



Malawi EMPOWER Newsletter



July—September 2021

Volume I, issue 3

The Expanding Malawi HIV/AIDS Prevention with Local Organizations Working for an Effective Epidemic Response

Quarterly Newsletter



Inside

Message from the Malawi EMPOWER Chief of Party.....	p.2
Malawi EMPOWER wins Best SBC Campaign and Game Changer Awards.....	p.3
Malawi EMPOWER Website Launched.....	p.4
DREAMS Ambassadors oriented on their roles.....	p.5
Stories of Change—Voices from the Field.....	p.6
⇒ HIV testing services changing lives of adolescent girls and young women in Zomba and Machinga.....	p.6
⇒ 'I use PrEP to prevent HIV'.....	p.7
⇒ 'Access to family planning services has enabled me see a new beginning for myself'.....	p.8

Message from the Malawi EMPOWER Chief of Party

We are pleased to present to you the third edition of the Malawi EMPOWER Newsletter. This newsletter is not only a way for us to update you with recent events of the project, but also to get stories of change capturing voices from the field out to you.

This issue covers news on the awards that the project won on SBC campaign and Game Changer categories, project's website launch, enhanced capacity of DREAMS Ambassadors, and stories of change that capture voices from the field. We hope that you will enjoy reading the newsletter.

We value you staying connected to us and I hope this is just another means for you to keep in touch with the latest Malawi EMPOWER news and stories of change.

We welcome your feedback on this piece (send to CLunduka@fhi360.org).



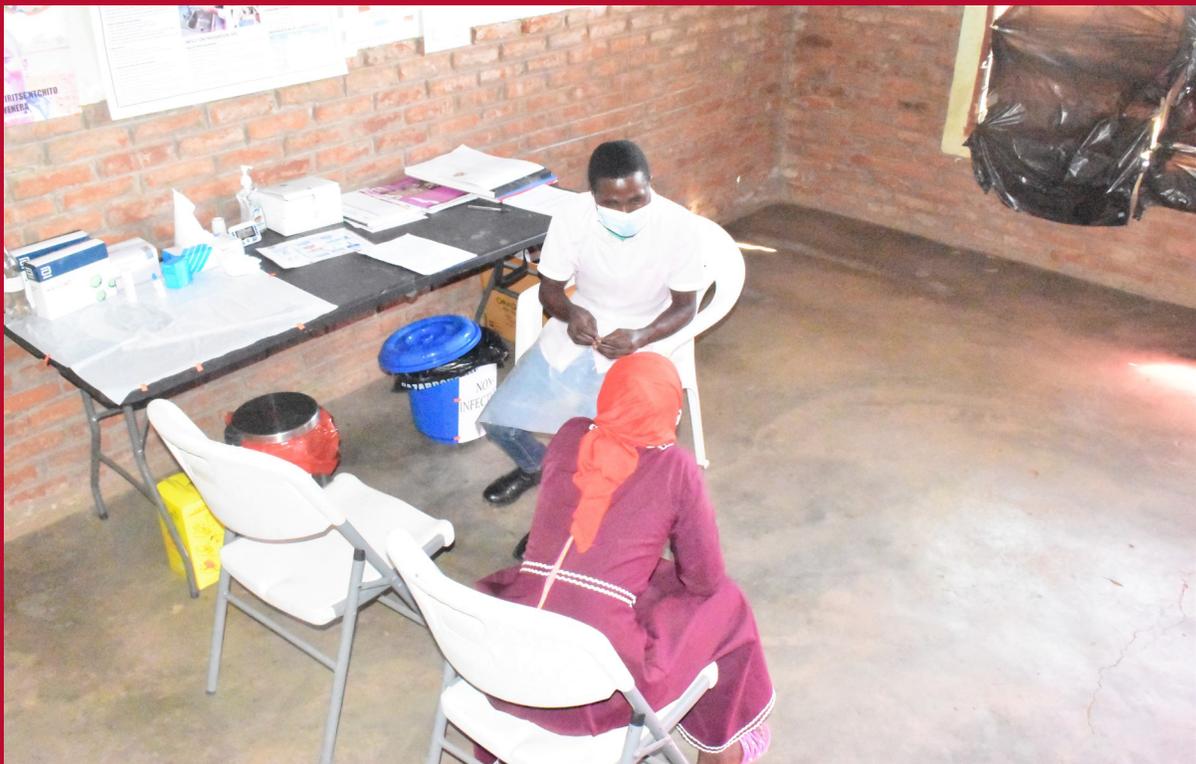
Malawi EMPOWER Chief of Party Dr. Boniface Maket

Thank you for taking the time to read and give us your thoughts!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be "Blau", written over a horizontal line.

Warm regards,

Dr. Boniface Maket



A young woman accessing SRH services offered by Malawi EMPOWER at Nsanama in Machinga

Malawi EMPOWER wins Best SBC Campaign and Game Changer Awards

Malawi EMPOWER

Best SBC Campaign and Game Changer

Award Winner

The Malawi EMPOWER was named the best Social Behaviour Change (SBC) Campaign and Game Changer Awards Winner at the FHI 360 Global HIV Retreat which was conducted virtually on 21st October 2021.

EMPOWER was nominated for the two awards following its submissions on Know Your Status Campaign, Excellence in Data Visualization, Use of Community Cadres in GBV Case Identification, and Virtual Data Quality Assessments amid Covid-19: Malawi EMPOWER Experience.

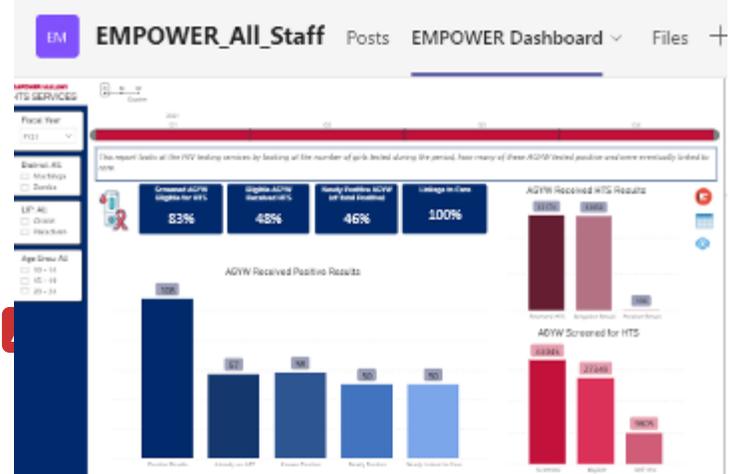
The two awards represent a special recognition by FHI 360 Global for the project's innovation and the potential to change the way FHI 360 approaches HIV programming.

"It is a great honour to receive this significant award. This is a great year for the project and we will build on this success as we implement the project's activities in the subsequent years." Said Malawi EMPOWER Chief of Party Dr Boniface Maket.

Dr Maket congratulated the Malawi EMPOWER team on winning the two awards and encouraged the team members to keep up the good work and continue to be creative and innovative.

"Feel free to suggest new innovations. We want to win every year," he said.

Malawi [EMPOWER's video](#) highlighting the project's game changing and innovative work was featured at the retreat.



EMPOWER was nominated for the two awards following its submissions on Know Your Status Campaign and Excellence in Data Visualization

The two awards represent a special recognition by FHI 360 Global for the project's innovation and the potential to change the way FHI 360 approaches HIV programming.

Malawi EMPOWER Website Launched



The Malawi EMPOWER officially launched its website on 29th September 2021 through a virtual event which attracted participation of different stakeholders including representatives from USAID, the Malawi Government, and implementing partners.

Following the development of the website which is in line with the Malawi EMPOWER Communication Strategy, the public and stakeholders as well as the project's beneficiaries now have increased access to quality information on HIV, SRH and GBV, among other thematic areas of the project.

Thus, the website is one of the communications channels the project is using to position Malawi EMPOWER Activity as a credible, efficient, and effective partnership that is helping to produce new knowledge, enhance service delivery, and improve people's lives, especially AGYW of 10-24 years old.

"It feels gratifying to have a brand-new space for us to "meet" and share our ideas. This new website, courtesy of the talented Malawi EMPOWER team, is one of the great strides the project has recorded this year. There is great potential that this website will assist the project to communicate better, and to serve its clients more effectively," said EMPOWER Chief of Party Dr Boniface Maket.

Specifically, the website will promote understanding of the Malawi EMPOWER Activity mandate, objectives, program strategies, progress, and achievements among different audiences; while showcasing the project's best practices, innovations, and technical expertise.

Malawi EMPOWER

Website Launched!

www.malawiempower.org

DREAMS Ambassadors Oriented on their roles



The DREAMS Ambassadors developing action plans during the orientation in Blantyre

A total of 18 Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe (DREAMS) Ambassadors from Machinga and Zomba districts are now equipped with knowledge and skills on how to effectively enhance community level advocacy and linking AGYW to available SRH, HIV and GBV services.

The development follows an orientation which Malawi EMPOWER in collaboration with Jhpiego organized to take the Ambassadors through essential fundamentals related to their roles. The week-long orientation which took place from 19th-23rd July 2021, focused on several areas which include promoting health seeking behaviours among AGYW, basic SRH services, the basics of biological vulnerability to HIV, and GBV response.

DREAMS Ambassadors are highly motivated, solution-driven AGYW who are responsible for leading community-level advocacy and linking peers to services as well as heightening awareness of DREAMS and issues affecting the lives of AGYW within their communities.

One of the DREAMS Ambassadors who attended the orientation—19-year-old Enifa Phiri from Ntupanyama Village, Traditional Authority Liwonde in Machinga district—says the training was key in strengthening the Ambassadors capacity to provide adherence support and help in information dissemination to AGYW deemed to be risk of contracting HIV.

“The training equipped us to effectively carry out our roles like PrEP messaging during sessions in AGYW DREAMS clubs or community level,” says Enifa.



Enifa is one of the DREAMS Ambassadors who attended the orientation and feels confident that she will be able to carry out her roles effectively

HIV testing services changing lives of adolescent girls and young women in Zomba and Machinga

For three years, 15-year-old Rebecca from Zomba in Malawi was afraid to get tested for HIV. Rebecca never had sex in her life. Her fears emanated from childhood interactions with friends as they shared sharp materials such as razor blades and other piercing objects. As such, Rebecca believed she had contracted HIV and hence the fear of getting tested.

“When we were young, we used to share sharp objects like razor blades. These objects would hurt us, and we bled most often. This happened when I was not aware of HIV and how it is transmitted,” narrates Rebecca.

Rebecca became fully aware of HIV in 2018 after she had joined the Tikondane Club established in Traditional Authority of Mwambo in Zomba district and is co-located with Matawale Health Centre. Tikondane Club is one of the clubs under the DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe girls and women) initiative which is a public-private partnership supported by the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) focusing on HIV prevention among Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) through evidence-based interventions shown to successfully address risk behaviors for HIV transmission and gender-based violence.

From the club, she learnt how HIV is contracted, how the virus is spread, its treatment and prevention measures, as well as the benefits of knowing one’s HIV status. However, Rebecca admits she was still too afraid to get tested even after learning more about HIV



Rebecca says she will strive to stay HIV negative

because she convinced herself that she got the virus through the sharp objects she shared with her friends.

“I always felt like I had HIV and each time I fell sick I would think, it’s HIV. This affected me to the extent that I was not paying attention to my studies,” she explains.

One day, after being convinced by her club’s facilitator and peers from the club, she decided that she couldn’t live like this anymore and she went to Namikate Primary School where the Expanding Malawi HIV/AIDS Prevention with Local Organizations Working for an Effective Epidemic Response (EMPOWER) project team were offering HIV testing and SRH services as part of their mobile clinical outreaches. At the site, she was welcomed by the project’s service delivery team who screened and tested her for HIV.

“The 20 minutes I spent waiting for the results was the longest period of my life. A nurse did some counselling before giving me my results.

‘Getting tested was the greatest thing I did for myself’

I couldn’t believe it when the nurse said, ‘you are HIV negative’. I was very happy that all the worrying was over. Since then, I have always been careful, so I do not get HIV through any way.” She narrates.

Rebecca admits getting tested was the greatest thing she did for herself because her entire lifestyle changed after that. She says knowing that she does not have HIV has motivated her to put more effort on her education, and she will strive to stay HIV negative.

“Even when I get a boyfriend in future, I will make sure we go for HIV testing, and we will always practice safe sex,” says Rebecca.

Since the day she got tested, Rebecca has been encouraging her peers to get tested so their fears should not control them.

“I always encourage my friends to get tested so they can know how to manage their health, be it an HIV negative or positive lifestyle,” says Rebecca.

Rebecca is one of the many young AGYW who benefitted from the HIV testing services offered by the Malawi EMPOWER project. The project is being implemented in Zomba and Machinga districts of Malawi – with promising results. As of July 2021, it had provided HIV testing services to a total of 15,634 AGYW after risk assessments, out of which 193 individuals were found HIV positive and were referred for treatment.

‘I use PrEP to prevent HIV’

The Malawi EMPOWER project is helping adolescent girls and young women who are at risk of getting HIV like Hendrina Kabisala to prevent contracting the virus through use of PrEP. PrEP has been shown to be up to 90% effective in preventing HIV infection among people who take it consistently.

Hendrina aged 19, hails from Thunya Village, Traditional Authority Mwambo, Zomba. She has a boyfriend who has multiple sexual partners and does not know his HIV status.

“He forces me to have unprotected sex with him and I accept because I do not want to lose him.

Hendrina has not contracted HIV because she uses PrEP which she accesses at Nsanama Health Centre where she was referred to, after getting screened for PrEP eligibility by Malawi EMPOWER.



Hendrina uses PrEP to prevent HIV

To avoid getting unplanned pregnancy, Hendrina accesses family planning services which are among the integrated sexual and reproductive health services provided by EMPOWER with support from the Ministry of Health through AGYW Outreach Clinics

“Access to family planning services is helping me prevent unplanned pregnancy. This will help me to complete school and realise my vision of becoming a nurse.” She explains.

‘Access to family planning services has enabled me see a new beginning for myself’

Just 19 years old, Esther Jonasi of Swayibu Village, Traditional Authority Nsanama in Machinga district, lives with her husband and daughter of three years old. As a young girl in 2018, Esther was performing well at school. During the year, she was selected to Malindi Secondary School after passing the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examinations (PSLCE) with flying colours. Unfortunately, she could not proceed with secondary education because she got pregnant from the man she had entered a relationship with whilst waiting for the release of the PSLCE results. At the time, she did not know anything about family planning.

“I didn’t know anything about condoms and any other family planning method. I didn’t know I could go to the health facility and get help.” Esther regrets. “If I had information about family planning, I’m sure I wouldn’t get pregnant before completing both secondary and tertiary education,” she says.

Esther acquired information on family planning and got the chance to access HIV, SRH and GBV services offered by Malawi EMPOWER in 2020 when she joined Sambazi Girls Club which is one of the DREAMS Clubs in the district.

“From the club I learnt about family planning, how to use condoms and other methods [of contraception], HIV prevention and treatment, and gender based violence management.”



“My plan now is to go back to school in 2022 so I can realise my dream of becoming a banker.” - Esther

“I’m happy to be a member of the DREAMS club and have access to HIV, SRH and GBV services offered by Malawi EMPOWER.” The information and access to HIV, SRH and GBV services has helped me plan my future and I don’t see myself getting unplanned pregnancy again,” she explains. “My plan now is to go back to school in 2022 so I can realise my dream of becoming a banker. Currently, I’m doing farming so I can earn a living and be able to depend on myself.”

The Expanding Malawi HIV/AIDS Prevention with Local Organizations Working for an Effective Epidemic Response (EMPOWER) -DREAMS AGYW Services and Case Finding Component project is a five-year (March 5, 2020 to March 4, 2025) Cooperative Agreement between the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Family Health International (FHI 360). The EMPOWER Activity is implemented by FHI 360 in collaboration with Pakachere Institute for Health and Development Communication (PIHDC) and Christian Health Association of Malawi (CHAM) in supporting Malawi government. *This publication does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the US Government.*

FHI 360 - Malawi EMPOWER, P.O. Box 521, Zomba – Malawi. +265 887 827 291 +265 887 827 291 Malawi EMPOWER

Malawi EMPOWER Project Malawi EMPOWER @EmpowerMw www.malawiempower.org

