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# LEARNING AND SHARING SUMMIT 2025



## Story of Change Template

(Malawi, Lilongwe, 21<sup>st</sup> February 2025 and Lyness Kumbukani Soko)

Women's Voice and Leadership Learning and Sharing Summit 2025

# SYNOPSIS


- **Describe the change that has occurred.**

- Traditional leaders & communities actively advocating for SRHR & safe abortion
- Holding duty bearers accountable for policy change & service provision
- Increased community dialogues & awareness on reproductive rights
- Stronger advocacy efforts towards policymakers for legal reform
- Improved access to SRHR services & reduced stigma

Impact:

- A progressive shift in attitudes, ensuring reproductive rights remain a priority for women and girls in Kasungu, Mzimba and Dowa.

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# OBJECTIVES

- Destigmatize abortion and promote comprehensive SRHR education.
- Strengthen advocacy efforts for legal reform concerning SRHR and safe abortion.
- Build capacity within communities to challenge harmful norms and promote gender equality.
- Enhance access to reproductive healthcare services for women and girls.

Photo

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# ACTIVITIES

- International safe abortion day commemorations
- Panel discussion on national TV and radio station
- Interface meetings with duty bearers
- Interface meeting with traditional and religious leaders
- Community dialogue sessions
- Life skills training
- Data collection



# Contribution to change

## ***Advocacy & Stakeholder Engagement:***

- *Conducted interface meetings with duty bearers, service providers, traditional, and religious leaders to discuss the consequences of unsafe abortions.*
- *Oriented traditional & religious leaders on SRHR laws, including the Termination of Pregnancy (ToP) Bill.*

## ***Community Mobilization & Awareness:***

- *Facilitated community dialogues on the impact of unsafe abortion, encouraging open discussions and support for policy change.*

*Impact: Strengthened community-led advocacy for SRHR, increasing accountability & support for legal reform.*



# Population Group this change most closely related to

Category	Women	Men	Total	% Women
Direct beneficiaries	3590	2860	6450	55%
Indirect beneficiaries (e.g. through other networks)	11000	8000	19000	57%
Online beneficiaries (e.g. website access, mailing lists, scholarly articles)			100000	
<b>Total</b>			<b>125450</b>	

# Significance of change

- The significance of this change is profound for the movement advocating for sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and safe abortion in Malawi. By engaging traditional leaders and communities in Kasungu District, the movement has gained influential allies in shifting societal perceptions and advocating for policy reforms.
- Key Impacts:
- Increased Community Ownership: Traditional leaders are now actively holding duty bearers accountable for SRHR service provision and policy changes.
- Policy Influence: Strengthened advocacy for the liberalization of abortion laws through grassroots and leadership support.
- Breaking Stigma: Communities are more open to discussing SRHR and safe abortion, reducing harmful misconceptions and discrimination.
- Duty Bearers holding each other accountable with traditional leaders engaging and holding traditional healers especially those who provide clandestine abortions accountable

# RESULTS

- **Women's Empowerment:** Increased awareness among women and adolescent girls about their sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), including the risks of unsafe abortion.
- More women advocating for their rights and demanding better SRHR services, including safe abortion and post-abortion care.
- Strengthened grassroots women's movements and networks championing reproductive rights

THE NATION  
MONDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2024

SUZGO CHITETE  
STAFF WRITER

**B**ackstreet abortion is one of the top three killers of pregnant women in Malawi, but lawmakers appear unmoved to amend a colonial law that fuels these deaths.

The debate over the country's colonial abortion law, which only permit health workers to terminate a pregnancy to save a woman's life, easily stirs moral and religious tirades.

In 2021, Chiradzulu West legislator Mathews Ngwale raised a private member's motion for Parliament to discuss additional grounds for safe abortion proposed by the Malawi Law Commission in 2015.

However, the motion was thrown out as some lawmakers feared a backlash from voters, chiefs and religious leaders.

But their fear was recently put on trial in Senior Chief Lukwa's territory in Kasungu West where locals openly blame the restrictive law for pushing women and girls to deaths.

"No one terminates a pregnancy for no reason," says Brenda Magwira, 21. "There are compelling reasons. Why should one be forced to keep a pregnancy from rape?"

The trauma associated with sexual violence compels some survivors to seek backstreet abortions that usually result in deaths, injury or disabilities.

Magwira was speaking during a panel discussion held on October 12 to belatedly commemorate International Safe Abortion Day. The observance falls on September 28 every year.

The panellists included Lukwa, Ngwale and gender activists Emma Kaliya and Marcel Chisi.

Nine in every 10 contributors were women, who demanded a break from the colonial past.

"No one wants to die just like that. If health workers' hands were not

## Kasungu community proves MPs wrong on abortion law



Ngwale (L), Lukwa (C) and Kaliya during the panel discussion



Magwira: No one terminates pregnancy for no reason

justifiable, why should it be so difficult to allow women to terminate unwanted pregnancies safely? Is it not unduly to force women to keep pregnancies resulting from rape, defilement or

The World Health Organisation estimates that over 114 million sexual acts result in 380 pregnancies every minute. These include 190 unintended pregnancies and 40

Researchers from the Kamuzu College of Health Sciences in Blantyre and the US-based Guttmacher Foundation recorded about 886 200 pregnancies in 2015, with 53 percent of them classified as unintended and 16 in every 100 ending in unsafe abortion.

"Restrictive abortion laws do not stop abortion from occurring, they just drive it underground, forcing women to resort to clandestine procedures, which are often unsafe," says study co-author Dr Chisale Mhango, the former director of reproductive health in the Ministry of Health.

According to the Ministry, unsafe abortion cause up to 18 in every 100 pregnancy-related death.

Ngwale, who leads the Parliamentary Committee on Health, says Malawians have the power to push their MPs to pass the proposed law.

"We have discussed boardrooms for years," says Ngwale. "It's refreshing to hear the people themselves ask for enactment of a progressive law on abortion."

Kasungu West MP Jaijosi Bonongwe, who to Ngwale's committee concurs: "With the people's voice rising, I have no problem supporting the Bill."

To Kaliya, community engagement is crucial in fact-checking "unfounded fears that slow the abortion law".

Said Kaliya: "It appears we have MPs who claim to represent people when they hold different views from the aspirations of the people they represent."

"Our advocacy is based on research and we hear these stories in communities we visit."

The observance was organised with support from the Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre, the Family Planning Association of Malawi and the Malawi Sexual Reproductive Health



# RESULTS

- Public Participation Traditional and religious leaders in Kasungu and other districts are now actively engaging in conversations about SRHR and advocating for safe abortion.
- Communities are holding decision makers accountable for better SRHR services and policy change
- More adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) participating in dialogues and advocacy campaigns.
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# RESULTS

- Media Coverage (Including Social Media)
- MHRRC has successfully engaged national and community media to amplify conversations on SRHR and safe abortion.
- Increased coverage of unsafe abortion issues through live radio and TV discussions featuring experts, policymakers, and community leaders.
- Social media campaigns on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have reached thousands, helping to destigmatize abortion and educate the public.

## Chiefs demystify safe abortion

SUZGO CHITETE  
STAFF WRITER

Senior Chiefs Lukwa and Njomwa of Kasungu say members of Parliament (MPs) should not hide behind culture for failure to put in place a responsive legal framework that will stop women from dying from unsafe abortion.

The two chiefs said this during a community dialogue at Chankhozi Primary School in Kasungu District as part of the commemoration of International Day of Safe Abortion organised by the Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre, Family Planning Association of Malawi, and Malawi Sexual Reproductive Health Alliance.

Lukwa said Parliament has no good reason to fail to enact a law which allows women to seek safe abortion when there is



Lukwa (C) during a panel discussion with Kaliya and Ngwale

overwhelming evidence that many women are dying from unsafe abortion.

Said the senior chief: "This law was enacted during colonial times. Our colonisers changed their law a long time ago. Why should we stick to what does not help? Are you sure a rape victim should keep a pregnancy? What about victims

of incest? We need a flexible law." Taking his turn, Njomwa said it is clear to everyone, including rural areas that women are dying from unsafe abortion.

During a panel discussion which included Lukwa, Parliamentary Committee on Health chairperson Matthews Ngwale, and gender activists

Emma Kaliya and Marcel Chisi, community members supported calls for access to safe abortion services.

In 2021, Ngwale moved a motion to table the Termination of Pregnancy Bill in Parliament, aimed at dealing with unsafe abortion, but it was rejected.

The Bill proposes flexibility on allowable grounds for safe abortion to include rape, incest, foetal deformity and threats to health.

In an interview, Ngwale, said he still wants to revive the matter in the august House and before that, he wants to conduct a public hearing on the matter.

Statistics show that unsafe abortion contributes to 18 percent of maternal deaths in Malawi.

The International Day of Safe Abortion is commemorated on September 28. ■

PHOTOGRAPH: SUZGO CHITETE



# RESULTS

- Strengthened the capacity of local CSOs, CBOs, women's groups, and youth-led organizations to mobilize communities and demand SRHR services.
- Changes in Gender Attitudes at Individual and Community Levels
- More open discussions about SRHR and abortion among women, youth, and community leaders.
- Reduction in stigma associated with seeking SRHR services including post-abortion care.

Include evidence here –  
photos/clippings





# RESULTS

- Increased male involvement in SRHR discussions, shifting norms around gender roles and reproductive decision-making.
- Other Notable Changes  
Stronger advocacy for legal reform on abortion, with more MPs expressing support for the ToP Bill.

Include evidence here –  
photos/clippings



# RESULTS

- *Improved access to SRHR services in some districts, as a result of increased advocacy and awareness.*
- *Formation of community watchdog groups to monitor SRHR service delivery and advocate for policy implementation.*
- *These results demonstrate tangible progress in shifting perceptions, improving access to SRHR, and creating an enabling environment for legal and policy changes in Malawi.*

**Include evidence here –  
photos/clippings**




# Evidence

- **What evidence / means of verification**

- Reports
- Registers
- Media Reports
- TV Programs
- Social Media posts
- Videos
- Testimonials from beneficiaries

Include evidence here –  
photos/clippings

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# CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

- What have been the main challenges? How have these challenges been overcome?
- Resistance from Religious Leaders: Deep-rooted cultural and religious beliefs opposing abortion and SRHR advocacy.
- Solution: Conducted sensitization meetings and interfaith dialogues to engage religious and traditional leaders, emphasizing the health and human rights implications of unsafe abortion. Some leaders became advocates after witnessing the realities faced by women.

# CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

- **Stigma & Misconceptions about SRHR and Abortion:** Widespread misinformation and stigma around safe abortion and SRHR limited open discussions.
- **Solution:** Launched storytelling campaigns, media engagements, and community theater to humanize the issue, share real-life testimonies, and debunk myths about SRHR and abortion.
- **Legal & Policy Barriers:** The restrictive legal framework in Malawi hindered progress on the Termination of Pregnancy (ToP) Bill.

# CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

- Solution: Strengthened advocacy efforts by engaging Members of Parliament (MPs) through policy dialogues, evidence-based advocacy, and community-led campaigns to push for legal reforms.
- Limited Media Support & Sensational Reporting: Some media houses sensationalized SRHR issues, reinforcing negative narratives on abortion and women's rights.
- Solution: Conducted media training workshops to equip journalists with accurate information and ethical reporting guidelines on SRHR.

# CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

- Weak Enforcement of SRHR Policies: Even where policies existed, there was weak implementation and accountability at different government levels.
- Solution: Strengthened community watchdog groups to monitor SRHR service provision, conducted accountability meetings with duty bearers, and advocated for better policy enforcement.



# CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

- Funding Constraints: Limited financial resources affected the sustainability of advocacy campaigns and community initiatives.
- Solution: Strengthened partnerships with local and international organizations, diversified funding sources, and integrated SRHR into broader gender equality programs to secure additional funding.
- Despite these challenges, MHRRC has continued to make progress by using a multi-stakeholder approach, engaging communities, policymakers, and media to drive sustainable change in SRHR and safe abortion advocacy in Malawi.

# CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

- What lessons have been learned?
- Community Engagement is Key: Traditional and religious leaders play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions. Early engagement and continuous dialogue with them lead to increased acceptance and advocacy for SRHR issues.
- Storytelling is a Powerful Advocacy ToolReal-life testimonies humanize the impact of unsafe abortion and restrictive laws, making it easier to shift public opinion and influence policymakers.
- Youth Involvement Strengthens AdvocacyCreating safe spaces and youth-led initiatives fosters stronger engagement from adolescent girls, young women, and boys, ensuring sustainability of advocacy efforts.

# CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

- Legal and Policy Advocacy Requires Persistence Changing laws and policies takes time, requiring consistent engagement with policymakers, MPs, and government agencies through evidence-based advocacy.
- Media Can Be a Catalyst for Change Properly trained journalists help frame SRHR and abortion discussions accurately, reducing misinformation and stigma. Investing in media training is crucial.
- Multi-Sectoral Collaboration Yields Better Results Partnering with civil society organizations, legal experts, medical professionals, and grassroots activists amplifies advocacy efforts and strengthens impact.

# CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

- Multi-Sectoral Collaboration Yields Better Results Partnering with civil society organizations, legal experts, medical professionals, and grassroots activists amplifies advocacy efforts and strengthens impact.
- Addressing Misconceptions Reduces Stigma Continuous public education through community dialogues, theatre for development, and digital campaigns helps correct myths about SRHR and abortion.
- Sustained Funding is Critical Advocacy efforts need long-term financial investment. Exploring diverse funding sources, including donor partnerships and integrating SRHR into broader gender programs, helps ensure continuity.
- Policy Reform Alone is Not Enough Even where policies exist, enforcement remains weak. Strengthening accountability mechanisms at community and government levels ensures real change on the ground.
- Final Insight: Change is possible but requires patience, strategic partnerships, and continuous engagement to challenge deeply rooted norms and influence legal reforms.



# SUSTAINABILITY AND REPLICATION

- **How can the work be sustained/kept going? How can the work be cascaded to other organisations?**
- Strengthening Community Ownership: traditional, religious, and community leaders as champions for SRHR and safe abortion advocacy. Establish community-led monitoring groups to track progress and ensure accountability.
- Policy Advocacy and Legal Reform: Maintain momentum in advocating for the Termination of Pregnancy (ToP) Bill by engaging policymakers, media, and civil society.
- Strengthen collaboration with legal experts to push for policy reforms and ensure implementation of existing SRHR-related laws.
- Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing: Train more community activists, including youth, women, and men, on SRHR advocacy and legal literacy.
- Develop toolkits and resources for organizations to replicate best practices.

# SUSTAINABILITY AND REPLICATION

- Leveraging Media and Digital Platforms: Expand awareness campaigns through radio, TV, and social media to reach a broader audience. Establish an online repository of resources, success stories, and advocacy tools for organizations to use.
- Forging Stronger Partnerships: continued collaboration with other CSOs, youth networks, and women's rights groups to share experiences and strengthen advocacy efforts.
- Engage regional and international partners to amplify efforts and access funding opportunities.
- Continued coordination among COPUA members: By working together, we can create a lasting impact and ensure that women and girls have access to their reproductive rights!

# NEXT STEPS

- What are the key priorities going forward?
- Follow up and monitor community activities
- Continued advocacy for policy change

Include evidence here –  
photos/clippings



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