

FEBRUARY 2024 | NEWSLETTER



**Point of
Progress**
NETWORKING FOR YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT



TABLE OF CONTENTS



3	ABOUT POINT OF PROGRESS
4	BELIEF, MISSION, PURPOSE
5	HER FUTURE HER CHOICE
6	CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS
7	HIGHER LEVEL RESULTS
9	ELLEN CHIMTENGO
12	SIBELA MASIKU
14	YVONNE
16	CHRISTINA CHAGUNDA
18	LOCAL LEADERS
20	BRIDGET KANYAKATILA
21	CHIWAMBA HEALTH CENTRE

ABOUT POINT OF PROGRESS



Point Of Progress is a local non-governmental organization which is committed to empowering young people and children to act around issues that affect their lives and play an active role in the development process. The organization also gives a forum to young women and young men from different backgrounds to share ideas, exchange experiences and learn from each other in the struggle for a better life. Point Of Progress is registered with Malawi Government, Council for Non-Governmental Organizations (CONGOMA) and NGO Regulatory Authority (NGORA).

The organization enables young people and women to create programmes and influence policies in the areas of Agriculture, Environment, and Climate Change, Children and Women's Rights, Youth Participation and Development, Gender Equality, and Skills Development/ Entrepreneurship. The organization promotes, protects and advances children's and young people's rights by building their leadership skills, and strengthening their scope of the youth through the clubs that the organization established in different communities so that they can actively participate and be involved in all issues that affect their day to day lives.



OUR BELIEF

We believe that the youth of Malawi, if equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills, are a force of change to be reckoned with. We believe that our youths have the energy to create a more powerful and more united Malawi.



OUR MISSION

We empower youths in Malawi by offering access to relevant skills and knowledge that help them make more informed decisions that create better futures for them and their families.



OUR PURPOSE

We exist to create a more united Malawi, one where both men and women are equally active in building a better future for themselves and their communities.

Three key factors set us apart from other youth led organizations and clubs:

- ▶ We believe that 'young people' are the key to unlocking the key challenges that keep Malawi behind (dated beliefs / gender disparity / poor education)
- ▶ We believe that providing youth with relevant knowledge and skills addresses 3 key pillars; decision making, confidence and leadership, new ideas and innovations which inspire and equip young people to make positive change.
- ▶ Our model methodology: the Young Women Can Do It Approach which is committed to promote gender equality, empower young women and increase their influence and social participation at all levels.



+265 999 94 26 79
+265 888 10 01 13



info@progressmw.org



www.progressmw.org





STRENGTHENING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

The collaborative efforts of Point of Progress (POP), the Centre for Alternatives for Victimized Women and Children (CAVWOC), the Family Planning Association of Malawi (FPAM), and Oxfam have been focused on implementing a transformative program entitled "**Her Future Her Choice: Strengthening Young Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**" (HFHC) in Lilongwe and Balaka.

This program is a response to the gender inequality and women's rights violations undermining access to comprehensive, rights-based sexual and reproductive health information and services for adolescent girls and young women in the two districts. Over the span of four and a half years (2019-2023), HFHC directly tackles the numerous obstacles that impede access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for adolescent girls and young women, including harmful social norms, entrenched traditional practices, and taboos surrounding sexuality.

By addressing these challenges head-on, the program aims to foster a profound transformation in gender dynamics, dismantling the structures of inequality and discrimination that underpin these barriers. Through targeted interventions, HFHC endeavors to ensure that adolescent girls and young women in the targeted areas are able to exercise their right to bodily autonomy, make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health, and are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve. Empowered with the knowledge and agency to assert their human rights, they are better equipped to lead healthy and productive lives.

The impact of Her Future Her Choice extends beyond direct beneficiaries, benefiting 4,000 adolescent girls and young women in TA Malili and Chimutu, and indirectly impacting the lives of 22,000 individuals.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Despite significant advances in reducing maternal and child mortality, progress in SRHR has been limited in sub-Saharan Africa, where adolescent birth rates are the highest in the world, at an average of 118 births per 1000 girls compared to the global average of 51 births per 1000 girls (World Bank, 2012). Adolescent girls' high rates of pregnancy are compounded by their low demand and use of contraceptives.

Several other factors cause adverse impacts on women and girls' health in these regions, including high rates of gender-based violence (GBV): women who experienced violence are 16% more likely to have a low birth-weight baby, more than twice as likely to have an abortion, and 1.5 times more likely to contract HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (WHO 2016). Therefore, improving reproductive health, access to contraceptives and preventing and reducing GBV for adolescent girls and young women in East and Southern Africa especially Malawi is critical to lowering rates of adolescent pregnancy, improving women's chances of surviving pregnancy and childbirth, and improving response to Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), including HIV.

Malawi experiences a high Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) (634 per 100,000 live births) with unsafe abortions accounting for 18% of all maternal deaths; a 26% unmet need for family planning; and an adolescent birth rate of 152 per 1000 women aged 15-19 (UNFPA 2016). The Malawi Ministry of Health (2011) reported that 20.5% of young women and girls between the ages of 15-19 years received post-abortion care (PAC) services. In addition, early marriage, sexual violence and teenage pregnancies (26% before age 19) are common.

Given this reality, the Her Future Her Choice program takes a comprehensive approach aimed at promoting and defending SRHR of adolescent girls and young women in Malawi. The initiative also directly responds to the objectives of global SRHR initiatives and commitments such as She Decides, Family Planning 2020, Agenda 2030 (particularly SDGs 3 and 5), the African Women's Rights Protocol, the Maputo Protocol, and the Thrive Objective of the Global Strategy for Women, Children, and Adolescent Health - which ensures universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services and rights. Her Future Her Choice is also well aligned with Malawi country strategies and plans, particularly national health strategies. HFHC supports the National Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy (2009), the Health Sector Strategic Plan (2010-2016), and the National Standards on Youth Friendly Health services (2015-2020).

Progress On Higher Level Results

Point of Progress has cumulatively reached to a total of 14,620 youth, including Adolescent Girls and Young Women, as well as Adolescent Boys and Young Men, through various project interventions across 81 youth clubs (20 in schools and 61 out of school), as well as 57 youth-led Village Saving and Loan Groups. The project interventions have begun to yield positive results towards achieving the project outcomes. Table 1 below illustrates the progress at the outcome level, as identified through a survey conducted by an external consultant.

INDICATOR	CURRENT ACHIEVEMENT STATUS			
	Baseline	Adolescent Girls	Baseline	Young Women
Percentage of adolescent girls and young women who decide to use contraceptives alone or jointly with their husbands/partners, disaggregated by age	41.9%	80.8%	40.0%	91.1 %
Percentage of adolescent girls and young women who are able to talk to their husband/partner about SRHR related issues, disaggregated by age	42.3%	80.6%	79.4%	87.5%
Percentage of adolescent girls and young women who have an increase in SRHR knowledge	36.2%	53.5%	57.1%	74.1%

INDICATOR	CURRENT ACHIEVEMENT STATUS			
	Baseline	Adolescent Girls	Baseline	Young Women
Level of positive attitude on women's reproductive autonomy among target population, disaggregated by sex and age	51.0%	79.2%	58.7%	82.1%
Level of positive attitude on SRHR communication and decision-making among target population, disaggregated by sex and age	60.0%	66.0%	57.1%	62.5%
Percentage of adolescent girls and young women who received SRHR education in school	70.9%	95.1%	61.9%	91.1%
Percentage of adolescent women and girls with awareness of referral systems for SRHR and GBV services	51.0%	90.3%	63.5%	92.9%

PEER EDUCATION MODEL MAKING HEADWAY: A STORY OF ONE ELLEN CHIMTENGO

The commitment to volunteer and safeguard the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights of youth may seem daunting, especially when some view it merely as a potential job opportunity. However, the Peer Educators of Her Future Her Choice in TA Chimutu and Malili, Lilongwe, have selflessly dedicated themselves to ensuring their peers have access to crucial Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and HIV information and services, aiming to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

One such remarkable individual is Ellen Chimtengo from TA Malili in Lilongwe, whose story embodies the essence of peer education. Ellen's journey is a testament to the impact of the training provided to 189 youth, including herself, who volunteered as peer educators. Before undergoing this training, Ellen, like many Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYWs) from TA Malili, had limited knowledge about Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), particularly concerning contraceptives, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), Sexual Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), and female reproductive autonomy. Moreover, discussing sexual matters publicly was taboo in her community, and AGYWs had little control over contraceptive use. Consequently, AGYWs from TA Malili were disproportionately affected by teenage pregnancies and STIs.



Ellen moderating the 16 Days of Activism event



Ellen speaking at a HFHC awareness campaign event in TA Malili

"The peer-to-peer training has truly been an enlightening experience, particularly regarding SRHR issues. It has transformed my life, empowering me to become a champion for youth Sexual and Reproductive Health. Through this training, I've gained the skills to effectively address SRHR issues among Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYWs) and Adolescent Boys and Young Men (ABYMs) in my community. To date, I've reached out to 2,420 ABYMs and AGYWs, providing them with vital SRHR information, and facilitated access for 4,671 individuals to short-term contraceptives, such as condoms and pills. Additionally, I've successfully referred 871 AGYWs and ABYMs to health centers for further assistance,"

Ellen reflects.

SRHR knowledge and service uptake has increased among AGYWs of TA Malili as a result of peer educator's efforts. AGYWs have been empowered to discussions with the partners/husbands on contraceptive use and make decisions together.

“I feel good and excited to be touching my fellow AGYWs’ lives. Above all, the economic empowerment drive under HFHC project has made more AGYWs to access private services since public health centers are usually hit by commodity stock out. To lead by example, my VSL loan enabled me to start a piggery business that aids me in transport during my peer outreach activities. This has put me on the map and no wonder I have taken up another mentoring position as Lilongwe District Youth Network Chair where I am spearheading youth structures in 23 TAs. This is attributed to the public and leadership skills I got from the peer education training”.

Ellen concludes with a smile.

HFHC employs the peer educator model as a dynamic approach to disseminate information on Sexual Reproductive Health, STIs, HIV, and AIDS in a manner that resonates with young people. Through this method, the program aims to create a youth-friendly and experiential learning environment. The peer educators facilitate discussions that help young individuals explore their values, understand themselves, and navigate issues related to sexuality and reproductive health.

This approach not only imparts knowledge but also equips peers with skills to reform their attitudes, ultimately influencing them to make healthier and safer life choices. By fostering positive behavior change, the program aims to cultivate a supportive community where individuals are empowered to take charge of their sexual and reproductive health.

To date, Point of Progress (POP) has successfully trained 189 peer educators, comprising 179 Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYWs) and 10 Adolescent Boys and Young Men (ABYMs), who serve as vital conduits for disseminating crucial information and fostering positive change within their communities.



Ellen receiving an outstanding award from Minister of Gender, Norwegian Ambassador and OXFAM country director

SIBELA MASIKU PAINTS A MALE INVOLVEMENT MODEL IN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS



Sibela Masiku speaking at a youth event in TA Chimutu

While it's commonly perceived that men and boys are often the perpetrators of violence against women and girls in communities, there's a growing recognition of the importance of involving them as key allies in the fight against such injustices. Sibela Masiku is one such champion who has taken a proactive stance in leading this charge. As a member of the Mataka Youth Club in T/A Chimutu, Lilongwe, he leads a group of 16 young men from various villages united under the banner of "Male Engage Chimutu (The Boys)."

This dedicated group aims to instigate behavioral change among men and boys concerning women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR).

They employ a grassroots approach, utilizing one-on-one interactions and awareness sessions to engage with other men in the community.

To date, the group has organized 11 awareness campaigns targeting men and boys specifically on women's SRHR, **successfully reaching out to 357 individuals through one-on-one sessions.**

Speaking on behalf of the group, Sibela emphasized their commitment to the cause, stating that they were inspired by Point Of Progress' call to action, challenging them to remain vigilant in promoting women's rights and ensuring the safety and protection of women and girls in their communities.

"We were motivated by Point Of Progress at a training on women's rights and SRHR and we realized that we had a role to play and decided to come together and establish a committee that will deal with the vice. Our idea behind is to engage more men so that they can promote positive masculine traits towards women and girls' rights as well as SRHR."

Sibela Highlighted.

The group's efforts extend beyond raising awareness to actively combatting issues such as early forced marriages and Sexual Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). Their proactive approach has led to the dissolution of 31 early marriages, providing tangible relief to vulnerable individuals like Beauty Edward, a 16-year-old from Mbalameyatsoka Village. Beauty is among the beneficiaries receiving support for her education, thanks to the group's intervention.

Moreover, the group has intervened in 13 cases of SGBV, offering critical support and guidance. They've also played a crucial role in educating girls on contraceptive use and accessing Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) services, benefiting 376 Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYWs).

This engagement strategy is particularly effective given that men and boys are often the perpetrators of violence against women and girls.

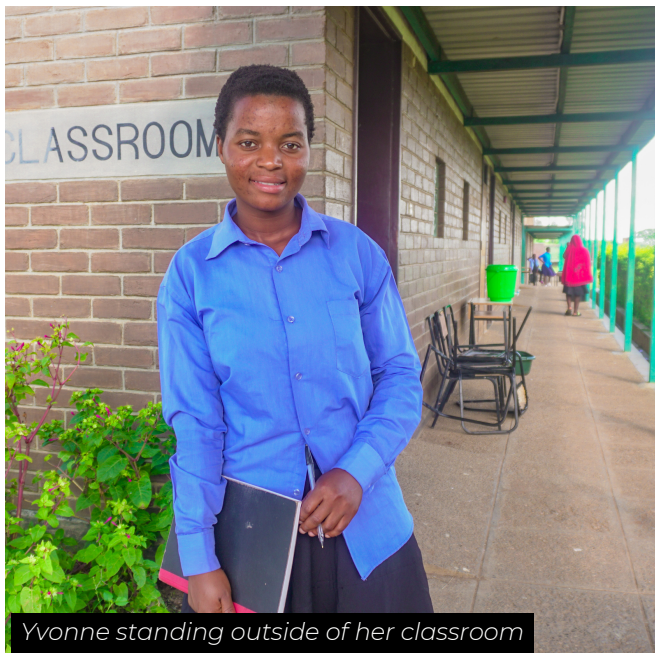
By raising awareness and promoting understanding of women's sexual anatomy and rights, these efforts empower men and boys to become champions for gender equality and women's rights. Importantly, the project also aims to address the power dynamics that often limit women's autonomy over their sexuality and contraceptive choices.

At the core of the Her Future Her Choice (HFHC) project is the promotion of Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) among Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYWs) aged 10 to 24. By placing AGYWs at the forefront, the project has successfully engaged 3,511 men and boys through various interventions, highlighting the importance of collective action in advancing SRHR and gender equality.



Some of the members in The Boys youth group

YVONNE TRIUMPHS FROM CHILD **EARLY** FORCED MARRIAGE TRAP



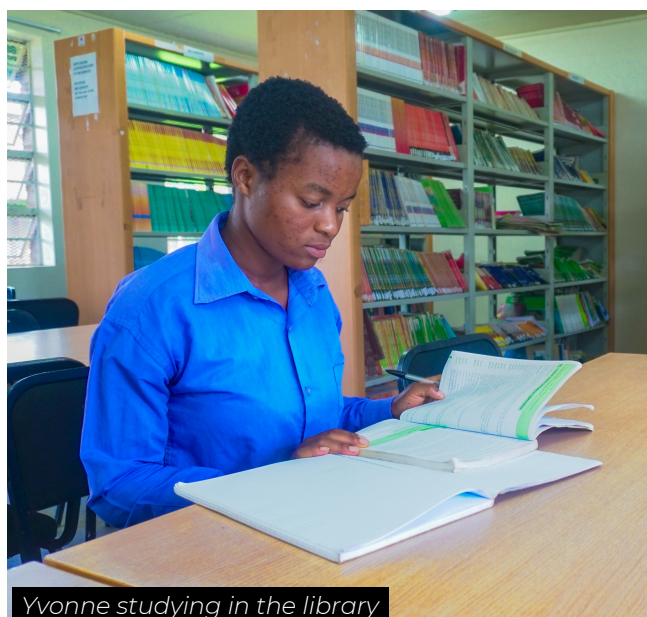
Yvonne's story from Kamamina Youth Club in TA Chimutu, Lilongwe, offers a poignant glimpse into the pervasive issue of Child, Early, and Forced Marriage (CEFM) in Malawi. At just 20 years old, she bears the weight of a difficult past, having become a mother at the tender age of 16.

"At 16 years old, I found myself pregnant while still in grade 2. The subsequent years were filled with struggles as I had to put my education on hold to care for my child," Yvonne recounts, her voice tinged with emotion. "My parents, unable to bear the shame, cast me out of the house and urged me to follow the man responsible for my pregnancy."

However, a ray of hope entered Yvonne's life during a youth meeting at Kamamina Youth Club when she learned about the Her Future Her Choice (HFHC) project. This sparked a renewed sense of purpose within her, dispelling the notion that her future was irreversibly bleak.

"The focus group discussions organized as part of HFHC exposed me to invaluable knowledge about teenage pregnancy, family planning, HIV, STIs, and more," Yvonne explains. "Moreover, my fellow youth club members took the initiative to engage with my parents one-on-one, advocating for my re-entry into education."

Empowered by newfound knowledge and support, Yvonne took the courageous step of re-enrolling in Nalikule Secondary School to pursue her Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE). Though her initial attempt did not yield the desired results, Yvonne remains undeterred, currently preparing to retake the examinations.



Yvonne studying in the library



Yvonne picking books in the school's library

Despite the challenges, I refuse to succumb to the cycle of CEFM and unplanned pregnancies

Her journey serves as a testament to the transformative power of education and empowerment in breaking the chains of societal norms and realizing one's potential.

Point Of Progress through Her Future Her Choice project interventions, has managed to send back to school 1091 young people (689 girls, 402 boys) since the project inception in 2019. Additionally, 981 SGBV cases have been referred to pertinent authorities (police, court, health centers) in liaison with Community Action Groups (CAGs,) Child Protection Committees, (CPC), Community Victim Support Unit (CVSU) and Local leaders.



Yvonne with her daughter



Yvonne with her parents sorting out vegetables

CHRISTINA CHAGUNDA MAKES AMENDS IN VILLAGE SAVINGS AND LOANS

Christina Chagunda from Chikondi Youth Club in TA Malili greatly values HFHC economic empowerment drive. Before receiving training in Village Savings and Loans (VSL) methodology and joining a VSL group in 2019, she struggled to make ends meet, relying on others for financial support.

Reflecting on her past, Christina shares, "I never had a strong economic footing, and accessing private contraceptives was a challenge, given the distance to health centers and their frequent stockouts." However, joining the Chikondi VSL group, established by the HFHC project, changed her life.

With support from Point Of Progress and training provided by Community Development Officers, Christina embarked on her VSL journey. In her first year, she received MK180,600. This initial investment served as a springboard for her tea room business, significantly improving her financial situation.

"VSL has been a game-changer for me," Christina declares proudly. "I've grown my business capital to MK1,875,500, allowing me to purchase land and build a sturdy house. I've also invested in an oxcart and two cows." With these accomplishments, Christina not only secures her access to contraceptives but also extends support to her fellow Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYWs).



Point Of Progress' collaboration with 57 youth-led VSL groups in TA Malili and Chimutu has yielded remarkable results. These groups have collectively disbursed MK15,645,200, empowering youth to pursue entrepreneurial ventures and mitigate the challenges of contraceptive stockouts in public health centers.



Christina serving customers in her tearoom

VSL has been a game-changer for me, I've grown my business capital to MK1,875,500, allowing me to purchase land and build a sturdy house. I've also invested in an oxcart and two cows.



Christina with her two cows



Christina with her oxcart in the background

LOCAL LEADERS: A FOCAL ENTRY POINT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



Traditional leaders wield significant influence in shaping the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) of young people, yet in TA Malili, Lilongwe, many of these leaders initially resisted discussing taboo topics such as sexual and gender-based violence and the HIV epidemic, particularly concerning young people in 2019.

The Her Future Her Choice (HFHC) Project recognized the pivotal role of traditional leaders in effecting positive change and embarked on a concerted effort to engage them. Through multiple negotiations, HFHC introduced plans emphasizing the importance of traditional leaders in fostering long-term, sustainable impact on SRHR issues. Sensitization sessions and evidence-based advocacy were conducted, highlighting the crucial role of chiefs in creating supportive services and structures to ensure the well-being of their constituents, especially young people.

"We appreciate the HFHC project," acknowledges GVH Kachala. "Our community has faced high rates of youth teenage pregnancy due to cultural norms. The capacity-building sessions provided a platform for youth to openly discuss SRHR issues, and we conduct self-led awareness campaigns to challenge discriminatory social norms. With the support of our bylaws, we have dissolved 233 Child, Early, and Forced Marriages (CEFM) and addressed 109 cases of Sexual Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). We also collaborate closely with Community Action Groups (CAGs), Child Protection Committees (CPC), and the Community Victim Support Unit (CVSU) in our fight against SGBV."

Point Of Progress has actively engaged 456 local leaders through various project interventions. By employing the Theatre for Development model, HFHC highlights the positive aspects of traditional practices while sensitizing traditional leaders to address harmful practices. This approach ensures that HFHC is community-based and community-owned, fostering sustainable change through traditional structures.



Village headmen in a group discussions



Group of local leaders from around Lilongwe during HFHC scorecard session

THE GODS SMILE ON BRIDGET KANYAKATILA'S HARD WORK



"VSL has economically empowered me as an AGYW. I have grown my business capital to Mk650,500. This has made to have 10 goats and 4 pigs. Above all, I easily access private contraceptives as I do not usually find them in public health centers."

Bridget (in the middle) leading a VSL group

The profound impact of economic empowerment on the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) of women and girls is gaining global recognition. Through the Her Future Her Choice project, Point of Progress is championing the transformation of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYWs) by equipping them with business management skills and introducing the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) approach.

Bridget Kanyakatila's childhood in TA Chimutu, Lilongwe, was filled with hope and ambition. Excelling in school, she secured a pass for secondary education upon completing primary school. However, her dreams were abruptly halted when she discovered her parents couldn't afford the school fees. Devastated by this realization, Bridget found herself at a crossroads.

"I wanted nothing more than to continue my education, but circumstances forced me to stay home for a whole year," Bridget recounts. "It was a difficult period, filled with disappointment, but I had no choice."

Fortunately, Bridget's life took a positive turn when she joined the Kamamina Village Savings and Loans (VSL) group, established by the HFHC project. With support from Point of Progress and guidance from Community Development Officers, Bridget received training in VSL methodology in 2019. In her first year with the VSL group, she received MK106,400. This initial investment served as a catalyst for her entrepreneurial spirit.

Using the funds wisely, Bridget invested in a wrappers and salon business, which proved to be a game-changer in her life. This venture not only provided her with a sustainable source of income but also restored her sense of purpose and determination.

CHIWAMBA HEALTH CENTRE EMERGES AS A LEADER IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF YOUTH-FRIENDLY HEALTH SERVICES

Malawi stands out in the region for its proactive implementation of youth-friendly health services (YFHS) as early as 2007, spearheaded by the Ministry of Health's Reproductive Health Directorate (RHD). These services cater to individuals aged 10 to 24, recognizing the vulnerability during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. Designed to address the holistic health needs of young people, particularly in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), YFHS provide tailored, high-quality care.

The National Youth Friendly Health Service Strategy 2015–2020 was formulated to enhance the provision of YFHS, building upon the findings and recommendations of the YFHS Programme and the high incidence of STIs/HIV among youth.

Chiwamba Health Centre, situated in TA Chimutu, Lilongwe, has exemplified the effective delivery of YFHS. Through tailored services, the health center has witnessed a remarkable increase in service uptake, soaring from 2,342 youth in 2019 to 8,789 in 2023.

The establishment of a YFHS corner under the HFHC project has been instrumental in facilitating service uptake. Leveraging the involvement of peer educators and Youth Community Based Distribution Agents (YCBDAs), the health center has bridged the gap between service providers and youth, resulting in a surge in service utilization.



A sign post outside Chiwamba Health Centre in TA Chimutu, Lilongwe



Emmanuel Mgomba counselling a young girl on contraceptives

“The establishment of a YFHS corner under HFHC project has made us tick as far a service uptake is concerned. The usage of peer educators and Youth Community Based Distribution Agents (YCBDAs) has bridged us health service providers and the youth. No wonder service uptake has skyrocketed.”

Emmanuel Mgomba, a provider at Chiwamba Youth Friendly Health Service, attests to the impact of these interventions. Point Of Progress has engaged 32 health service providers in various interventions, emphasizing the importance of linking them with youth clubs and supporting YFHS corners with recreational resources.

Furthermore, FPAM has played a crucial role in enhancing the capacity of health service providers through comprehensive training sessions. Covering topics such as comprehensive abortion care, SRH services, family planning, GBV management, and youth-friendly, gender-responsive care, these sessions have empowered providers to deliver inclusive, sensitive, and effective care to young people.





Point of Progress

NETWORKING FOR YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT



+265 999 94 26 79
+265 888 100 113



Point Of Progress (NfYD)
P.O. Box 803
Lilongwe
Area 6



info@progressmw.org



www.nfydmw.org



FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA