



Malawi EMPOWER

Newsletter



Oct-Dec 2021

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

Quarterly Newsletter



Financial Year 2022 - Quarter I



Introduction

The Malawi EMPOWER is glad to release the fourth issue of its newsletter. The newsletter provides you with the latest updated information about the project's activities and impact of its interventions. Stories captured in this issue include:

- ⇒ **USAID Mission Director commends Malawi EMPOWER's for increasing AGYW's access to HIV prevention services**
- ⇒ **USAID visits Malawi EMPOWER to appreciate project's service delivery activities**
- ⇒ **Malawi EMPOWER excels in USAID's quality assurance exercise**
- ⇒ **Stories of Impact;**
 - ◆ **Access to PrEP transforms life of a young woman in Zomba**
 - ◆ **Enhancing GBV case identification among AGYW in DREAMS clubs through community cadres**
 - ◆ **"COVID-19 threw me worst experiences I do not want to go through again"**

We welcome your feedback on this issue. Please send the feedback to CLunduka@fhi360.org.
Enjoy the reading!

Announcements

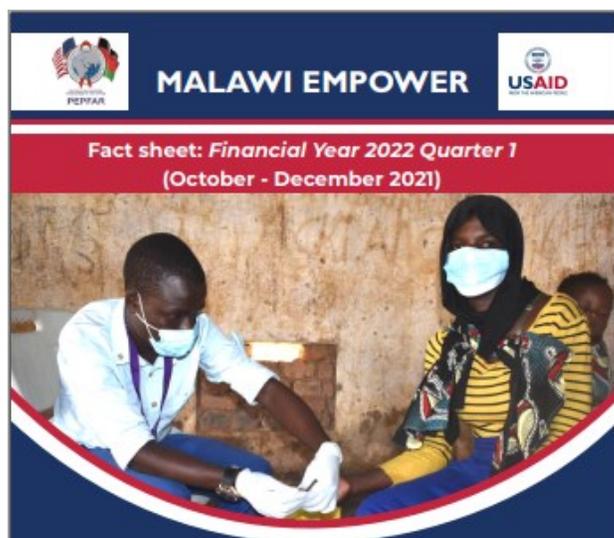
Malawi EMPOWER releases booklet of 2021 stories of change

Malawi EMPOWER compiled touching stories of some of the AGYW who have benefitted from the project's interventions in 2021. The booklet clearly shows the positive impact the project has had to date. The booklet can be accessed on this link: <https://www.malawiempower.org/download/malawi-empower-stories-of-impact-2021-booklet/?wpdmdl=2187&refresh=62148d8ccfac41645514124>



Project's fact sheet updated

The project updated its fact sheet to provide the project's stakeholders and the public with basic information and latest key achievements of the project. The Fact sheet is on this link: <https://www.malawiempower.org/fact-sheets/#>



USAID Mission Director commends Malawi EMPOWER for increasing AGYW's access to HIV prevention services

The USAID Mission Director Dr. Katie Lott commended Malawi EMPOWER for intensifying efforts aimed at ensuring AGYW's easy access to HIV prevention, SRH and anti-GBV services.



Dr. Katie Lott commended the project on 10th December 2021 when she visited Thunya Village, Traditional Authority Mwambo in Zomba district where she witnessed EMPOWER's provision of HIV prevention and SRH services to AGYW.

“The project is doing a great job in ensuring targeted AGYW have easy access to quality HIV prevention, SRH and GBV services. Keep it up!” she said.

Dr Katie Lott interacts with Malawi EMPOWER M&E Assistant, Bright Mkandawire



Dr Katie Lott being briefed on Malawi EMPOWER's service delivery approach

USAID visits Malawi EMPOWER to appreciate project's service delivery activities

A delegation from USAID visited Machinga and Zomba districts to appreciate EMPOWER's HIV prevention service delivery to the DREAMS AGYW. The delegation which was led by USAID Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) for the project, Ms. Linda Malilo visited the project on 25th October 2021 in Machinga and 26th October 2021 in Zomba.

During the visit, EMPOWER made presentations on its collaboration with DREAMS partners, different government departments, community cadres and non-DREAMS partners;

organized a courtesy call with government stakeholders at Machinga DHO office and Zomba District Council focusing on how the project is collaborating with different government departments in the implementation of activities at community and district level; and demonstrated and shared experience on service delivery to DREAMS beneficiaries in communities.

The AOR commended Malawi EMPOWER on how it is reaching AGYW with HIV, SRH and anti GBV services. "I'm impressed with how the project is managing its service delivery program," said Linda Malilo.



The USAID AOR for Malawi EMPOWER, Linda Malilo (third from right) emphasizes a point during the visit

Malawi EMPOWER excels in USAID's quality assurance exercise



A snapshot of SIMS session at Malawi EMPOWER Office in Zomba

The Malawi EMPOWER performed exceptionally during the Site Improvement through Monitoring Systems (SIMS) which USAID Malawi conducted on 8th November 2021 in Zomba and 9th November 2021 in Machinga. SIMS is a quality assurance methodology used to increase the impact of PEPFAR programs on the HIV epidemic through standardized monitoring of the quality of services at the site.

The SIMS aimed to systematize and broaden ongoing PEPFAR site monitoring processes and improve documentation through administration of standard tools that assess adherence to PEPFAR standards of care and service delivery, as well as within entities that support and guide service delivery. The monitoring visit meetings led by the EMPOWER Chief of Party had in attendance all of

the EMPOWER Strategic Information Unit and service delivery teams and lasted an average of four to five hours. The SIMS were the first on-site assessments for EMPOWER since project inception.

The USAID team on one end asked a series of questions under the respective Core Essential Elements (CEEs) that progressively assessed the two sites against the standard best practices. The final scores under each programmatic cluster of SIMS CEE, highlighted whether an improvement plan or urgent remediation is required or not (green: meet standards, yellow: needs improvement, red: needs urgent remediation). On the EMPOWER end, the team responded to a series of questions that assessed the site against standards.

Access to PrEP transforms life of a young woman in Zomba

Passing through the narrow road of Likangala market especially around lunch time, one would easily notice a fully packed restaurant with customers. The restaurant situated 30 metres away from Likangala Health Centre in Zomba district is owned by 20-year-old Catherine who is well known for cooking delicious and mouth-watering meals.

She smiles as she says; “running this business successfully was a dream I thought will never come to pass.”

Two years ago, Catherine was without hope and motivation to engage in any economic activity.

Catherine had lost confidence in herself in 2018 when her husband, James (not real name), had started a fishing business. The business made James spend a week of every month on Lake Chilwa. He usually stays home four days a month and the rest of the days are spent in Zomba town and surrounding districts like Machinga and Blantyre where he sells the fish.

Since James started the business, Catherine caught him cheating with other women including sex workers on several occasions. She was so upset and depressed because she knew she was at high risk of contracting HIV due to her husband’s risky sexual behaviour. This negatively affected her to the extent that she could not engage in any economic activity.

She says her life turned around in May 2021 when she joined Tikondane DREAMS club through Malawi EMPOWER’S Community Partner, Ana Patsogolo.



Catherine narrates her story

“At the club, I learnt so many things like family planning and HIV prevention through use of PrEP. A few weeks later, a team from Malawi EMPOWER came to our club to provide different HIV and sexual reproductive health services and taught us again about HIV prevention and treatment including use of PrEP” she says.

She says the session with Malawi EMPOWER convinced her to seek PrEP.

“The team screened and tested me for HIV to which the result came negative. They escorted me to Likangala Health Centre to access PrEP,” she explains. “The team later connected me to a Youth Community Based Distributor Agent (YCBDA) who follows up on me on how I’m taking the drugs and escort me to the health facility for refill,” she explains.

'PrEP boosted my confidence'

Catherine says PrEP boosted her confidence that she got the energy to open her restaurant in June 2021. She is able to run her business without stress, knowing she is protected from HIV. She says she is now at peace that she even took it upon herself to teach her peers about PrEP.

"I have been able to talk to three of my friends who had worries similar to mine and they are now using PrEP. Memory Chithambo is one of the YCBDAs who was recruited by Malawi EMPOWER in

February 2021 to support in the provision of HIV, SRH and GBV services at community level. She says Catherine is one of the 84 AGYW she supported in 2021, to ensure they take their PrEP properly.

"I relentlessly follow up with the AGYW on how they are taking PrEP and ensure they get a refill of the drugs at the right time," she says.



YCBDA Memory escorts Catherine to Likangala Health Centre to collect PrEP.

STORIES OF CHANGE—VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Enhancing GBV case identification among AGYW in DREAMS clubs through community cadres

When Emma was forced into early marriage by her parents and boyfriend in March 2021, she thought and believed that her time for happiness had come. Little did she know that she was digging an early grave for herself until when the community cadre working on GBV came to her rescue.

Emma was only 15 years old when she fell in love with a man aged 21. At first, Emma thought it was just a mere relationship, but the man wanted marriage. So, he coerced Emma's parents to allow him to marry their daughter. Since the man was financially stable, Emma's mother agreed and forced her daughter to accept the man's hand in marriage.

The marriage did not even last 6 months before Emma started facing some hardships.

"The husband stopped providing for the household. He started chasing other girls and spending days out of the household. "When I raised complaints before his kinsmen, they simply told me to endure the experience because the treatment was the real definition of marriage," she narrates.

The situation got worse, and Emma reported the issue to her mother and relatives who also told her not to give up the marriage. When Emma noticed that no one was being helpful, she started longing to go back to school.

"I realized at this point that school is good," she says.

Remembering that she was once a member of



A Community Linkage Facilitator giving good news to Emma and her mother that she will be supported back to school .

DREAMS-AGYW Club and that at the club they learnt about how they can challenge GBV, she decided to approach a community worker trained in GBV response by Malawi EMPOWER who after hearing Emma's ordeal, approached Ana Patsogolo (APA)- YONECO'S Community Linkage Facilitator and EMPOWER's Youth Community Based Distribution Agent (YCBDA) and together they took the issue to another level.

They confronted Emma's parents and Emma's husband was brought to book. The case was brought before the Group Village Headman and the marriage was ended instantly. Emma was referred to APA- YONECO for education support and she was very eager to go back to school in the following term.

'DREAMS club taught me to challenge GBV'

Medically, EMPOWER's YCBDA referred her to Matiya Health Centre where several tests including HIV and Pregnancy were done. Fortunately, all the tests turned out negative.

Back to her DREAMS Club, Emma always stands out to inspire her fellow AGYW not to get carried away by men but rather focus on their education. She always encourages her fellow girls that education is a key to their success. Emma will be writing her Primary School Leaving Certificate Exams in 2022..

'COVID-19 threw me worst experiences I do not want to go through again'

When the opportunity to get vaccinated presented itself, Pemphero, 38, knew right away she wanted the shot. She had always wanted to get vaccinated but long distance was a barrier as she had to travel 10 kilometers to get to her nearest health facility - Ntaja Health Centre.

Pemphero who hails from Masambuka Village, Traditional Authority Kawinga in Machinga is one of the survivors of COVID-19. She suffered from COVID-19 in June 2020. She says she had a worst experience which she does not want to go through again. However, she stayed unvaccinated until early November 2021 despite the vaccine being available in the country's health facilities. She alludes the failure to get vaccinated to the long distance she must travel from her home to Ntaja Health Centre.

"This is why I could not hesitate to get vaccinated when the health authorities came to my area with COVID-19 vaccine," says Pemphero.

The health authorities' travel to Pemphero's village was made possible with support from Malawi EMPOWER.

Macpherson Mailosi is the Health Surveillance Assistant who administered the vaccine to Pemphero. His duty Station is Ntaja Health Centre but was able to travel to Pemphero's village to administer vaccines with support from EMPOWER.

He says taking the vaccine to the communities has proven to be effective.



Pemphero is happy that she got vaccinated

"For example, villages in my catchment area are very far from Ntaja Health Centre, the nearest being four kilometers and the furthest is over 10 kilometers. As such, it is difficult for the people from these villages to visit the health centre just to get a vaccine due to long distance of travel," he says. "When we take the vaccine to the villages more people show up to get vaccinated.

Mailosi says that previously, a maximum of five people from his catchment would come to Ntaja Health Centre in a week to get vaccine.

"Lately, since we started taking the vaccine to the villages, figures from my catchment area have moved to over 50 in a week" he says

‘Taking COVID-19 vaccine to communities has proven to be effective’

Since November 2021, EMPOWER has been supporting DHOs in Zomba and Machinga in the implementation of demand creation activities supporting the acceleration of COVID-19 vaccine uptake.

For instance, EMPOWER engaged community leaders (traditional, religious, and key opinion leaders), on the benefits of COVID-19 vaccine. Through routine community gatherings, community leaders sensitized and brought the needed awareness to their communities on the availability and benefits of accessing services, including COVID-19 vaccination.

In addition, service delivery schedules are shared with traditional and religious leaders to inform their communities on dates and sites for service provision. A total of 835 community leaders have so far been engaged in the two districts. Furthermore, the project takes advantage of its on-site health counseling to



Macpherson Mailosi is the Health Surveillance Assistant who administered the vaccine to Pemphero.

AGYW to talk about COVID-19

The sessions help clear myths and misconceptions towards vaccination. The AGYW then take the messages to their communities.

As of December 2021, Malawi EMPOWER’s support enabled over 1,500 people in Machinga and Zomba districts to get vaccinated.

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.*

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