagement with Municipal Assemblies and planning authorities, adolescents contributed recommendations on the need for child-friendly recreational spaces and safe environments for young people. These contributions influenced the inclusion of playground and safe space initiatives within municipal planning discussions, including the ongoing child park/playground development initiative at Abesim.

Key Policy and Advocacy Shifts:

- Increased Use of Adolescent-Generated Evidence in Advocacy



A significant shift under the project was the growing use of community-generated evidence by adolescents to drive advocacy and engagement with stakeholders. Through quarterly community forums, adolescent journalists, and parliamentary engagements, young people gathered information and documented challenges affecting their communities, including sanitation, insecurity, lack of safe spaces, poor lighting, and limited access to health services. This evidence formed the basis of policy discussions, media advocacy, and stakeholder engagements, strengthening the credibility and relevance of adolescent voices within development processes.



Figure 4: Adolescent MPs facilitate community forums, guiding discussions, presenting evidence, and engaging peers in identifying local challenges and solutions to strengthen accountability and dialogue with stakeholders.

The project demonstrated that adolescents can meaningfully influence local development planning when provided with structured engagement opportunities. Through participation in planning meetings, ICEP dialogues, and stakeholder consultations, adolescents contributed directly to discussions on recreational spaces, youth development, sanitation, and education infrastructure. Their advocacy contributed to the integration of adolescent-focused priorities into municipal discussions and planning processes, particularly around the creation of safe spaces and youth-friendly infrastructure.

➤ Greater Accountability from Duty Bearers and Institutions Fostering Learning and Inclusive decision making

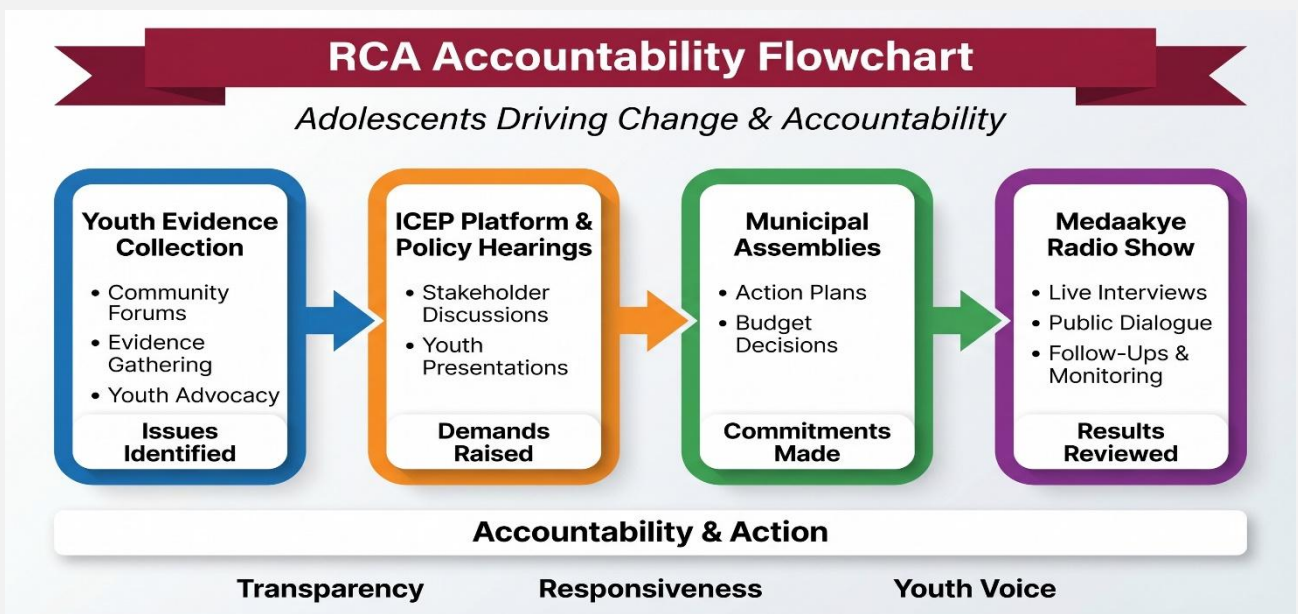


Figure 5. Adolescents drive accountability from evidence gathering to policy action and public dialogue.

Through platforms such as the Medaakye Radio Show and the ICEP dialogue sessions, institutions and duty bearers increasingly responded publicly to adolescent concerns and community development challenges. Sector authorities were invited to explain ongoing challenges relating to water, sanitation,

health access, security, and youth wellbeing while also responding to concerns raised directly by adolescents. These engagements strengthened transparency, public dialogue, and accountability between institutions and communities.

➤ Youth Priorities Increasingly Reflected in Planning Discussions

The RCA Project contributed to a visible shift in how adolescent issues are discussed and prioritized within municipal systems. Adolescent concerns around education, safe spaces, health services, sanitation, and youth development increasingly became part of stakeholder dialogue and planning conversations. The inclusion of adolescent voices within policy discussions, public forums, and municipal planning processes demonstrated growing institutional recognition of young people as

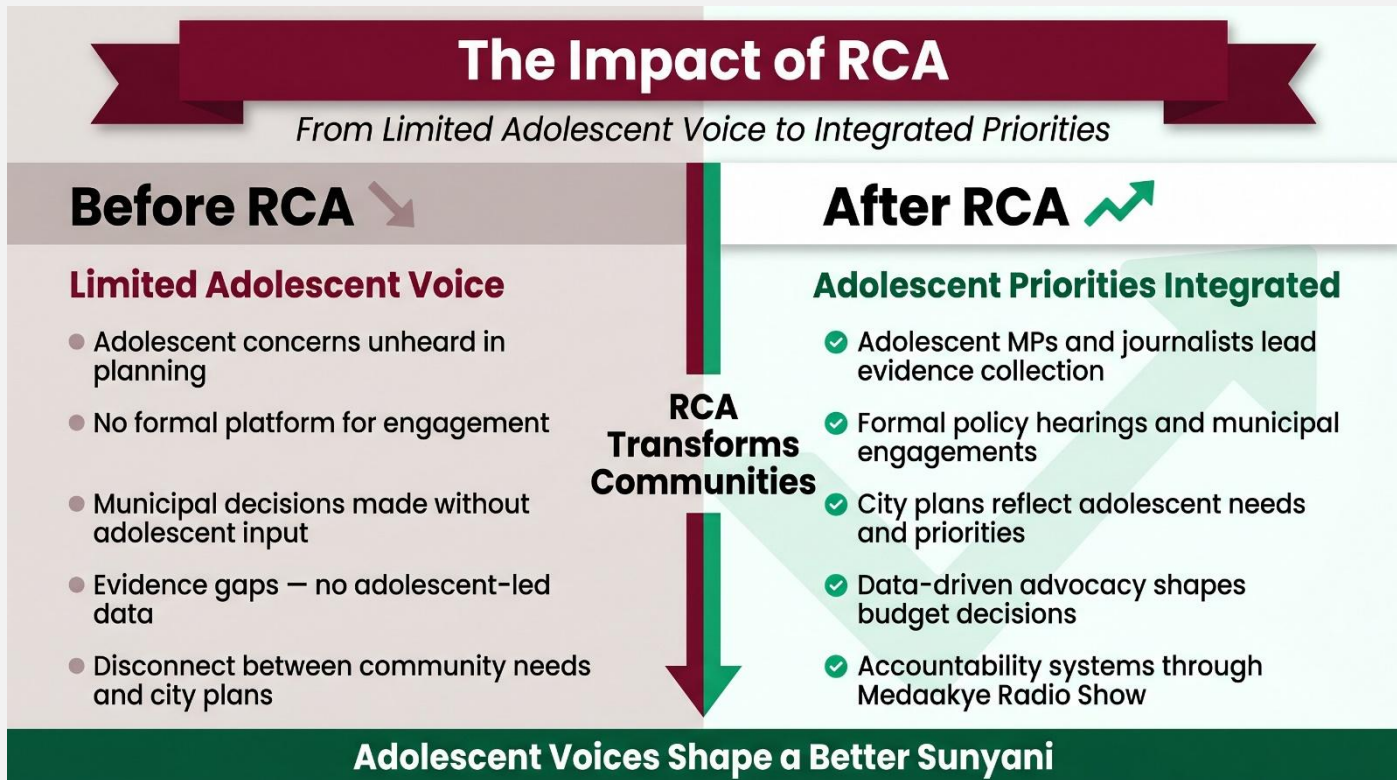


Figure 6: RCA shifted adolescent voices from being unheard to shaping municipal priorities, evidence-based advocacy, and accountability systems.

important stakeholders in city development.

➤ Institutional Shifts: Strengthening Responsive City Systems:

A major systems change achieved through the RCA Project has been the strengthening of institutional responsiveness and collaboration around adolescent wellbeing within the Sunyani municipality. Through sustained engagement, dialogue, and evidence-sharing processes, the project contributed to stronger coordination among local government institutions, service providers, civil society organizations, traditional authorities, and adolescents themselves. This shift gradually transformed adolescent wellbeing from a standalone social issue into a shared development priority within the city system.

Central to this transformation was the establishment and operationalization of the Intermediary City Ecosystem Platform (ICEP), which evolved into a recognized multi-stakeholder engagement platform bringing together over 70+ stakeholders from government institutions, Municipal Assemblies, development organizations, schools, media, and community leadership structures. The platform created structured

opportunities for continuous dialogue, collective reflection, evidence sharing, and joint problem-solving on issues affecting adolescents and young people within the municipality.

The project also strengthened institutional engagement with evidence and adolescent voice. Through baseline findings, community-generated evidence, policy dialogues, and advocacy engagements, institutions increasingly used adolescent perspectives and project-generated data to inform discussions, planning, and decision-making processes. This contributed to growing institutional openness toward youth participation and strengthened accountability around adolescent health and wellbeing concerns.

Key Institutional Shifts:

➤ ICEP Evolved into a Recognized Multi-Stakeholder Platform

One of the strongest institutional shifts under the RCA Project was the emergence of the Intermediary City Ecosystem Platform (ICEP) as a recognized and trusted city-level engagement mechanism. The platform convened stakeholders across sectors to discuss adolescent health, protection, education, livelihoods, governance, and social development issues. ICEP created a collaborative environment where institutions and adolescents could jointly identify challenges, share evidence, and explore practical solutions for improving adolescent wellbeing within the municipality

ICEP Membership:

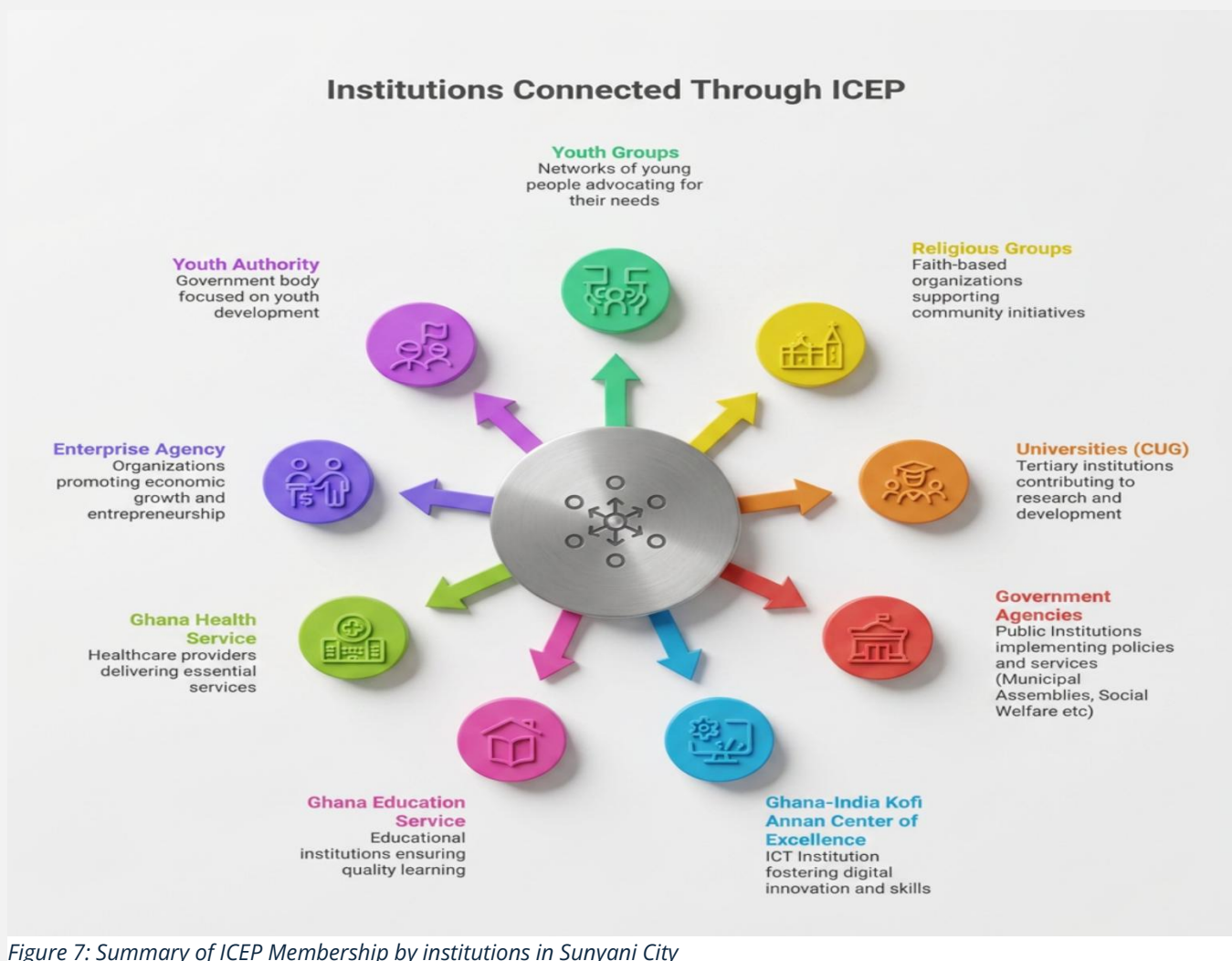


Figure 7: Summary of ICEP Membership by institutions in Sunyani City



Figure 8: Sunyani Municipal Planning Officer and Adolescent Parliament Clerk present findings during the ICEP meeting, engaging stakeholders on municipal annual plans.

➤ Increased Institutional Responsiveness to Adolescent Priorities

The project enhanced the attentiveness of Municipal Assemblies, sector institutions, and development actors to adolescent concerns. Through consistent engagement and evidence presentation, institutions responded more directly to issues of safe spaces, sanitation, education, security, health access, and youth development. This responsiveness was demonstrated in stakeholder participation in dialogue platforms, policy discussions, committee engagements, and follow-up actions. Adolescents also contributed to the 2025–2029 MTDPs for Sunyani and Sunyani West, ensuring priorities such as safe spaces, sanitation, and youth-friendly services were integrated. Adolescent MPs further strengthened this process by participating in development planning sub-committee meetings.

Evidence from ICEP Meetings:

“It has served as clarion call to provide an exclusive platform for involving adolescents and youth in the preparation of our plans since our previous plans did not adequately provide for adolescent involvement.”

“It has given the youth in our Municipality the opportunity to air their views. For instance some Adolescent Parliamentarians took part in the development planning subcommittee.”

“Construction of 1No. Urban Park, volley, Tennis Court area Electrical Supply lighting system, change Room and sanitary facilities for adolescent/Youth.”



Figure 9: Adolescents present evidence and priorities during municipal planning sessions, influencing MTDPs and strengthening institutional responsiveness.

➤ Greater Collaboration Across Sectors and Institutions

The RCA Project strengthened collaboration among institutions working on adolescent wellbeing by creating platforms for coordinated engagement and collective action. Institutions including the Municipal Assemblies, Ghana Health Service, Ghana Education Service, National Youth Authority, Social Welfare Department, media organizations, and civil society actors increasingly worked together through shared discussions and activities. This multi-sector collaboration improved information sharing, referral pathways, joint programming, and coordination around adolescent-focused interventions.

Greater Collaboration Across Sectors & Institutions



Multi-Sector Collaboration for Adolescent Development in Sunyani

➤ Evidence and Adolescent Perspectives Increasingly Informing Decision-Making

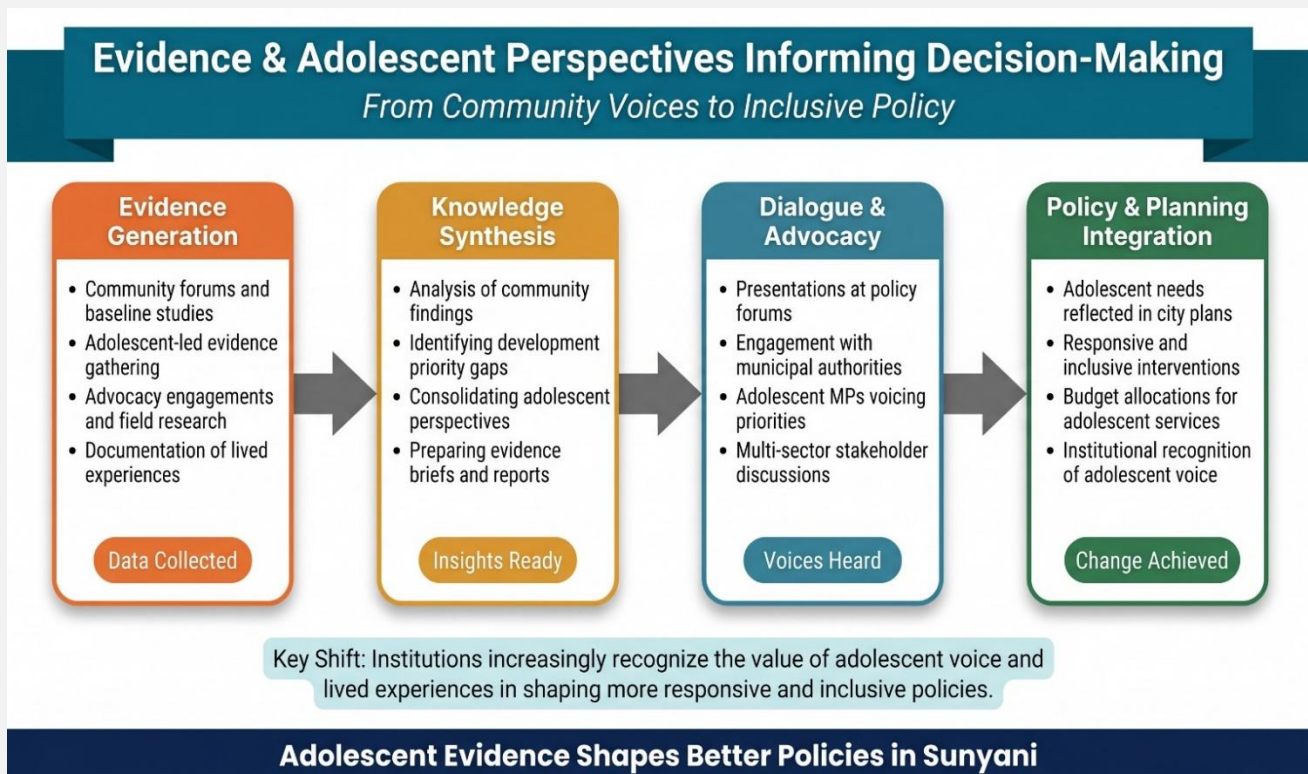


Figure 10: Adolescent MPs co-chair International Youth Day with the Regional Minister, amplifying youth perspectives in national dialogue.

A

significant institutional shift was the growing use of project-generated evidence and adolescent perspectives in local planning and dialogue processes. Findings from community forums, baseline studies, advocacy engagements, and adolescent-led evidence gathering increasingly informed

discussions on development priorities and service delivery gaps. Institutions gradually began recognizing the value of adolescent voice and lived experiences in shaping more responsive and inclusive policies and interventions.



➤ Increased Institutional Recognition of Adolescents as Development Partners

PLEOver the implementation period, adolescents gained increased legitimacy and visibility within institutional spaces. Stakeholders increasingly recognized adolescents not only as beneficiaries of development interventions but as partners capable of contributing to governance, advocacy, accountability, and social transformation. This shift was reflected in the inclusion of adolescents in stakeholder engagements, Assembly committee meetings, public events, and policy discussions across the municipality.

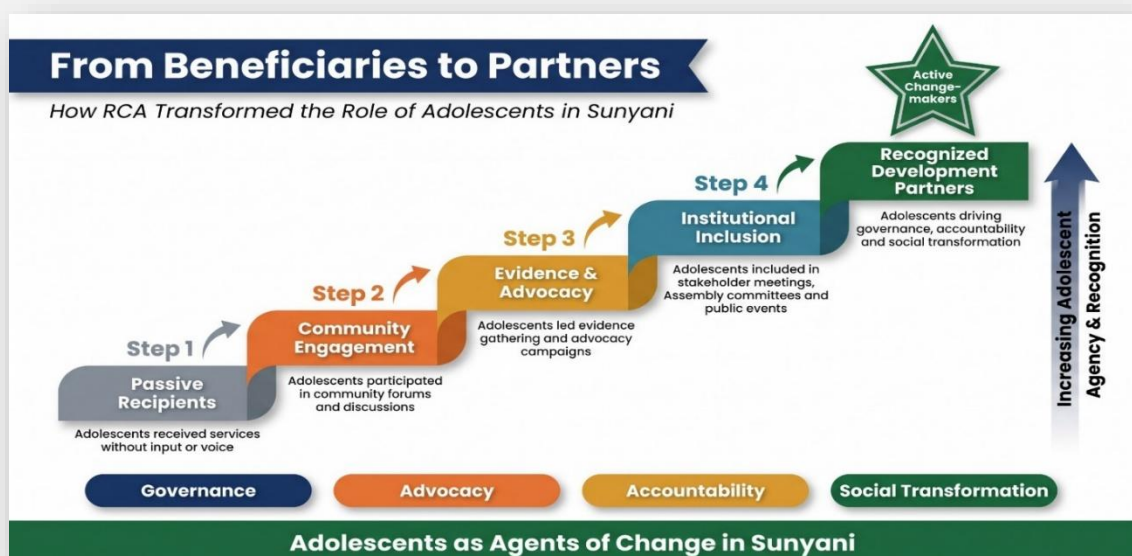


Figure 11 Adolescents evolve from beneficiaries to recognized partners, driving governance, advocacy, accountability, and social transformation.

➤ **Social Shifts: Building Confidence, Voice, and Trust**

Beyond governance and institutional changes, the RCA Project contributed to important social and behavioral shifts among adolescents, parents, communities, and service providers. Through continuous engagement, leadership development, safe spaces, and interactive learning platforms, adolescents developed increased confidence, communication skills, and willingness to engage publicly on issues affecting their lives and wellbeing. The project also strengthened trust and interaction between adolescents, institutions, and communities, helping to reduce barriers that previously limited adolescent participation and access to support services.

The creation of safe and adolescent-friendly engagement platforms, including the Adolescent Parliament, adolescent clinic, radio outreach clinics, community forums, and school outreach sessions, enabled adolescents to openly discuss sensitive issues such as sexual and reproductive health, mental health, insecurity, violence, and social challenges. These interventions promoted peer learning, confidence building, and increased awareness while encouraging adolescents to actively seek information, support, and opportunities.

The project further contributed to changing perceptions around adolescent leadership and participation. Adolescents increasingly became visible within public discussions, stakeholder platforms, media engagements, and governance spaces, while communities and institutions gradually developed greater appreciation for the value of youth voice and participation in development processes.

Key Social Shifts

➤ **1 Increased Confidence and Leadership Among Adolescents**

The project significantly strengthened confidence, leadership, and communication skills among adolescents through mentorship, advocacy engagement, public speaking opportunities, and participation in governance platforms. Through the Adolescent Parliament and Adolescent Journalist initiatives, young people increasingly demonstrated the confidence to engage stakeholders, moderate discussions, present evidence, and advocate publicly on issues affecting their communities and wellbeing.

Many adolescents who initially lacked confidence to speak publicly gradually transitioned into active youth leaders participating in policy dialogues, stakeholder meetings, media programmes, and community engagements.



Figure 12: Adolescent MPs engage confidently in SRHR and mental health policy dialogue alongside service providers, while the Speaker and Clerk of Adolescent Parliament lead a sitting session with stakeholders, strengthening Adolescents leadership visibility.

➤ Stronger Youth Voice in Public and Community Discussions

The RCA Project strengthened adolescent voice and visibility within community and public spaces. Through radio advocacy programmes, community forums, school sessions, and stakeholder engagements, adolescents increasingly expressed their opinions and concerns on issues affecting their lives. Platforms such as the *Medaakye* Radio Show created opportunities for adolescents to engage directly with duty bearers and publicly discuss issues including sanitation, security, safe spaces, education, and health services.

This contributed to greater public recognition of adolescent concerns and strengthened the legitimacy of youth voice within community dialogue and decision-making spaces.



Figure 14: An adolescent host leads a live **radio outreach clinic**, engaging peers and a stakeholder in open discussion on adolescent health and wellbeing. The interactive broadcast creates a safe space for young people to voice concerns and seek guidance on issues such as mental health, sanitation, and access to services.



Figure 14: The Radio outreach clinic Sessions where a mixed panel of youth and key stakeholders discussed sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) and mental health, creating an inclusive space for dialogue and shared accountability.

➤ Increased Trust Between Adolescents and Institutions

One of the important social shifts observed was the improved relationship and trust between adolescents and institutions. Through continuous interaction with health professionals, Assembly officials, teachers, and service providers, adolescents became more willing to engage institutions and seek support on sensitive issues affecting their wellbeing.



Figure 15A: A group of adolescents referred from selected schools participate in a **small counselling and learning session on sexual and reproductive health (SRHR)**. Facilitated in a safe space, the activity builds trust, reduces stigma, and strengthens adolescent confidence to seek support on sensitive wellbeing issues.

The adolescent clinic, school outreach activities, and counselling sessions particularly helped to reduce fear, stigma, and hesitation around discussions on sexual and reproductive health and mental health concerns. This strengthened confidence in referral systems and increased adolescents' willingness to access information and support services.

➤ Greater Openness Around Sensitive Health and Wellbeing Issues

The project created safe and interactive environments where adolescents could openly discuss issues that are often considered difficult or stigmatized within communities. Through radio outreach clinics, counselling sessions, school outreach activities, and peer discussions, adolescents increasingly engaged in conversations around mental health, reproductive health, teenage pregnancy, insecurity, and personal development. This shift contributed to increased awareness, improved health-seeking behavior, and greater acceptance of adolescent wellbeing discussions within schools, communities, and stakeholder platforms.

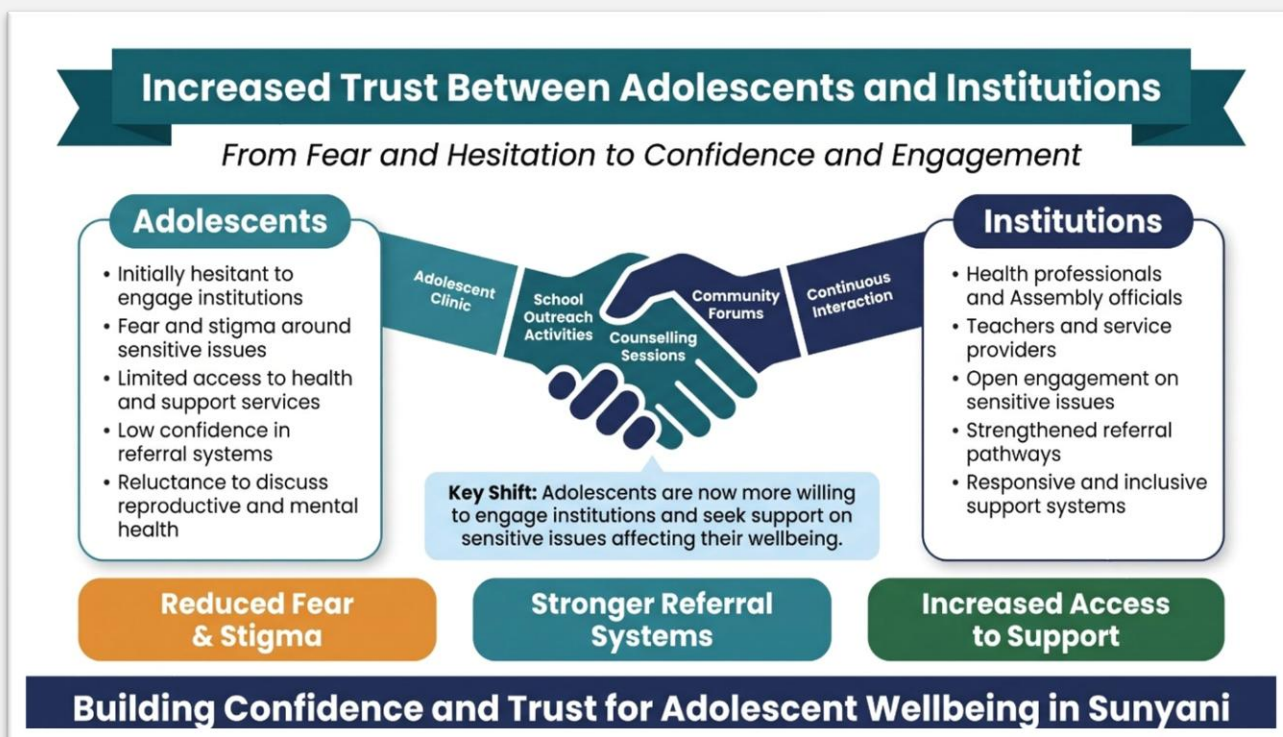


Figure 16: Fig. 4.2 Strengthening Adolescent–Institution Relationships

➤ Changing Community Perceptions About Adolescent Participation

The RCA Project also contributed to changing how communities and stakeholders perceive adolescents and their role within society. Adolescents increasingly became recognized as contributors to development and governance rather than passive beneficiaries. Their ability to gather evidence, engage stakeholders, present recommendations, and advocate for community priorities demonstrated their potential to influence positive change within the municipality.

This shift helped strengthen intergenerational dialogue and promoted greater acceptance of adolescent participation within governance, planning, and community development processes.

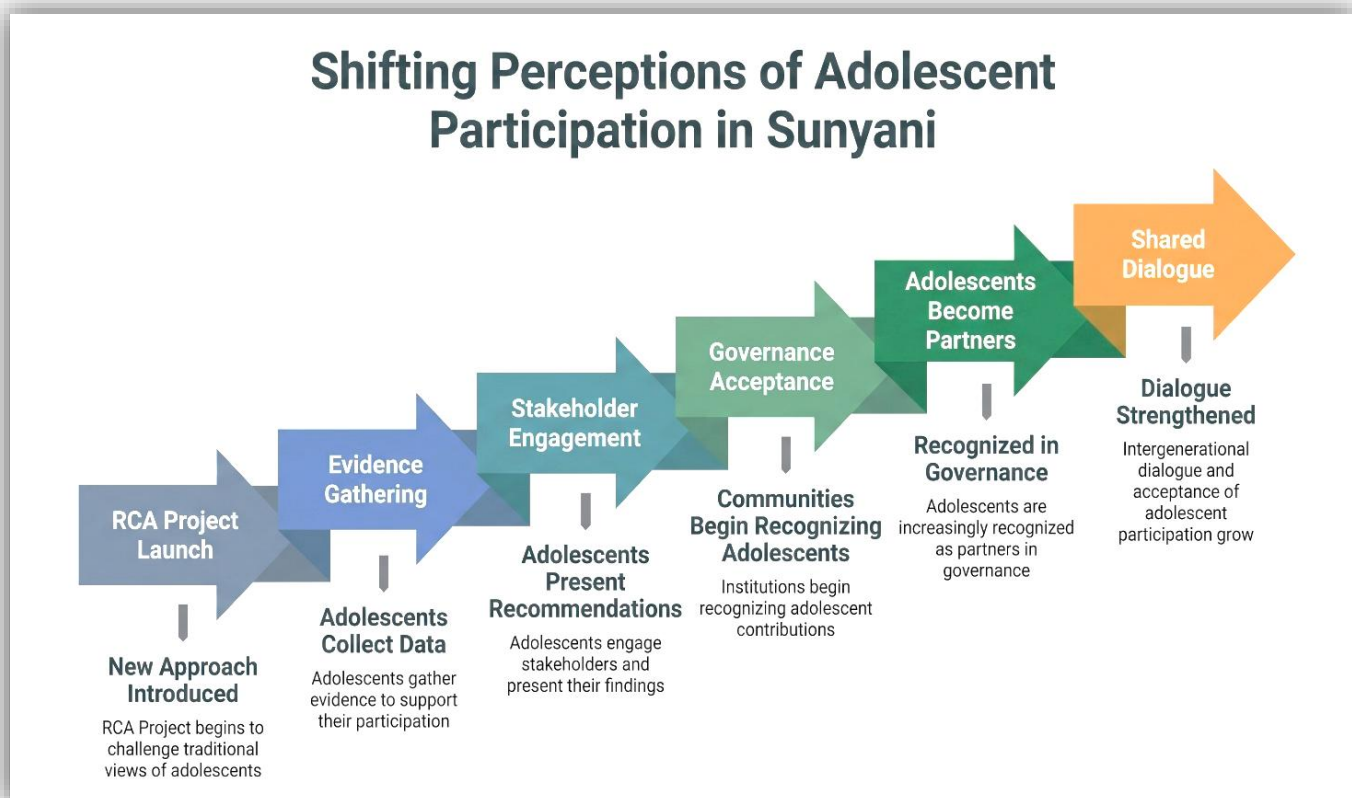


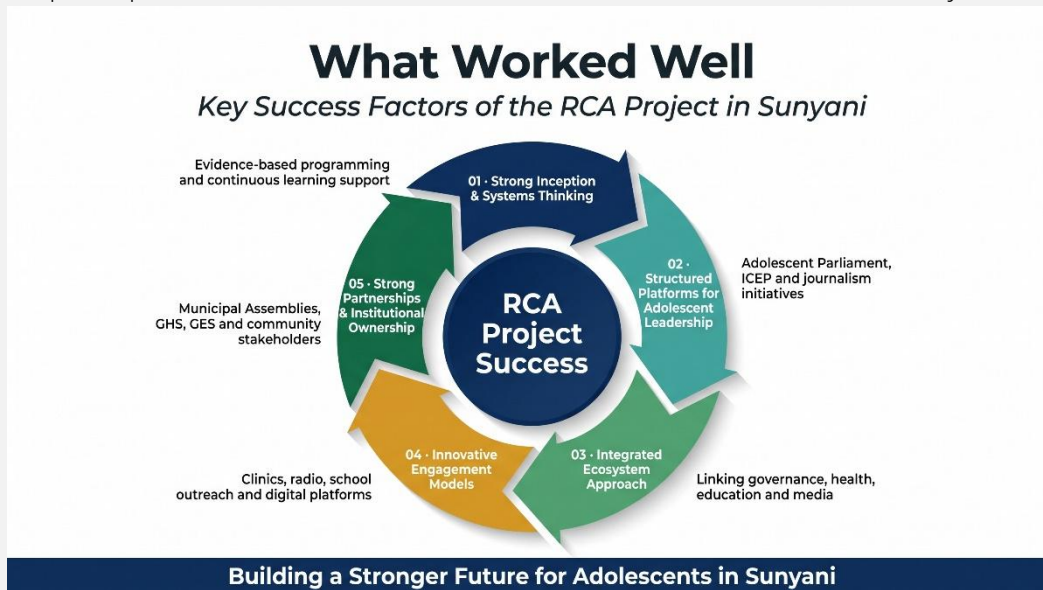
Figure 17: Shifting Perceptions of Adolescent Participation in Sunyani

This infographic titled *"Shifting Perceptions of Adolescent Participation in Sunyani"* summarizes how the RCA Project gradually transformed the role of adolescents in governance. It begins with the project launch, introducing a new approach that challenged traditional views of Adolescents. Adolescents then gathered evidence to support their participation and presented recommendations to stakeholders. Over time, governance structures began to accept adolescents as partners, leading to stronger youth–adult dialogue and recognition of their contributions. The overall message is a clear progression from initial hesitation to full confidence and engagement in civic and community spaces.

What Worked Well:

One of the foundational strengths of the RCA Project was the inception phase, which provided critical space for reflection, planning, learning, and refinement of the project approach before full implementation. The inception process allowed the consortium and stakeholders to carefully develop the project structures,

refine interventions, clarify pathways for implementation, and establish strong systems for coordination, participation, and monitoring. This early investment in planning and systems thinking created a solid foundation that significantly



contributed to the overall performance and success of the project.

A particularly important success factor during this phase was the continuous engagement and learning support provided by the MEL Team of Ecorys and the broader HCA-II team. The collaborative reflection sessions, technical guidance, and adaptive learning processes strengthened the project's understanding of systems-oriented programming, adolescent participation, and evidence-based implementation. The strategic support and close working relationship with the MEL structures in Ghana and the HCA-II ecosystem helped position the project on a stronger path toward effective implementation, learning, and performance.

Figure 19 What worked well

Summary of What worked well.

What Worked Well — RCA Project Key Success Factors in Sunyani

01 · Strong Inception & Systems Thinking Early collaboration with MEL Team and HCA-II structures created space for reflection, continuous learning, and evidence-based programming.

02 · Structured Platforms for Adolescent Leadership Adolescent Parliament, ICEP, and journalism initiatives gave young people safe spaces to engage in governance, advocacy, and accountability.

03 · Integrated Ecosystem Approach Linking governance, service delivery, skills development, and media ensured stronger pathways between adolescents, institutions, schools, and health systems.

04 · Innovative Engagement Models Clinics, school outreach, radio programmes, and digital platforms created accessible spaces for sensitive SRHR and mental health discussions.

05 · Strong Partnerships & Institutional Ownership Partnerships with Municipal Assemblies, GHS, GES, media, and community stakeholders reinforced ownership and sustainability of interventions.

Another major success was the creation of structured and safe platforms that enabled adolescents to participate meaningfully in governance and development discussions. The Adolescent Parliament, ICEP platform, and adolescent journalism initiatives demonstrated that when young people are provided with mentorship, evidence, and opportunities for engagement, they can confidently contribute to policy dialogue, advocacy, and accountability processes. These platforms significantly increased adolescent visibility, leadership, and participation within municipal systems.

The project also benefited from combining governance, service delivery, skills development, and media engagement into one interconnected ecosystem rather than implementing isolated interventions. This integration strengthened linkages between

adolescents, institutions, schools, health systems, and local authorities, creating stronger pathways for engagement and support.

Another key success was the use of innovative and hybrid engagement models. The adolescent clinic, school outreach clinics, radio outreach clinics, and digital engagement platforms created safe and accessible spaces where adolescents could openly discuss sensitive issues such as sexual and reproductive health and mental health. These approaches improved trust, participation, and access to information and support services.

Strong partnerships and collaboration with Municipal Assemblies, Ghana Health Service, Ghana Education Service, media platforms, and community stakeholders also played a critical role in strengthening ownership, institutional engagement, and sustainability of interventions.

Challenges Encountered and key Adaptations:

Despite the progress achieved, the project faced several operational and contextual challenges that affected implementation. One of the major challenges was the delay in infrastructure and safe space development due to land-related issues, institutional processes, and local government transitions. This affected timelines for some planned physical interventions and required significant adaptation by the project team.

The project also encountered varying levels of institutional responsiveness and bureaucratic delays, particularly around policy follow-up and implementation of recommendations raised through adolescent advocacy. Sustaining continuous stakeholder engagement across multiple sectors required significant coordination, relationship building, and follow-up efforts.

Another challenge was the vulnerability of many adolescents engaged under the project. Poverty, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, family instability, and school drop-out affected consistent participation and transition outcomes for some beneficiaries. Discussions around mental health and sexual and reproductive health also initially faced stigma and hesitation within some schools and communities.



Key Adaptations:

➤ Adaptations & Innovation – RCA Project

The RCA Project demonstrated resilience by adapting strategies to overcome operational and contextual challenges. In response to infrastructure and safe space delays, the team shifted toward flexible outreach models such as adolescent clinics, school outreach sessions, and radio platforms. These ensured continuity of engagement and reduced dependency on physical structures.

To address institutional responsiveness and bureaucratic hurdles, the project invested in persistent stakeholder coordination, regular dialogue forums, and strengthened advocacy efforts. This helped sustain multi-sector collaboration and improved accountability.

Recognizing adolescent vulnerabilities and social barriers, the project expanded counselling, mentorship, and peer-led initiatives, while creating safe spaces for open discussion on SRHR and mental health. These approaches reduced stigma and supported vulnerable adolescents to remain engaged.

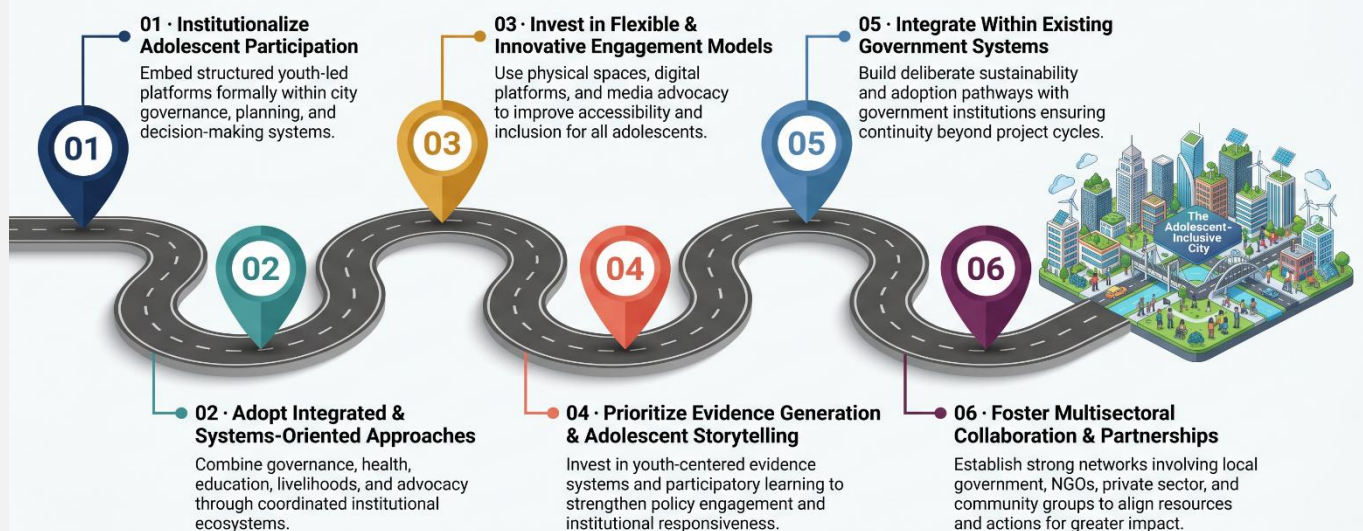
When faced with funding and disbursement delays, the team adopted phased implementation, prioritized critical activities, and enhanced coordination to maintain delivery despite financial pressures.

Finally, in response to staff attrition, internal adjustments and improved recruitment processes introduced in the second and third years stabilized operations and ensured continuity of implementation.

Key Recommendations for Similar Cities:

Key Recommendations for Similar Cities

Lessons from the RCA Project in Sunyani



The experience of the RCA Project demonstrates that improving adolescent wellbeing within rapidly urbanizing secondary cities requires more than standalone youth activities or short-term interventions. Sustainable change is more likely when adolescent participation, wellbeing, and inclusion are intentionally integrated into city governance systems, planning processes, and institutional structures.

One of the strongest recommendations emerging from the project is the need to institutionalize adolescent participation within local government systems. Youth engagement should move beyond consultation-based or event-driven participation toward

structured mechanisms that allow adolescents to contribute consistently to planning, accountability, and decision-making processes. Platforms such as adolescent parliaments, youth-led dialogue spaces, and multi-stakeholder ecosystem platforms can significantly strengthen inclusion, accountability, and responsiveness when formally connected to city governance structures.

The project also highlights the importance of adopting integrated and systems-oriented approaches to adolescent wellbeing. Challenges affecting adolescents are interconnected and therefore require interventions that combine governance, health, education, psychosocial support, livelihoods, mentorship, and advocacy rather than fragmented programming approaches. Cities should invest in coordinated ecosystems where institutions, communities, schools, service providers, and adolescents themselves work collaboratively to address wellbeing challenges holistically.

Another important recommendation is the need for cities to adopt innovative and flexible engagement models that reflect the realities and communication preferences of young people. Combining physical engagement spaces with digital platforms, media advocacy, community outreach, and hybrid learning models can significantly improve accessibility, participation, and inclusion, particularly around sensitive issues such as mental health and sexual and reproductive health. Media and digital platforms can also strengthen accountability by amplifying adolescent voices and increasing public engagement on youth-related issues.

The RCA experience further demonstrates the importance of investing in evidence generation and adolescent-led storytelling as central tools for systems influence and policy engagement. Community-generated evidence, lived experiences, and youth-led advocacy can strengthen the credibility of adolescent participation and improve institutional responsiveness. Cities should therefore prioritize participatory learning, community dialogue, and youth-centered evidence systems that allow adolescents to shape conversations around their own wellbeing and development.

The project also recommends stronger integration of adolescent-focused interventions within existing government systems and policy mechanisms from the onset of implementation. Partnerships with institutions responsible for youth development, enterprise support, health services, and local governance should go beyond participation and include deliberate sustainability and adoption pathways to ensure continuity beyond project funding cycles.

Finally, cities should prioritize long-term investment in adolescent leadership, mentorship, and transition opportunities. Exposure-based learning, mentorship engagements, peer exchange platforms, and structured pathways into livelihoods, governance, and civic leadership can significantly strengthen adolescent confidence, aspirations, and long-term social and economic resilience.

Human Stories & Case Studies:

One of the strongest indicators of change under the RCA Project has been the personal transformation experienced by adolescents who participated in the intervention. Beyond systems and policy shifts, the project created opportunities for young people to gain confidence, discover their potential, influence decisions, and improve their wellbeing and livelihoods. These stories reflect the lived realities behind the data and demonstrate how adolescent-centered approaches can contribute to long-term personal and community transformation.

This section presents selected stories and experiences from adolescents whose journeys reflect the broader impact of the project across governance, advocacy, skills development, leadership, and wellbeing.

Adolescent Advocacy and the Bono Regional Library Campaign:

From Evidence to Policy Action:

One of the strongest demonstrations of adolescent-led advocacy and systems influence under the RCA Project was the campaign surrounding the abandoned Bono Regional Library project in Sunyani. The library project, which had remained incomplete since 2003, became a major symbol of limited investment in youth learning and educational infrastructure within the region.

Through the Adolescent Parliament and Adolescent Journalist platforms, adolescents consistently raised concerns about the impact of the abandoned facility on learning opportunities, access to educational resources, youth development, and safe spaces for young people. Using parliamentary sittings, stakeholder engagements, community forums, radio discussions, and media advocacy, adolescents amplified the issue as a critical development concern affecting the future of young people in the Bono Region.

The campaign evolved from local discussions into a broader public advocacy issue, with adolescent-generated evidence and sustained engagement helping to maintain public attention on the abandoned project. The advocacy efforts demonstrated how structured youth participation platforms can influence accountability discussions and strengthen public demand for responsive development action.

A major milestone was recorded in October 2025, when the Minister of Education, Hon. Haruna Iddrisu, speaking at the 63rd Annual Conference of the Conference of Heads of Assisted Secondary Schools (CHASS) held at the University of Energy and Natural Resources (UENR), publicly announced government plans to complete regional library projects across the country, including the Bono Regional Library. This commitment was later reaffirmed by regional authorities and discussed during sessions of the Adolescent Parliament.

The Bono Regional Library campaign became a practical example of how adolescent voices, evidence generation, media engagement, and sustained advocacy can contribute to policy attention and institutional response. Beyond the infrastructure itself, the process strengthened adolescents' confidence in civic participation and demonstrated that young people can meaningfully contribute to accountability and development discussions within their cities.

➤ Key Change

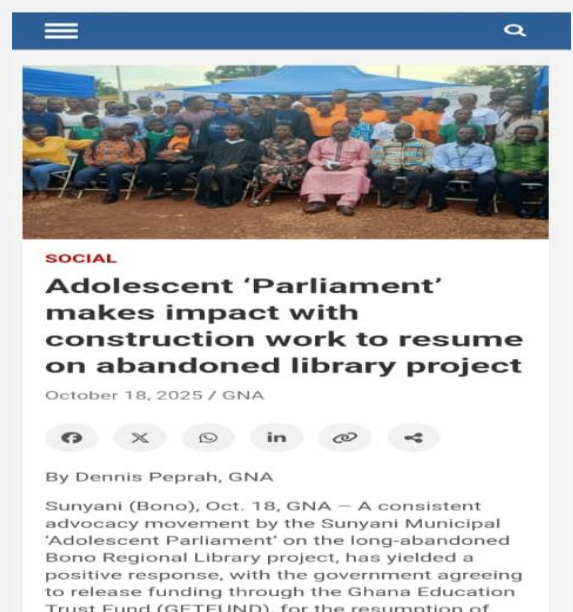
- Adolescent-generated evidence contributed to renewed policy attention and public commitment toward the completion of the Bono Regional Library project.
- Increased recognition of adolescents as credible advocates within local governance and public accountability systems.
- Strengthened confidence and civic participation among adolescent leaders and journalists.

A video link below:

[GLOMEF-HO VIDEO.mp4](#)



Figure 21: The abandoned Bono Regional Library project in Sunyani, left incomplete since 2003, became a major advocacy issue championed by the Adolescent Parliament and Adolescent Journalists under the RCA Project. Through sustained evidence-based advocacy, media engagement, and stakeholder dialogue, adolescents amplified the need for the completion of the facility as a critical investment in youth learning, safe spaces, and educational development within the region. The campaign contributed to renewed public attention and government commitment toward the completion of the project, demonstrating a clear example of



From Vulnerability to Advocacy Leadership:

➤ How Rahima's Story Sparked Change in Yawhima Community:

Rahima Ishaq Umar's journey reflects one of the most powerful examples of personal transformation and



Figure 23: Rahima Ishaq Umar hosting the Medaakye Radio Show as part of the RCA Project's adolescent-led media advocacy platform. Through the programme, adolescents engage duty bearers, service providers, and community stakeholders on issues affecting their health, education, safety, and wellbeing, while strengthening youth voice, civic participation, and accountability within the city system.

systems influence under the RCA Project. Raised in difficult social and economic circumstances in Yawhima, Rahima's early life was marked by financial hardship, limited family support, teenage pregnancy, and interrupted educational aspirations. Despite these challenges, she remained determined to continue her education and pursue her dream of becoming a journalist and community advocate.

Her turning point came through the RCA Project, where she was elected as an Adolescent Member of Parliament representing Yawhima and later served as Majority Leader. Through the project's leadership and adolescent journalism platforms, Rahima gained training in advocacy, storytelling, public speaking, and evidence gathering. These opportunities reignited her passion for journalism and strengthened her confidence to speak publicly on

issues affecting young people within her community.

One of Rahima's most impactful advocacy efforts focused on the unsafe and deteriorating classroom structure at Yawhima African Faith Basic School. Using skills gained through the adolescent journalism platform, she documented and published a story highlighting the poor learning conditions affecting school children in the community. The story attracted attention from local authorities, including the Sunyani Municipal Assembly and political leadership, resulting in the commencement of a new three-unit classroom block for the school.

Her story became a practical demonstration of how adolescent voice, community evidence, and youth-led media engagement can influence local development action and improve community wellbeing.

Beyond advocacy, Rahima also benefited from vocational skills training in makeup artistry and wig-making, providing her with livelihood opportunities and economic support. Her leadership journey further expanded through participation in major national and international learning platforms, including the World Urban Forum in Cairo (2024), the Global Learning Forum in Ho, an exchange programme in India, and visits to the Parliament of Ghana.

In recognition of her leadership and advocacy efforts, Rahima was honoured with the Ghana Leadership Awards as the *Most Promising Young Leader of the Year (2025)*. Today, she continues to use her voice through the *Medaakye Radio Show*, adolescent advocacy platforms, and stakeholder engagements to educate, mentor, and advocate for adolescents, particularly girls and teenage mothers within her community.

Rahima's journey reflects the transformative potential of investing in adolescent leadership, voice, and opportunity. Her experience demonstrates that when adolescents are provided with mentorship, safe platforms, and meaningful participation opportunities, they can influence systems, inspire change, and become powerful advocates within their communities.

Key Change:

- Adolescent-led evidence and storytelling contributed directly to community development action.
- Strengthened adolescent confidence, leadership, and civic participation.
- Improved educational infrastructure through adolescent advocacy.
- Increased visibility of adolescent girls and teenage mothers as leaders and changemakers.



Figure 25: Before and after images of Yawhima African Faith Basic School following adolescent-led advocacy under the RCA Project. What began as evidence gathered and amplified by adolescent journalist and Adolescent MP, Rahima Ishaq Umar, contributed to stakeholder response and the construction of a new classroom block—demonstrating how adolescent voice and community advocacy can influence local development action and improve learning environments for children.

Video Story Link:

[ISHAQ.mp4](#)

Published Story Link:

Impact Story: How a Young Citizen Journalist Sparked Change in Yawhima Community

<https://www.watchghana.com/en/details/12977/impact-story-how-a-young-citizen-journalist-sparked-change-in-yawhima-community>.

From Digital Skills to Employment: Derick's Journey of Transformation Through the RCA Project:

Derick Owusu, a 19-year-old adolescent from Sunyani, is one of the young people whose life has been significantly transformed through the Resilient City for Adolescents (RCA) Project. His story reflects the project's broader vision of equipping adolescents with practical skills, confidence, exposure, and opportunities that prepare them to participate meaningfully in society and pursue sustainable livelihoods.



Figure 27: Derick Owusu, A 19 year old and a beneficiary of the RCA project in Sunyani.

Before joining the project, Derick had limited exposure to digital technology, leadership opportunities, and professional working environments. Like many adolescents within rapidly urbanizing communities, he faced challenges in accessing practical employability skills and mentorship opportunities that could help shape his future career path. Although he had a strong interest in technology and learning, he lacked the platform and resources to develop his potential.

His turning point came when he enrolled in the RCA Project's Digital Innovation Programme (DIP), implemented in partnership with the Ghana-India Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT. Through the programme, 45 adolescents were trained in practical digital and innovation skills as part of the project's effort to expose young people to the digital space and strengthen employability

opportunities for adolescents interested in technology, innovation, and digital leadership.

During the training, Derick acquired practical competencies in computer applications, digital communication, and technology-based problem-solving. Beyond technical skills, the programme also strengthened his confidence, communication abilities, and exposure to professional environments through participation in leadership and civic engagement activities linked to the project.

Reflecting on his experience, Derick explained that the RCA Project fundamentally changed how he viewed himself and his future.

"The project really boosted my confidence. Before the training, I had little exposure to digital technology, but now I can use computers confidently, speak in public, and engage people without fear."

Through the RCA Project, Derick actively participated in several key engagements, including community forums, policy dialogues, the Adolescent Parliament, the Medaakye radio programme, and stakeholder meetings. These experiences helped improve his public speaking skills, broaden his understanding of leadership and governance, and increased his ability to interact confidently with institutions and professionals.

His growing confidence and digital competence soon began creating opportunities beyond the project itself. His school headmaster later recommended him to support the IT unit at his church, where he now assists in typing and managing digital notes during church services. He also joined his school's robotics activities, further deepening his passion for technology and innovation.

One of the most remarkable milestones in Derick's journey came when he attended an interview at Chardose Micro-Credit for a position as an accounts assistant. During the interview, Derick shared his experience and training under the RCA Project. According to him, the manager became particularly interested in the practical skills and confidence he had gained through the Digital Innovation Programme.

"When I mentioned the training I received through the RCA Project, the manager was impressed by my confidence and skills, and he offered me the job immediately."

Today, Derick works as an accounts assistant, supporting loan entries and financial record management while continuing his education. The opportunity has not only improved his practical experience and exposure but has also strengthened his sense of responsibility and independence.

Importantly, Derick's journey has gone beyond personal transformation. Due to his school schedule, he introduced another adolescent beneficiary of the RCA Project, Ahmed Boadi, to support the organization during his absence. He now mentors his colleague and transfers the same knowledge and workplace experience he acquired through the project.

"Because of my school schedule, I introduced Ahmed to assist when I'm away. My boss accepted him too, and now I'm helping him learn the work."

Derick's story demonstrates how investments in adolescent digital skills and leadership development can create real pathways to employment, mentorship, and economic participation. It highlights the importance of linking youth training programmes with practical opportunities, exposure, and confidence-building interventions that allow adolescents to transition successfully into the world of work.

Today, Derick serves as an inspiration to many young people within the municipality, proving that when adolescents are provided with the right support systems, skills, and opportunities, they can move from vulnerability to leadership, productivity, and self-reliance.

➤ Key Systems Shifts Demonstrated

- Digital skills training linked to real employment opportunities
- Increased adolescent confidence and leadership capacity
- Peer mentorship and youth-led knowledge transfer
- Growing private sector recognition of adolescent potential
- Stronger pathways between skills development and economic inclusion

Derick Owusu's journey reflects the transformative power of digital inclusion and youth empowerment under the RCA Project. From participating in the Digital Innovation Programme to securing employment as an accounts assistant, his story demonstrates how investments in adolescent digital skills can create pathways to confidence, leadership, mentorship, and economic independence.

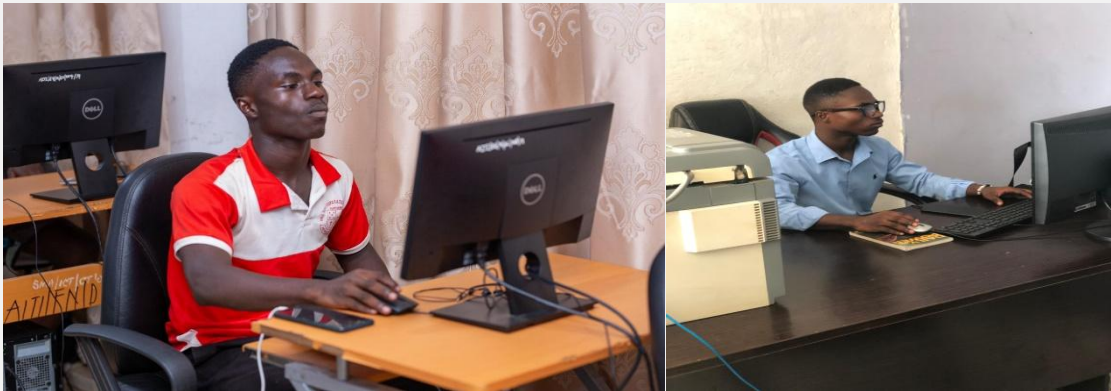


Figure 29: Derick Owusu, a beneficiary of the RCA Project's Digital Innovation Programme, transitioned from ICT training at the Ghana-India Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT to a professional working environment as an accounts assistant. His journey reflects how digital skills, confidence-building, and mentorship can create real employment opportunities for adolescents.

Conclusion:

The experience of implementing the Resilient City for Adolescents (RCA) Project in Sunyani has reinforced one central lesson: adolescents are not simply beneficiaries of development interventions, they are critical actors in shaping responsive, inclusive, and sustainable cities. When young people are provided with safe spaces, meaningful participation opportunities, mentorship, skills, and platforms for engagement, they are capable of influencing governance systems, driving advocacy, strengthening accountability, and contributing directly to community development and social transformation.

The RCA Project demonstrated that adolescent wellbeing cannot be addressed through isolated interventions alone. Sustainable impact requires integrated and systems-oriented approaches that connect governance, service delivery, skills development, economic empowerment, evidence generation, and community engagement. The project also showed that meaningful adolescent participation is possible when institutions intentionally create spaces where young people are listened to, respected, and included in decisions affecting their lives.

One of the strongest reflections from the project is the importance of investing in structures and systems rather than only activities. Platforms such as the Adolescent Parliament, ICEP, adolescent journalism, community forums, and the adolescent clinic became more than project interventions, they evolved into mechanisms for dialogue, accountability, learning, leadership development, and institutional engagement. These structures demonstrated the potential for long-term systems change when adolescent participation is linked directly to governance and planning processes.

The RCA experience also highlights the importance of flexibility, innovation, and continuous learning in responding to the realities of adolescents within rapidly urbanizing cities. Hybrid engagement approaches combining physical, digital, media, and community-based platforms proved highly effective in expanding reach, increasing trust, and strengthening engagement around sensitive issues such as mental health, sexual and reproductive health, livelihoods, and youth participation.

Importantly, the project demonstrated that adolescent-responsive cities matter because the wellbeing of young people is directly connected to the future resilience, productivity, inclusion, and sustainability of urban systems. Cities that fail to invest in adolescents risk deepening inequalities, exclusion, unemployment, insecurity, and social vulnerabilities. Conversely, cities that intentionally create opportunities for adolescents to participate, learn, lead, and thrive are better positioned to build stronger, safer, and more inclusive communities.

The RCA Project therefore serves as a practical example of how secondary cities can strengthen adolescent wellbeing through collaborative, evidence-driven, and youth-centered approaches. The lessons from Sunyani provide important insights for policymakers, local governments, development partners, and organizations seeking to strengthen adolescent participation and inclusive urban development.

Moving forward, there is a strong need to scale up and institutionalize successful models emerging from the project. Adolescent participation platforms, integrated service delivery approaches, digital innovation programmes, and ecosystem dialogue structures should be embedded within existing government systems and policy frameworks to ensure sustainability and wider replication. Stronger investment in adolescent leadership, mentorship, livelihoods, and governance participation will remain critical for building resilient and adolescent-responsive cities across Ghana and beyond.

Ultimately, the RCA Project has shown that when adolescents are given voice, opportunity, trust, and support, they do not only transform their own lives they contribute to transforming their cities as well.



RESILIENT CITY FOR ADOLESCENTS (RCA) PROJECT
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for Adolescents (HCA-II) Initiative
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