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HER FUTURE HER CHOICE

STRENGTHENING SEXUAL AND
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

STANDING UP FOR YOUTH RIGHTS

On September 30th, 2021, a trained peer educator came to Sister Ngosa Motomola with an urgent matter. Ms. Motomola is the District Adolescent health focal point supporting the HFHC project in Namwala district, Zambia.

The peer educator told her that a grade 12 pupil had just been expelled from her Secondary School. The reason: she had accessed a safe and legal abortion at a local clinic.

Zambia's abortion laws, including the Termination of Pregnancy Act and the Gender Equity and Equality Act provide a legal basis for women and girls to seek safe and legal abortions. However, this is not always respected by school authorities.

The grade 12 pupil who had been expelled had been escorted to the clinic by one of her classmates, who later told the school matron about what had happened. The school matron confronted the girl about whether she had accessed abortion services. The girl said she had.

Without even an explanation given, the head teacher called the girl's parents to inform them she would be expelled.

When Ms. Motomola found out about this, she immediately contacted the school authorities and demanded an explanation. The authorities said they were worried she would be a bad

influence on her schoolmates because of her "bad behaviour," Ms. Motomola repeated that all she had done was access a completely legal and safe abortion.

She quickly passed the information on to Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), which engaged the district education board. No pupil should be expelled for seeking out legal and safe sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services.

The school authorities finally relented and readmitted her into the school, where she will sit for her final exams in November.

ZAMBIA





ZAMBIA

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WOMEN IN LAW AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA (WILDAF)

Established in 1998, WILDAF is a women's rights network that played a pivotal role in advocating for the Maputo Protocol and the Gender Equity and Equality Act in Zambia.

WILDAF has implemented numerous projects on promoting SRHR, particularly with adolescents and young women. Its mission is to promote the development of a policy and legal environment that protects women's rights in Zambia, through research, advocacy, strategic partnerships and information sharing.

MALAWI

BALAKA PUBLIC HEALTH FACILITIES EMBRACE YOUTH FRIENDLY SERVICES

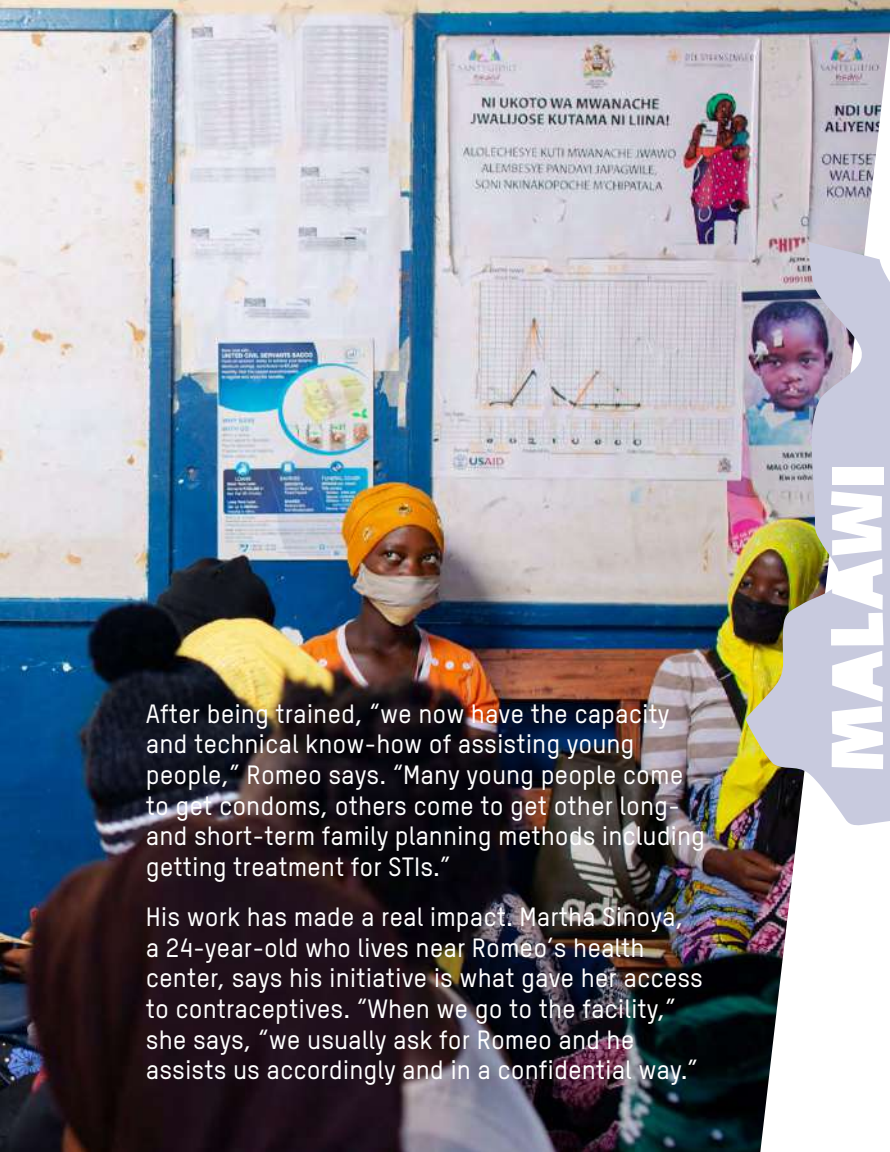
Romeo Quinn Burton, the youth-friendly health services focal point for Kalembo Health Centre in Balaka district, Malawi, has become the go-to person in his community for information on contraceptives and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). He says it is all because of a training session he participated in, which was supported by the HFHC project and implemented by Family Planning Association of Malawi (FPAM).

In the past, he and his colleagues would be at a loss when adolescents and youth came looking for these services. “Before the training, we did not know how to assist them,” he says. “Sometimes they were not receiving much attention.”

The training session sought to give participants confidence in discussing SRH services and dispelling myths about contraceptives. It specifically aimed to make sure health workers like Romeo had the necessary skills to help adolescent girls and young women, who were often told that contraceptives were only for older people.

“After we were trained, we now have the capacity and technical know-how of assisting young people,” Romeo says. “Many young people come to get condoms, others come to get other long- and short-term family planning methods including getting treatment for STIs.”





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His work has made a real impact. Martha Sinoya, a 24-year-old who lives near Romeo’s health center, says his initiative is what gave her access to contraceptives. “When we go to the facility,” she says, “we usually ask for Romeo and he assists us accordingly and in a confidential way.”

MALAWI

WELCOME TO KALEMBO HEALTH CENTRE



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FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION OF MALAWI (FPAM)

The local chapter of Planned Parenthood established in 1999, FPAM is a local NGO that provides comprehensive, youth-friendly SRH services to young people 10 to 24 years old. It provides SRH services in specially-designed clinics branded as Youth Life Centres. FPAM’s focuses on hard-to-reach and underserved communities to increase service access. In addition to extensive clinical services, its work includes organizing targeted health talks/discussions and providing life skills through peer education.

CHIMWEMWE BREAKS TABOOS AROUND SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS (SRHR)

Chimwemwe, a 24-year-old member of the Ubale Youth club in the Traditional Area Malili in Malawi, has taken her sexual and reproductive rights into her own hands after participating in a peer-to-peer training session held by the HFHC project in Lilongwe.

“ I am now free and happy,” she says. “I am no longer scared of an unplanned pregnancy because I use contraceptives.”

She even got her boyfriend involved. He was initially reluctant to access SRHservices at the local clinic, because in their community it is unusual for women to take a stand for their own sexuality. Chimwemwe says that “at first, he was surprised with my stand because in my community it is taboo for a lady to initiate sexual discussion in a relationship.” Myths and misconceptions about contraceptives and SRHR for women. Some believe that use of contraceptives can cause future infertility and birth defects and that those who take them are promiscuous. With adolescent girls

having their first sexual experience at the median age of 15, this leaves them in a precarious position, sometimes forced into early motherhood or unsafe abortions.

To counter this situation for young women like Chimwemwe, the Network for Youth Development (NfYD) of HFHC project organized peer to peer training sessions about SRHR and gender-based violence. It was one of these sessions that inspired Chimwemwe to take a stand for her sexual and reproductive health.

It has also been a turning point in her relationship with her boyfriend. She says she is now “able to talk about how to manage our relationship as opposed to previously when I was so shy and thought he would harshly judge me for raising such issues, and I will continue to influence other youths to follow suit.”

MALAWI



MALAWI

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NETWORK FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (NFYD)

Established in 2008, NfyD has implemented projects in gender, women rights, and SRHR for over a decade. NfyD believes that strong, vibrant youth should actively take part in decision-making processes at all levels on issues that affect their lives. Areas of focus include education, SRHR, GBV, youth participation, child protection, and women's empowerment. Key strategies include awareness raising, advocacy, and mobilizing youth in schools through clubs that NfyD champions.

ETHIOPIA



A GRADE 10 STUDENT MOBILIZES HER WHOLE COMMUNITY AGAINST FORCED MARRIAGE

At 16, Kulil Abebaw has already had a major impact on her community in Sekota Zuria district, Ethiopia. It all began in December 2020, when her family informed her she would be married to a 31-year-old local man she had never met. A grade 10 student with excellent results, she had no interest in marrying, but did not see any way out.

Kulil is also an HFHC project peer educator in her village and as such she participated in a training organized by the project. The session, held by Pathfinder International, provided her with information about her sexual

and reproductive health and rights and the confidence and communication skills to assert them. She immediately went to her family and convinced them to call off the wedding.

Kulil did not stop there. She knew of other adolescent girls who had found themselves in similar situations, so she took up the issue with the SRH club lead teacher at her school and the youth-friendly services provider at the nearby Sirel Health Center. She told them about other girls in her grade who were being forced into early marriages.

Kulil's determination and initiative led to a massive mobilization in her community that would involve health service providers, teachers, police officers and other peer educators and that would lead to the cancellation of all of the forced weddings.

“**The project taught me how to explain myself to others and protect my SRH rights without embarrassment,” she says.**

Now, she and her friends are happy to be continuing their studies. In addition, they are continuing to mobilize others to become agents of change against forced marriage.





ETHIOPIA

HER FUTURE HER CHOICE PARTNER

PATHFINDER INTERNATIONAL

Since 1957, Pathfinder has worked to increase access to SRHR and promote healthy pregnancies. In Ethiopia, it is experienced in strengthening health centers and community health workers, family planning, adolescent and youth SRH, and GBV response. Pathfinder has a long experience in managing and/or being engaged in large, complex, multi-partner projects in Ethiopia, and globally.

A HUSBAND BECOMES A SOURCE OF EMPOWERMENT FOR HIS WIFE'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

When Wessie Debash married his wife Ada Girma, she was 17 years old. Following the norms of the people around him in Sekota town, Ethiopia, he pressured his wife to have a child at the age of 19, even though he had not prepared for the financial burdens of raising a child.

His opinions began to change when he saw how much pain she experienced during labour and when he and Ada struggled to feed their child on his income as a day labourer. But he felt the pressure from the culture around him for his wife to have more

children, and began pushing Ada to have another child.

When he heard about a Self-help Group organized by Women's Empowerment Action (WE-Action) team in HFHC project, he encouraged Ada to join because she had no income at the time. The group turned out to be pivotal in their relationship. Ada learned about family planning methods and received a loan to open a vegetable business. She also encouraged Wessie to attend the group's family dialogue sessions, which he attended.



He learned about the importance of family planning and women's economic empowerment. Now, he is proud of his wife's work and supports her decision to use family planning methods. He has even begun to tell his friends about maternal health and STIs.

He is no longer pushing Ada to have more children.

“Now,” he says, “we are focused on growing my wife's business and providing better living conditions for our child.”

ETHIOPIA



ETHIOPIA

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WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ACTION (WE-ACTION)

A women's organization, established in 1995, WSA's mission is centred on women's social and economic empowerment, and it has a strong background in SRHR and GBV. They focus on improving women's economic independence, agency, and social capacity to challenge their positions.

MOZAMBIQUE

A TRAINING SESSION—AND A PHONE CALL— BUILD COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR SAFE ABORTION IN A RURAL COMMUNITY IN MOZAMBIQUE

Ventura Namucondia Sabini is the Chief of the Co-Management Committee (CMC)—a community level health committee established by Pathfinder International (under Output 1222)—in Nagor, Mozambique. One day, he received a phone call that surprised him. Lina Francisco Manuel, a nurse at the maternity ward at Nagor Health Center, reached out to tell him that her health center was offering free, safe abortions.

“I didn’t really believe it,” he says. “Because in the community everyone said that it was a crime and if you went to a health facility you would have to pay or give something.”

Indeed, most people in rural communities had not heard about Mozambique’s recent abortion law that guaranteed free access to abortion services, including

in rural communities. Lina had only learned about this during a training session with Pathfinder International. “I had heard of safe abortion but didn’t know how to perform it,” she says.

It was after the session that she reached out to Ventura. Ventura, though skeptical, decided to attend a training session himself. “I participated in the two sessions,” he says, “and I learnt that it is free and it is not a crime.” It turned out, he realized, that Lina was right. “I am informing my community now.”

Without the involvement of key community members like Lina and Ventura, safe abortion services would probably not be available at the Nagor Health Center, and adolescent girls and young women would be faced with the prohibitive prospect of traveling a great distance to the district capital for the service. The knowledge that Lina and Ventura now have will enable them to spread the word to others in nearby communities.



MOZAMBIQUE



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ARMED WITH A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS, A COMMUNITY ACTIVIST NOW FEELS MORE ABLE TO HELP HER COMMUNITY

Laura Fazenda, 48, had worked as a community activist for some time, but she always had difficulty confronting questions about women's sexual and reproductive health rights. She knew that human rights existed, but didn't have enough knowledge to make difference for the women in her community.

Laura works in Mocuba, Mozambique, a place known for a high level of premature unions, early pregnancy, and unsafe abortions. Activists like Laura, therefore, are pivotal to improving women's rights in the area.

But, Laura says, even the organizations that already work in the field of women's sexual and reproductive health have little knowledge about existing legislation at both the national and international level. And this lack of knowledge has held them back in their ability to help their communities.

Laura was able to participate in two training sessions conducted by Women and Law in

Southern Africa Mozambique (WLSA). During the sessions, she learned that the activist organizations in her community were not alone in fighting for women's rights, but were bolstered by important international legislative frameworks. She was particularly interested to learn about the SADC (Southern African Development Community) Protocol on Gender and Development, which is a key step toward enshrining the rights of women in national constitutions.

Armed with this new knowledge—and with material resources related to the international protocols she learned about—she says she now has the confidence and expertise she had lacked before. The training session also aimed to develop participants' capacity to organize their own information sessions about international human rights, which Laura says has already made activist associations better recognized in their communities. Now that their outreach work is anchored in international legislation, these organizations are better able to help the people in their communities.

MOZAMBIQUE



“ I would like to thank the WLSA and HFHC project,” Laura said, “for the initiative to expand knowledge in people and at the district level, because this knowledge has come at a time that all people need it due to the level of violence that women and girls suffer.”

MOZAMBIQUE

HER FUTURE HER CHOICE PARTNER

WOMEN AND LAW IN SOUTHERN AFRICA MOZAMBIQUE (WLSA)

Established in 1989, WLSA is a regional organization that conducts women’s rights research in Southern Africa. A strong contributor to knowledge about women’s rights in Mozambique, it has experience conducting research and has played an active role in contributing legislative change to advance women’s rights, including the Family Law and Domestic Violence Against Women Law. It is the founder of the SRHR Network.

