



## **A Knowledge and Learning Platform**

## **A Case study and Best Practices Publication for Community Based Organizations**

## **Tracking Impact in Community HIV and Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights**

**Dingaan Mithi**

## CASE STUDY

**Organization:** Liwaladzi HIV Support Organization, Nkhota-kota District

**Written By:** DINGAAN MITHI

**Partner Country:** Malawi

**Project Title/Key Result Area:** Women's Health

**Development Partner:** Southern Africa AIDS Trust

### Village saving loans can improve women's health status

Naomi Kanyenda is a 43 year old mother of four who comes from Liwaladzi in the lakeshore district of Nkhota-kota in Senior Group Village Headman Maluma in the area of Traditional Authority Kanyenda. She works as a volunteer for Liwaladzi HIV Support Organization (LIHASO) one of the community based organizations which is funded by Southern Africa AIDS Trust (SAT).

LIHASO with support from SAT started implementing a women's health project in the area to scale up community HIV and sexual reproductive and rights responses. Taking into account that Nkhota-kota along Lake Malawi, the high level of commercial activity of farming and fishing in the surrounding fishing communities creates a lot of sexual reproductive health challenges such as sex for fish practices and multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships. Women in the area are now being targeted by LIHASO through village saving loans (VSL) in which there are now a total of 16 VSL groups, the largest of them is Kavuuula, which is the biggest VSL group with 32 women as members. LIHASO through its volunteers such as Naomi Kanyenda visit the women in their VSL groups to raise awareness on family planning to ensure that women learn on child spacing to reduce their family sizes.

*"A lot of women come to my group to learn about family planning, positive living with HIV and other sexual reproductive health issues, while they also benefit from loans", Says Kanyenda*

The idea of empowering women economically through village saving loans according to Kanyenda is that women are no longer relying on their husbands for house hold financial needs, while they can also make independent sexual reproductive health choices. In addition with fewer children, women are healthy and productive and continue to improve house hold income.

### Transformation of women's health through village saving loans

In 2002, Kanyenda who is one the leading advocates for village saving loans lost her husband due to HIV related complications, only to be found HIV positive in 2010. Due to her involvement in VSL groups she is leading a healthier life and supports her family economically.

*"My life has changed, I am now self-reliant with a lot of income in my house. In the past I struggled to access capital for my small scale businesses as Microloan Foundation loans were not sustainable, but with the coming of village saving loans, all the financial difficulties are gone", She narrates.*

Most of the women of child bearing age in Liwaladzi and the surrounding communities covering 5 traditional authorities now access family planning services due to awareness as women in VSL groups discuss women's health issues.

*"When a woman is financially secure she is able to make family planning choices and accesses various sexual reproductive health services, thereby improving her health status", reveals Kanyenda.*

## **Responding to HIV through women economic empowerment**

In the project, LIHASO is also enhancing HIV treatment, prevention and support by working with women in HIV support groups. The approach is that women who are living with HIV are also able to access loans through VSL groups to improve their nutritional status. Gloria Nkhwazi is a 44 year old mother with one child and belongs to Tilimbike HIV Support Group which works with LIHASO and has 60 members.

She is engaged in farming and grows Soy beans and Ground nuts to enhance her nutritional status and has constructed her own house complemented with iron sheets through the village saving loans. For instance the largest VSL group in Liwaladzi of Kavuuula has an annual profit of K 1 million, while newly formed groups have realized K500,000 just within 12 months and offers women with many economic opportunities as micro finance institutions (MFIs) are not benefiting women due to high interest rates and complicated borrowing conditions.

*"I lost my husband in 2001 and got tested HIV positive in October, 2004, being HIV positive inspired me to be strong and I joined the village saving loan group, I am now economically empowered", Says Nkhwazi.*

Gloria in her HIV support group encourages women living with HIV for positive living and to participate in the VSL groups to boost house hold income as most of the women are widows and use proceeds from loans to improve their economic livelihoods.

In Liwaladzi other organizations such as Total Land Care, Concern World Wide and Land O Lakes are supporting LIHASO to scale up village saving loan schemes to benefit more women, while also strengthening farming to ensure that vulnerable women lead healthier and economically empowered lives. **ENDS**

**PHOTOS:** Gloria Nkhwazi in front of her house

**PHOTOS:** Group of representative beneficiaries of VSL

**PHOTOS:** LIHASO sign post

## **BEST PRACTICE**

**Organization:** Liwaladzi HIV Support Organization

**Documented by:** Journalists Association Against AIDS

**District:** Nkhota-kota

**Development Partner:** Southern Africa AIDS Trust

### **Peer education; addressing sexual reproductive health in fishing communities**

#### **Introduction**

Nkhota-kota is a district located along Lake Malawi and has a huge fishing community, in such an environment the population is dependent on fishing as one of the major economic livelihoods, apart from farming. However responding to increasing HIV prevalence due to sex for practices and multiple and concurrent sexual practices requires innovative approaches. Liwaladzi HIV Support Organization (LIHASO) is using peer education as best practice to target youths, women and fishing communities to access HIV and family planning services to scale up community sexual reproductive health. LIHASO was established in 2003 and is registered as an NGO, the organization has 10 staff members and over 300 volunteers and has a catchment area that reaches five Traditional Authorities. The organization has annual budget of K35 Million (USD 86,000).

#### **Demonstrating impact, Innovation and Potential for scaling up**

LIHASO is implementing a project which has a huge potential to be scaled up in other fishing communities by integrating a population, health and environment approach. It is important to observe that Nkhota-kota is also affected by factors of migration as many surrounding districts and foreigners from Mozambique also engage in the fishing business in the community. However taking into serious consideration that there is a mix of migration and reproductive health issues, peer education is very innovative as it targets groups of people in their ages by being specific. For instance using peer educators taken out of over 600 volunteers belonging to LIHASO it reaches out to youth, women, fish trades, traditional leaders and communities on the beaches on Lake Malawi.

LIHASO could scale up the best practice to other underserved communities to influence behavioural change towards HIV prevention which is also a key feature and promoting voluntary testing and counseling. Currently LIHASO targets over 2000 sexually active youths with VCT and peer education in a year in an area with 35,000 people which spans over 5 Traditional Authorities. It is possible to scale up the best practice as peer approach creates better knowledge and understanding as a step of influencing behavioural change, for instance tackling gender based violence and multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships across the fishing communities.

In addition through collaboration with World Medical Fund (WMF) LIHASO is strengthening peer education in which it is able to raise awareness and scale up VCT service to the vulnerable communities. The organization is using peer education as one way of strengthening access to family planning services. Family planning is key towards HIV prevention, based on the 2010 Malawi Demographic Health Survey, Nkhota-kota recorded 19% in men who reported to have more than one sexual partner in the last 12 months. Hence scaling up family planning services and promoting condom use in the community is a promising best practice that has a huge potential for replication.

## Key Challenges with the best practice

- LIHASO operates in a huge catchment area that has a complex sexual reproductive health rights issues, as such the organization is struggling with funding to meet the huge SRH challenges especially in the fishing communities where uptake of family planning services is low, while migration and gender based violence are also very complex to solve with a limited financial base.
- Although peer education is highly innovative to promote community sexual reproductive health and rights, the collaboration of LIHASO with Nkhota-kota district council is not strong as the district council has shown no interest to engage community based organizations such as LIHASO during formulation of District Implementation Plans and the budgetary processes. In turn communities are having many challenges to access sexual reproductive health services as the nearest health centre of St Annies (Liwaladzi Health Centre) a private Christian Health Association of Malawi (CHAM) facility charges a user fee of K2, 000 to women seeking antenatal services. Many women cannot afford this amount except those involved in village saving loans whose economic status is much stronger.

## Key Lessons learnt

- It is important for LIHASO to positively engage with the Nkhota-kota district council to be involved in the formulation of District Implementation Plans and budgeting processes so that Liwaladzi can have better health infrastructure and an uninterrupted supply of essential drugs and family planning commodities.
- LIHASO is an organization with a huge potential to enhance community sexual reproductive health and rights, despite having funding challenges, it has demonstrated that innovation can be important in a situation of scarce financial resources.

## Conclusion & Recommendations

LIHASO is one of the organizations working in a difficult environment where there a lot of population dynamics such as age structure, migration and rapid population growth, while environmental degradation in the fishing resources also presents a n environmental challenge. In addition various socio-cultural practices such as sex for fish practices creates a breeding ground for HIV due to multiple and concurrent sexual practices. The organization needs to strengthen monitoring and evaluation and generate quality data that will inform evidence which could hugely improving community response to various sexual and reproductive health and rights aspects.

- ✓ Taking into consideration that LIHASO is struggling with funding in a large catchment area, the organization should consider strengthening its resource mobilization by training staff to leverage more resources to respond to community sexual reproductive health and rights. In addition Southern Africa AIDS Trust should consider providing more resources to the partner.
- ✓ There is a need for the Nkhota-kota district council, the Member of Parliament, NGOs and LIHASO to positively engage in budgeting processes and the formulation of the district's implementation plan. In this case there is a need for a government health facility to be established in Liwaladzi which has no user fees as the current fees at St Annies Health Centre excludes many women and youth from accessing sexual reproductive health services.

**PHOTOS:** Use the photo for Peer Educators working in the community

## CASE STUDY

**Organization:** Tidzuke Women Organization, Mchinji district

**Written By:** Dingaan Mithi

**Partner Country:** Malawi

**Project Title/Key Result Area:** Women's Health

**Development Partner:** Southern Africa AIDS Trust

### Investing in family planning promotes delivery of maternal health services and HIV prevention

Makilina Sikelo is a 58 year old mother of 4 and is divorced, she hails from Group Village Headman Kacheta in the area of Traditional Authority Zulu in Mchinji district. She remembers that when Southern Africa AIDS Trust (SAT) first provided a grant to Tidzuke Women Group, there was no office, however with a lot of capacity building to the organization, now the organization have shown community competency by building an office with support from Nick Webber a British national. This is a typical example how Tidzuke is scaling up family planning through a women's health project funded by Southern Africa AIDS Trust.

Mchinji is one of the districts faced with rapid population growth and it is further compounded by population dynamics such as migration due to its proximity with Zambia on its border. Tidzuke is targeting women to access HIV and family planning services and works in Traditional Authority Zulu, the organization covers a population of 38,837 across group village headmen Mtanga, Kacheta, Kachanje, Chithumba, Namiya and Nchambo. Sikelo being a divorced woman decided to join Tidzuke Women Organization after noticing that a lot of pregnant women in the area were not delivering at the hands of skilled birth attendants. After joining the organization she accessed family planning services and decided to stop having children.

*“ In the past we lost many women due to bleeding, as there was a habit of seeking services from traditional birth attendants, but now I can confidently tell you that maternal deaths have been greatly reduced, as women now go to Kochilira Health Centre to access antenatal services”,* Narrates Sikelo.

Backed by support from Southern Africa AIDS Trust, she now educates fellow women on family planning and HIV prevention, gender based violence and sexually transmitted infections. In addition she also got trained in early childhood development as caregiver and targets orphans and other vulnerable children.

### Engagement of traditional leaders in advancing maternal health and family planning

Traditional leaders in Mchinji district such as senior group village headman Kamwendo has taken a leading role to strengthen family planning and ensure that women only access maternal health services from skilled and qualified midwives and nurses. Since coming to chieftaincy in 2005 Kamwendo has vigorously worked with Tidzuke Women Organization to promote women's health by scaling up family planning. In 2013 only 4 maternal deaths were reported in the area as a result of women who accessed services from traditional birth attendants.

*“As a traditional leader with fellow leaders, we have established by-laws that establish strict measures to ensure that no woman in labour goes to seek attention of a traditional birth attendant. We are also raising awareness on preventing early marriages as one way of promoting better maternal health”,* Says Kamwendo.

The traditional leader notes that through Tidzuke Women Organization, many women are taking various family planning methods at Kochilira Health Centre, while also encouraging men to be involved in family planning services. There is also strong collaboration with Village Development Committees (VDCs) in the area, its VDC has 21 members. However admits that there are a lot of challenges such as shortage of drugs and stock outs of family planning commodities at Kochilira Health Centre which serves 120,000 people. The health centre which covers Traditional Authorities Zulu, Mduwa and Sub TA Simphasi also struggles due to shortage of health workers to properly promote family planning and access to HIV and antenatal services.

### **Family planning increases women's economic productivity**

Tidzuke Women Organization with support from Southern Africa AIDS Trust realized the importance of scaling up women economic empowerment by enabling women to have smaller family sizes which makes women to be economically productive as they are healthy.

*“ I have benefited a lot from Tidzuke Women Organization, I now have a lot of knowledge on family planning and also fighting gender based violence which is common in the community”,* Observes 54 year old Ernestina Nkhoma.

Male participation in family planning is another key success from the organization which has contributed to smaller family sizes due to the work of volunteers in educating couples on the benefits of family planning. In addition cases of gender based violence are reportedly declining in the community as men are being sensitized to respect the reproductive health choices of their wives. Tidzuke Women Organization is taking family planning as a human rights issue.

**Photos: Volunteers from Tidzuke and the Executive Director, Mrs Theresa Moyo**

## **BEST PRACTICE**

**Organization:** Tidzuke Women Organization

**Documented by:** Journalists Association Against AIDS

**District:** Mchinji

**Development Partner:** Southern Africa AIDS Trust

### **Enhancing gender equality; scaling up maternal and child health in vulnerable communities**

#### **Introduction**

Mchinji is one of the districts located in the central region of Malawi and has a rapid population growth that is also compounded with various population dynamics such as migration. Taking into consideration that women led organizations play a key role in promoting gender equality, maternal health outcomes can be realized if women and men are engaged in scaling up family planning and sexual reproductive health and rights. A local women led organization called Tidzuke Women Organization funded by Southern Africa AIDS Trust (SAT) under the women's health program is utilizing women volunteers across its catchment area to educate women and men on family planning and sexual reproductive health.

The organization was established in 1997 and operates in the area of Traditional Authority Zulu and covers a population of 38,837, it has 30 volunteers mostly women, accounting to 98% who are also involved in promoting better child health and targets 300 Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children,(OVCs) while 37 preschool children aged between 2-8 years are attended by care givers in early child hood development. In total 5,600 OVCs are reached in a year in the community.

#### **Demonstrating impact, Innovation and Potential for scaling up**

Taking into serious consideration that maternal and child health are closely related development issues, the approach taken by Tidzuke Women Organization promote maternal health services while also strengthening early childhood are scalable approaches. In a bid to promote gender equality in scaling up maternal health outcomes, the organization is using volunteers and traditional leaders in the area to raise awareness and enforcing by-laws that discourage pregnant women from accessing services from traditional birth attendants.

The organization has recorded only 4 maternal deaths in 2013 as a result of women seeking attention of traditional birth attendants. By encouraging men to accompany their wives to antenatal services, it has benefits of reducing gender based violence as now women have reported to have freedom in accessing various family planning methods without violence in the families as compared to the past.

However the community health centre of Kochilira serves a huge population of 120,000 which makes it hard for quality of maternal and sexual reproductive services, while stock outs of family planning method such as condoms are widely reported in the area by beneficiaries and organizational staff members. The fact that the health center is also constrained with health care worker shortages, women have to struggle to access services as demand is increasing and is outstripping the capacity of the health centre as women become more aware on the need to access health care at a health facility.



### **Key Challenges with the best practice**

- The use of women volunteers in the target area is one important aspects of women to reach fellow women through peer approach in promoting maternal health and to educate women on the benefits of adopting family planning to make informed decision on their reproductive health choices. However the organization has a challenge as its funding base is very narrow, while it covers a huge area, in this context financial sustainability is problem that cannot sustain the best practice in the long term.
- The failure by Mchinji district council to invest in family planning in a district which has high fertility rates of 5.7% makes it a challenge for better delivery of women's health services

### **Key Lessons learnt**

- It is possible for a women led organization which has few financial resources to implement innovative projects that can scale up sexual reproductive health and rights. In addition by integrating a rights based approach to family planning and to confront gender based violence can transform lives of women in the communities to lead healthier lives.
- Women volunteers guided with incentives and empowered with knowledge can enhance women's health status in a district faced by rapid population growth, while also scaling up family planning with a rights based approach.
- Closer collaboration with traditional leaders in scaling up family planning is essential towards strengthening maternal and child health outcomes. The local leaders are influential and can play a huge role to improve male participation in family planning and antenatal services which is very key towards strengthening community sexual reproductive health responses by enforcing community by-laws.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

It is important to observe that there are very few women led organizations working in the district of Mchinji, the work of Tidzuke Women Organization is very unique as it uses a rights based approach towards scaling up sexual reproductive health services. In addition since women in the district have a high fertility rate, investing in family planning with high level male participation and influence from traditional leaders has the potential to reap huge reproductive health benefits. It is important women led organizations be supported with adequate resources as they have a key role to play in enhancing women's health at community level.

- ✓ There is a need for Tidzuke Women Organization to improve its collaboration with district stakeholders such as Village Development Committees, Local Development Fund (LDF), District Council and local organization to scale up family planning as key driver of women empowerment. Hence the organization must consider strengthening networking and partnerships.
- ✓ The organization should consider increasing its resource envelope by strengthening resource mobilization to meet the growing development needs in the communities. Hence it could recruit a specialist in resource mobilization including exploring using volunteers such as American Peace Corps or World University Service of Canada (WUSC), the part time volunteers could expose the organization to other funding opportunities locally and internationally. Donors such as Global Fund for Women, MAMA Cash, African Women Development Fund, UN Women and others could be useful grant makers.
- ✓ It is of huge importance that the organization lobbies the District Council on the accountability in the use of Local Development Fund and it can promote gender responsive budgeting in the formulation of budgets and the District Implementation Plan. By holding duty bearers, the much needed funding could be beneficial towards enhancing women's health needs.

## CASE STUDY

**Organization:** New Life Behaviour Ministries, Mchinji district

**Written By:** Owen Nyaka, Editing by Dingaan Mithi

**Partner Country:** Malawi

**Project Title/Key Result Area:** Youth Prevention and Sexual Reproductive Health

**Development Partner:** Southern Africa AIDS Trust

### Raising awareness improves access to youth sexual reproductive health and family planning services

Mchinji is a border district that has a huge youthful population, in order to respond to the challenges of increasing HIV infection and lack of access to youth friendly sexual reproductive health services, a community based organization has taken the lead to solve the obstacles. New Life Behaviour Ministries is a local CBO located in the area of Traditional Authority Mkanda just some 10 kilometres near the Zambian border.

Agnes Pinda is a 41 year old woman of three children who hails from Sumana village realized the need to have a smaller family and decided to have three children and stop child bearing. The idea of having a smaller family size was that life was becoming hard and that having more than 5 children was not sustainable. She then adopted family planning and spaced the births of her three children. The first born son is 16 years old, the second born is 14, while the last born is 9 years old.

*“ Due to the support of Southern Africa AIDS Trust, I have learnt a lot of family planning and child spacing, and am now advocating for family planning among young women in this area”, She says*

New Life Behaviour Ministries under its youth prevention program is raising awareness and educating youth for safe sex and ensuring they have information on various sexual reproductive health services. By December, 2013 the community based organization had reached 1,783 youths with information on access to SRH services, out of this figure 243 are male youths and 1,583 female youths.

### Decline in unwanted pregnancies and high women participation

The community based organization has recorded high level participation of youthful women in scaling up youth sexual reproductive health, this is also evidenced by a decline unplanned pregnancies. In addition the organization is working with traditional leaders in the area to promote awareness on Voluntary Testing and Counselling and family planning.

The organization is also promoting condom use amongst youths. In addition traditional leaders are advocating for the modification of negative cultural practices which expose young women to HIV infection. After some time Pinda was recruited from the community by New Life Behaviour Ministries as a project officer. She also gives testimony that with support from Southern Africa AIDS Trust, the youths in the community of Mkanda are now able to access sexual reproductive health services from Kayigwazanga and Mkanda Health Centres.

*“Many girls are now in school, the drop outs have been reduced, in this way early marriages will be reduced including unwanted pregnancies”, She adds.*

New Life Behaviour Ministries works with 30 Community Based Organization around the area, with capacity building support from Southern AIDS Trust, the organization is also advocating for Voluntary Male Medical Circumcision (VMMC) as one way of enhancing HIV prevention in the youths. Additionally the organization appeals to Southern Africa AIDS Trust and other development partners to scale up funding to the organization which is remote located and ease its transportation challenges. By improving mobility through use of bicycles, its volunteers will be able to conduct effective community outreach to scale up awareness on sexual reproductive health services amongst the vulnerable youths.

## **BEST PRACTICE**

**Organization:** New Life Behaviour Ministries

**Documented by:** Journalists Association Against AIDS

**District:** Mchinji

**Development Partner:** Southern Africa AIDS Trust

### **Access to legal services and human rights key towards youth HIV prevention**

#### **Introduction**

New Life Behaviour Ministries is a community based organization working in the area of Traditional Authority Mkanda in Mchinji district. It covers an area with an estimated population of 35,000. The organization was established in 2007 and was registered in 2009 and works in area composed of 15 officially gazetted village development committees (VDCs). It has 4 members of staff and collaborates with its 25 volunteers. The organization is a partner of Southern Africa AIDS Trust (SAT) and operates within the strategic focal area of youth prevention.

#### **Demonstrating impact, Innovation and Potential for scaling up**

The work of New Life Behaviour Ministries involves a network of volunteers who work by raising awareness on youth reproductive health by targeting youths with access to information. In order to scale up sexual reproductive health and rights, the organization is using a rights based approach to ensure that vulnerable groups such as youth are able to know their sexual reproductive health rights in the context of HIV prevention. One of the board members of the organization, Midias Thomas is a magistrate and encourages local communities to report cases of sexual abuse to the magistrate court to ensure speedy delivery of justice.

Taking into consideration that there are negative cultural practices and other HIV determinants such as intergenerational sex, the levels of sexual abuse are very high and is further worsened when parents and guardians of a sexually abused girl or young have tended to hide cases and failure to tender evidence on time, leading to cases to be quashed by the magistrate court at Mkanda.

The organization is promoting access to information on legal and human rights aspects of sexual reproductive health amongst youths in the community through awareness sessions. In a year some 3,500 youths are targeted, by December 2013, some 1,783 youths were targeted with information. The current scenario is that youths are now able to access health services at the two main health centres of Mkanda and Kayigwazanga. The important part of the best practice is that educating local communities on the legal and human rights aspects of sexual reproductive health is vital to inform stakeholder participation and to ensure that local communities have knowledge on a rights based approach to sexual reproductive health.

This is a unique best practice in such a way that many CBOs in communities have not integrated legal and human rights into sexual reproductive health, despite having courts, victim support units and court users associations. Hence by scaling up access to family planning services, promoting VCT and working traditional leaders to address negative cultural practices that infringe on the sexual reproductive health rights is important in strengthen sexual reproductive health and rights. The best practice is innovative due to integration of legal and human rights aspects and is highly promising for scaling up to many communities across the country but requires a lot of funding and capacity building.

### **Key Challenges with the best practice**

- Stock outs of family planning commodities such as condoms and other forms of contraceptives still excludes many youths who are sexually active from accessing services. Thus the supply is very low while the demand side is high. Although New Life is doing a commendable job to provide access to information amongst youths for sexual reproductive health services, shortages of family planning commodities have a potential to derail the gains already recorded.
- The unwillingness amongst communities to quickly tender evidence to courts upon cases of rape and defilement makes delivery of justice to be derailed. The culture of silence of letting perpetrators of sexual abuse to go unpunished increases impunity as law enforcement is very weak as the communities are failing to play their role as watchdogs of sexual reproductive health rights. For instance in 2013 a girl was defiled by a pastor; however the girl's parents delayed to report to the police making the magistrate court to fail to deliver justice. Hence in order to sustain the best practice more awareness on legal and human rights issues could make a much needed contribution.
- Transportation is a huge challenge for volunteers of the organization to implement activities such as education and awareness raising, the organization has to grapple with challenges of late reporting as reports cannot be delivered on time. In addition lack of power is another obstacle that makes New Life Behaviour Ministries to struggle in implementation of project activities especially processing of reports from the field in its catchment area.

### **Key Lessons learnt**

- The integration of legal rights into sexual reproductive health amongst the youth has a potential to enhance HIV prevention if youths, community stakeholders such as village and area development committees and traditional leaders work in close collaboration with courts so that there is quick delivery of justice.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

It is important to observe that New Life Behaviour Ministries is working in remote located area which has no access to electricity, while its financial base cannot meet the huge needs of the youth in terms of sexual reproductive health rights. The organization has a potential to transform lives of youths to access sexual reproductive health services with a rights based approach only if it is given adequate financial resources and have technical capacity in place.

- ✓ There is a need for closer collaboration between New Life Behaviour Ministries and the Mchinji District Council and its stakeholders to address the challenges especially the stock outs of family planning commodities such as condoms which are very key in reducing HIV infection. Hence the SAT partner should intensify its efforts to lobby the district council to provide family planning commodities so as to meet the huge demand.
- ✓ Taking into account that Mchinji is a border district, migration is one of the population dynamics affecting sexual reproductive health of youths, there is a need for the organization to collaborate with the District Youth Office and development partners to improve service delivery of sexual reproductive health and rights.

## CASE STUDY

**Organization:** Ladder for Rural Development, Ntchisi District

**Written By:** Dingaani Mithi

**Partner Country:** Malawi

**Project Title/Key Result Area:** Youth Prevention and Sexual Reproductive Health

**Development Partner:** Southern Africa AIDS Trust

### Sustaining girl child education enhances youth sexual reproductive health

Ntchisi is one of the districts in the central region which has poor socio-economic indicators such as high drop outs of girls from school due to early and unplanned pregnancies and early marriages. Southern Africa AIDS Trust is supporting Ladder for Rural Development (LAFORD), a local community based organization which is working in various communities in the district. At Gwangwa primary school which can be reached in 1 hour drive from the Ntchisi boma, LAFORD is working with Gwangwa Youth Club to enhance access to sexual reproductive health services to youths. One of the beneficiaries of the club, Christina Banda a 19 year old girl from Chidakula village in the area of Traditional Authority Kalumo in Village headman Yohane says keeping girls in school has multiple benefits to prevent girls from falling into early marriages a practice that is very common in the area.

*“My life has changed a lot because I have learnt skills to continue with school, I were not in school, things could have worsened, may be getting into an early marriage”, Says Banda.*

Banda who is in standard 8 at Gwangwa primary school is also part of the Gwangwa Youth Club and collaborates with LAFORD to reach to other girls and boys in the community to concentrate on school to realize their future dreams, Christina aspires to become a primary school teacher.

*“For a girl to be at school, it helps to enhance literacy skills so that you are empowered and self-reliant”, She observes.*

The Gwangwa Youth Club has 35 members composed of 20 girls and 15 boys also works with Ntchisi Organization for Youth and Development (NOYD) and promote sexual reproductive through awareness campaigns. However stock outs of family planning commodities in the districts is a huge challenge.

### Keeping girls in schools reduces risk of maternal deaths

In a district where early marriages are very rampant, strengthening access to education amongst girls has benefits of reducing maternal mortality. Many girls as young as 13 get into early marriages, this is associated to increasing unsafe pregnancies especially still born deliveries and deaths of young girls due to pregnancy related complications. Sofileti Jabison is an 18 year old girl from Gwangwa and reveals that before LAFORD came to work in the community a lot of girls were going into early marriages. At present time many young teenage girls are in primary school, while cases of young girls falling into early marriages are declining.

*“Encouraging girls to remain in school reduces maternal deaths as girls delay marriages. Before Southern Africa AIDS Trust through LAFORD came to work in our community, there were many cases of early marriages, a lot of young girls were entering into these marriages”, Notes Jabison*

The early marriages also subject young girls to physical and sexual abuse and when girls escape from such marriages it is very common in the community that they end up in commercial sex work in places such as bottle stores and pubs, while taking care of children whose fathers have abandoned. The key lesson is that strengthening youth participation in sexual reproductive health and creating an enabling environment for access to basic education are key towards HIV prevention. In addition women's health status is improved as literacy scales up better reproductive health choices especially in young women.

## **BEST PRACTICE**

**Organization:** Ladder for Rural Development

**Documented by:** Journalists Association Against AIDS

**District:** Ntchisi

**Development Partner:** Southern Africa AIDS Trust

## **Engaging youth volunteers promotes knowledge on sexual reproductive health**

### **Introduction**

Ladder for Rural Development (LAFORD) is a local community based organization working in Ntchisi District. In 2013 LAFORD approached Gwangwa Youth Club for a community partnership agreement, through its network of 35 volunteers, there is awareness raising in the community on sexual reproductive health. Traditional leaders are also involved to scale up awareness on access to sexual reproductive health services. However the demand of family planning commodities remains high, while supply is low.

### **Demonstrating impact, Innovation and Potential for scaling up**

LAFORD through its community partnership with Gwangwa Youth Club are working in the area of Traditional Authority Kalumo in Group Village Headman Reuben Soko. Southern Africa AIDS Trust is supporting LAFORD through a youth HIV prevention project in the area which has an estimated population of 13,000. Through this project LAFORD is using youth volunteers to targets youths aged 12-24 years with information on access to sexual reproductive health services. The area has a difficult terrain which makes mobility to be difficult also combined with long distances, the nearest health facility, Khuwi Health Centre is some 5 kilometres away.

In 2013 only 5 unwanted teenage pregnancies were reported in the last 12 months as compared to the past years whereby 8-10 teenage pregnancies were reported. Providing information on access to sexual reproductive health services amongst youths provides knowledge on youths. In the project LAFORD selected 2 community supervisors and 8 volunteers who supervise the work of Gwangwa Youth Club and reports and collects data from the 35 member youth club.

The approach is promising as it also involves members of Village Development Committees, service providers and international NGOs such as Malawi Red Cross, World Vision International, National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE). The use of youth volunteers is very key towards scaling up sexual reproductive health services as a peer to peer approach creates an enabling environment for learning and facilitating behavioural change in vulnerable key populations such as youths.

### **Key Challenges with the best practice**

- Although using youth volunteers brings an advantage of a peer to peer approach targeting a huge youthful population under 30 years, the risk is that working in an environment which has a lot of transportation problems and lack of support from the Ntchisi District Council creates loss of moral support amongst the volunteers. In addition since the youth volunteers have lack of capacity to advocate and lobby for improved access to sexual reproductive health services, gains recorded could be derailed as the demand for sexual reproductive health services is very high, while there is weak supply.
- Weak engagement with service providers is a challenge that makes access to sexual reproductive health services to be problematic. Hence the stock outs of family planning commodities cannot be addressed if the service providers are unwilling to scale up those reproductive health supplies. In addition there is also weak participation of the organization in tracking the District's Implementation Plan (DIP), as a result resource allocations are not monitored including aspects of budgeting and planning.

## Key Lessons learnt

- LAFORD is working in a difficult environment, however community partnerships have a potential to make an impact in conditions of scarce financial resources. In this case youth volunteers have a role to play in scaling up access to sexual reproductive health, only that positive engagement with service providers is important to improve the availability of reproductive health supplies to meet the growing demand.
- Engagement of traditional leaders in scaling up access to sexual reproductive health is important. Hence the enforcement of community by-laws and mobilizing communities especially to attend school is essential to have a youthful population that has access to sexual reproductive health as a human right.

## Conclusion & Recommendations

The district of Ntchisi has a lot of challenges in terms of scaling up sexual reproductive health, taking into account that there is a huge youthful population, local leaders, religious leaders, service providers, CBOs, Ntchisi District Council all have a role to play to promote sexual reproductive health. In addition it should be noted that youth volunteers need to be given incentives as one way of giving them morale to strengthen community outreach.

- ✓ Southern Africa AIDS Trust should consider organizing a budget monitoring and tracking workshop for its implementing partners. In this way community based organizations will be able to hold policy makers and duty bearers at the Ntchisi District Council accountable to increase resource allocations on sexual reproductive health services. In the same context social accountability is required as a mechanism to enable LAFORD and its fellow community based organizations to track budgets and resource allocations at district level. At the community level the CBOs could engage in community score cards and ensure that results from the score cards are used to inform policy makers at the District Council to formulate budget and the District Implementation Plans in a manner that is transparent and participatory.
- ✓ There is a need to scale up capacity amongst youth volunteers, hence LAFORD should take all the necessary steps to ensure that volunteers are able to collate and collect data on sexual reproductive health services so that there is evidence-based programming. Additionally LAFORD should scale up resource mobilization to generate adequate funding to meet the growing need for sexual reproductive health for the huge youthful population.
- ✓ Human resources for health are a huge challenge in the community, hence there is for LAFORD to lobby the District Council to improve deployment of health workers to be able to provide services to youths.
- ✓ Taking into account that financial resources are scarce for HIV prevention, there is a need for LAFORD to mobilize resources by integrating sexual reproductive health into other development sectors such as water and sanitation, hence adopting a population, health and environment approach could make a huge contribution.

## CASE STUDY

**Organization:** Kazongolowe Community Based Organization, Ntchisi District

**Written By:** Dingaani Mithi

**Partner Country:** Malawi

**Project Title/Key Result Area:** Women's Health

**Development Partner:** Southern Africa AIDS Trust

### Community based family planning empowers women in making reproductive health choices

Driving towards the western part of Ntchisi district at a long distance which takes 3 hours for a cyclist to reach an area of Village Headman Mwinama in Traditional Authority Chilooko's area, there is Kazongolowe Community Based Organization which is implementing a women's health project funded by Southern Africa AIDS Trust (SAT). Women in this area are now taking a lead in adopting family planning as one way of enhancing women's health.

Helen Njinga is a 33 year old mother of 4 children from Mwinama Village and is a beneficiary of project work undertaken by Kazongolowe CBO. A lot of women are now aware of the need to reduce the number of children which is key towards making them economically productive. The organization is working with 7 women's health clubs in the its catchment area, the women educate and encourage each other on adopting family planning methods.

*"In the women's health clubs, we are raising awareness on family planning, it is important to do that because when women are aware of family planning they make good reproductive health choices, as compared to those who have no knowledge",* Says Njinga.

However gender based violence remains a key challenge that often derails family planning in the local communities. It is common that men who have lack of knowledge on the benefits of family planning due to low male involvement often causes suspicions.

*"Some times men think that when a wife adopts a certain family planning method then she may be cheating, they think the solution is just to get another wife",* Notes Njinga.

Kazongolowe CBO is working with the women's health clubs by encouraging women to raise awareness amongst their husbands so that they have knowledge and respect the reproductive health rights of their wives. In this context community awareness sessions are being conducted in the groups. Njinga has now adopted Depo Provera as family planning method which has enabled her to be productive. She is engaged in farming and grows maize, ground nuts, soy beans and tobacco as one way of increasing her household's income.

#### Encouraging women to access maternal health services from skilled birth attendants

In the past years, before Southern Africa AIDS Trust came to support Kazongolowe CBO, cases of women seeking attention of traditional birth attendants was common in which many women lost lives due to pregnancy related complications such as bleeding. However with the project in place in the Mwinama village, maternal deaths have declined sharply.

*"In the past women in labor lost lives due to loss of blood at the hands of Traditional Birth Attendants, at the moment to be honest I have not heard any maternal death in the past six months",* Indicates Njinga.

Kazongolowe CBO is working with traditional leaders to promote safe motherhood by enforcing by-laws that ban women in labor from accessing services from Traditional Birth Attendants, instead women in labor are encouraged to go to the Kansonga Health Centre. However women in the women health clubs are struggling to access family planning services as the health centre is located at a distance of 12 kilometres.



## **BEST PRACTICE**

**Organization:** Kazongolowe CBO, Ntchisi District

**Documented by:** Journalists Association Against AIDS

**District:** Ntchisi

**Development Partner:** Southern Africa AIDS Trust

## **Educating women on family planning reduces maternal mortality**

### **Introduction**

Kazongolowe Community Based Organization is located in the area of village headman Mwinama, in Traditional Authority Chilooko and is implementing a women's health project to enable women access family planning services through engagement using women's health clubs. The population in the catchment area is estimated at 5,000, the nearest health facility (Malambo Catholic Health Centre) is privately owned by the Catholic church, while Kansonga Health Centre which is a government health facility is located some 12 kilometres away from Mwinama village.

### **Demonstrating impact, Innovation and Potential for scaling up**

By using women's health clubs as a platform for creating an enabling environment for women to talk about family planning strengthens knowledge of women to make informed opinions and decisions on reproductive health choices. Kazongolowe reports through women's health clubs that Depo Provera and Pills are the two major forms of contraception being taken by women. The organization reports that under the project there have not been any reports of maternal deaths in the past 12 months in the village.

It is important to observe that under difficult conditions characterized by poor health infrastructure and long distances, women in the community though facing a lot of struggles are still able to access family planning services due to positive engagement through women's health clubs. The clubs have a huge impact as women are also open to discuss family planning with their husbands. Hence this is a promising best practice and can be scaled up and it cost-effective considering the fact that club establishment does not require a lot of funding. Additionally the clubs produce multiple benefits as women own the clubs and they can sustained even if Kazongolowe leaves them to operate on their own.

It is an innovative approach to use women's health clubs to strengthen community based family planning by empowering women to easily make reproductive health choices. The similar best practice could be scaled up across other communities so that women could identify their own reproductive health needs by lobbying stakeholders such as reproductive health service providers to scale up availability of family planning commodities to be near them.

### **Key Challenges with the best practice**

- Taking into account that family planning service providers are located at long distances, many women are turned off because of distance, while reproductive health supplies are in short supply this makes women to have the unmet family need which in Malawi is estimated at 26% based on the 2010 Malawi Demographic Health Survey. Long distances have a potential to increase maternal deaths in the area, only two bicycle ambulances are operating but they are prone to wear and tear, instead communities have resorted back to using Ox-carts which are strong and can withstand pressure due to long distances.
- It should be noted that shortage of human resources for health in the area derails the delivery of sexual reproductive health services, although there are by-laws enforced by traditional leaders, women could still be forced to go to traditional birth attendants thereby reversing gains already registered.

- Gender based violence has a potential to derail women's sexual reproductive health as there is low male involvement in family planning and maternal health. Although the women's health clubs under Kazongolowe have demonstrable evidence to reduce maternal deaths, women health clubs are dominated by women, while men look at them as only for women, hence the gender disparities create a gap. Hence to promote male involvement in the clubs issues such as gender based violence could be tackled as one way of promoting a rights based approach to family planning.

### **Key Lessons learnt**

- It is cost-effective to promote family planning through women's health clubs at community level as they are self-sustaining, however scaling up access to sexual reproductive health services requires support of the Ntchisi District Council which was reported to have a working collaboration with Kazongolowe CBO.
- It is possible to strengthen HIV prevention amongst women organized into health clubs as issues of voluntary testing and counseling are also discussed, hence the integration of HIV prevention into community based planning has a benefit of strengthening women's reproductive health choices sustainably. However weak engagement of family planning service providers in the area poses a huge challenge towards reducing maternal mortality. Journalists Association Against AIDS has learnt that lack of engagement with the Ntchisi District Council increases secrecy, as processes such as budgeting and formulation of District Implementation Plans are not done in an open environment. Hence lack of social accountability is a key issue in terms of enhancing women's health.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

The work of Kazongolowe CBO is unique in such a way that women's health clubs promote knowledge on women to make better decisions in terms of family planning. However it is important to give special attention to transportation constraints which prevent women from accessing maternal health services. Addressing gender based violence as a human rights issue is key towards scaling up family planning amongst women by also improving male involvement which is essential to create understanding amongst married couples on making informed reproductive health choices.

- ✓ There is a need for Kazongolowe CBO to engage the Ntchisi District Council to increase numbers of health workers in the area especially Health Surveillance Assistants and Community Based Family Planning Distribution Agents. However lack of proper health infrastructure excludes women from accessing reproductive health services, hence the District Council should consider constructing a health centre which has no user fees. At the moment the nearest Malambo Catholic Health Centre charges user fees that scares women in need for family planning services.
- ✓ It is critical that family planning service providers consider establishing clinics near the people in the community in order to close the gap of the unmet family planning need. In this case, Kazongolowe should be engaged in social accountability initiatives such as community score cards to track availability of reproductive health supplies such as condoms and lobby the District Council to increase resource allocations.
- ✓ It is important to strengthen the capacity of Kazongolowe CBO to be one of the key players in advocating for family planning in their catchment area, there is a need to improve monitoring and evaluation and data collection, enhance resource mobilization and also build the capacity of the women's health clubs so that they are gender responsive to improve male involvement in sexual reproductive health.

## CASE STUDY

**Organization:** Foundation for Community Livelihoods and Development (FOCOLD) formerly Matindi Youth Organization, Blantyre District

**Written By:** Dingaani Mithi

**Partner Country:** Malawi

**Project Title/Key Result Area:** Youth Prevention

**Development Partner:** Southern Africa AIDS Trust

### Traditional leaders hold key in confronting early marriages in vulnerable communities

Group Village Headman Mpopo comes from the area of Traditional Authority Makata in Blantyre District. Southern Africa AIDS Trust is supporting FOCOLD to scale up youth access to youth friendly sexual reproductive health services. In the village where the traditional leader is governing, he is advocating for youths to remain in school and lobbying for vocational skills to enable youths refrain from risk sexual practices. One of the challenges affecting youthful women are early marriages which expose women to unplanned pregnancies and gender based violence.

Mpopo recalls a case in 2013 where he intervened to stop some early marriages in his community courtesy of the work of FOCOLD. Intergenerational sex is another common practice that puts many lives of girls at risk as older men often have a long history of sexual experiences and end up infecting young girls of school going age.

*“In 2013 I personally took responsibility to stop two early marriages involving boys and girls who were at Namikate who were learners at Namikate Primary School. Imagine one of the boys was 15 years old, while the girl was 13 years of age, I had to call their parents and ensured that they return to school”,* Recalls Mpopo

Taking into consideration that traditional leaders have a huge influence towards enhancing sexual reproductive health among the youth, FOCOLD engages the traditional leaders in the process of enforcing by-laws to ensure that youths lead better sexual health lifestyles.

*“There are community by-laws in my area and I am working with my fellow traditional leaders to stop early marriages and harmful practices such as older men sleeping with young girls. The punishment is that when a man impregnates a young girl, he is ordered to do hard labour near schools so that all youths mock him”,* He discloses.

According to the traditional leader, the idea of using hard labour and manual work as a form of community service to curb intergenerational sex lies in the fact that monetary fines cannot work, as some men who have money could easily pay the fines and continue engaging in those practices and expect to get away with such offences time and again. Using hard labour on offenders is a workable approach as it inflicts psychological pressure on an offender, traditional leaders in the area hope that it could deter such offences in the future.

### Economic empowerment of youths with soft loans enhances sexual reproductive health

FOCOLD has realized that poverty is linked to vulnerability of youths to contraction of HIV, hence one way that could solve the challenge is to provide soft loans to youths to engage in small scale enterprises so that they are economically empowered. Amongst young girls the loans would play a key role by reducing dependency on men for monetary gains. As traditional leaders are playing a role to stop early marriages, the soft loans increase economic independence in young women to avoid getting into the trap of risk sexual practices.

Southern Africa AIDS Trust capacity building support has enhanced networking and partnerships within FOCOLD. The organization has entered into a partnership agreement with Opportunity International Bank of Malawi (OIBM) which is providing loans to vulnerable youths in the community using a revolving fund mechanism. It is expected that through collaboration between traditional leaders, FOCOLD, various key stakeholders and the 30 Youth Clubs operating in the catchment area would scale up sexual reproductive health for youths that is sustainable.

## **BEST PRACTICE**

**Organization:** Foundation for Community Livelihoods and Development (FOCOLD) formerly Matindi Youth Organization

**Documented by:** Journalists Association Against AIDS

**District:** Blantyre

**Development Partner:** Southern Africa AIDS Trust

## **Star circles; a catalyst for scaling up youth sexual reproductive health and community development**

### **Introduction**

Foundation for Community Livelihoods and Development (FOCOLD) which was previously known as Matindi Youth Organization was founded in 1998 and works in the strategic areas of HIV and AIDS, climate change, food security and livelihoods and education. It uses advocacy and promotes service delivery in the areas of focus. The organization targets communities located in 4 traditional authorities of Senior Chief Kapeni, Traditional Authorities Chigalu, Lundu and Makata. The organization has 6 members of staff, 250 volunteers and has an annual budget of USD 160,000.

### **Demonstrating impact, Innovation and Potential for scaling up**

In order to scale up sexual reproductive health services in the catchment area, FOCOLD is working with 30 Youth Clubs which target 10,000 youths in a year. The organization has adopted star circle as a method of mobilizing community support sexual reproductive health and is integrating Star Circles in other themes of development such as education.

The organization realizes the need to integrate education in scaling up sexual reproductive health. A community Star Circle group in TA Makata has mobilized communities and has managed to construct a house for the head teacher at Nankhwazi Junior Primary School. The Star Circle is a composed of a group of 30 people who discuss community development issues such as sexual reproductive health and education amongst other issues. The Star Circle is a participatory approach that is characterized by comprehensive community mapping to identify opportunities, challenges and needs in a manner that supports community ownership.

This is a promising approach as local communities in TA Makata's area have demonstrated that local communities can influence community development and scaling up sexual reproductive health as a key development theme. Using its network of volunteers and youth clubs the organization has managed to conduct HIV testing of 50 married couples and 1,500 youths in the past 12-14 months. FOCOLD is also lobbying the Blantyre District Health Office to scale up availability of family planning commodities. Additionally the organization has sourced 40,000 condoms from the District Health Office for distribution to the youth.

Using the 30 youth clubs, they raise awareness on sexual reproductive health services, at FOCOLD, its secretariat has a room that conducts HIV testing and counselling. The Organization is also lobbying the District Health Office to scale up family planning services through engagement using platforms such as meetings of District AIDS Coordinating Committees (DACCs) and District Executive Committee. The organization is working with Village Development Committees, since the Star Circle was adopted in 2005; some 38 villages have been reached. The Star Circles is also making a contribution raising awareness on early marriages and promoting condom programming amongst sexually active youths. FOCOLD is working is also collaborating with various development partners such as Save the Children, Oxfam, OIBM and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The Star Circle is a promising and scalable approach as it is designed to identify needs of communities in a mapped approached guided by a Star Circle Guide Book which is developed by communities themselves thereby creating ownership of community projects.

### **Key Challenges with the best practice**

- Taking into account that FOCOLD has a large catchment area that is also having a mountainous terrain, mobility is hard and it limits reporting from the communities to feed the organization with latest data and statistics on development work. Although Star Circles are very innovative in solving community development challenges such as reproductive health, they are not capable of creating increased demand for sexual reproductive health services for instance there is still low uptake of the female condom.
- Stock outs of reproductive health supplies are very common the catchment area where FOCOLD is operating, in this context a lot of youths are not able to access sexual reproductive health services.
- The Blantyre District Health Office has not positively engaged with FOCOLD in an accountable manner, although FOCOLD participates in DACC and DEC meetings, they are not able to take part in budget formulation, the secrecy at the District Council also makes it hard for FOCOLD to monitor the health budget, while projects such as Local Development Fund (LDF) are also shrouded in secrecy.

### **Key Lessons learnt**

- The Star Circle approach is key towards enhancing community development and could make a huge contribution towards scaling up sexual reproductive health services if FOCOLD could add other strategies such as using social accountability to enable the Star Circle group such as Msambuzi which is working in the area to demand sexual reproductive health services in a transparent manner.
- A lot of youths in the community are now able to access reproductive health services at Mlambe, Lirangwe and Banja La Mtsogolo although long distances to reach those centres are an obstacle.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

The Star Circle methodology is a unique approach towards enhancing sexual reproductive health services in an area with many development challenges. The fact that there is a huge youthful population in the area, rapid population growth is a development issue that needs a population health and environment approach. Rapid population growth in the area is leading to environmental degradation as the youthful population which lacks economic livelihoods tends to extract natural resources such as trees which are a source of wood and timber for sale. Hence strengthening family planning is important to reduce family sizes.

- ✓ There is a need to scale up family planning services in the catchment area of FOCOLD, if the Star Circles could adopt social accountability it could make a great contribution towards creating demand and increasing supply of family planning commodities such as condoms. In addition the organization could use the Star Circles to lobby the Blantyre District Health Office to procure and supply family planning commodities to underserved communities.
- ✓ FOCOLD should consider integrating population, health and environment in its work to respond to the needs of communities in which rapid population growth depletes natural resources. In addition the organization also consider integrating youth HIV prevention into other projects such as agriculture, food security and livelihoods as one way of maximizing scarce resources.
- ✓ The organization should take necessary steps to introduce the Star Circle methodology into all of its projects to create community ownership projects. In that way the organization could in turn influence stakeholders such as traditional leaders and village development committees to hold duty bearers such as Members of Parliament and the District Council to improve delivery of sexual reproductive health services. Additionally the organization should also strengthen resource mobilization by using an integrated approach so as to broaden its financial base.