



UNFPA Zambia

BI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

JANUARY- JULY, 2024

**HOPE IN CRISIS: SAFEGURADING WOMEN AND GIRLS
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS IN TIMES OF DROUGHT**



Remarks from the Country Representative



Every pregnancy is wanted, every child birth is safe and every young person's potential is being fulfilled.

I am pleased to welcome you to this edition of our newsletter, where we share stories of resilience, hope, and determination. We feature our work with communities, governments, and partners to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every child birth is safe and women and girls are protected from gender based violence (GBV) and harmful practices.

During the recent past, Zambia has faced unprecedented humanitarian challenges. We began the year, battling a devastating cholera outbreak, which was immediately followed by a severe drought which affected 9.8 million people in 84 out of 116 districts. Despite these crises, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) remained committed to ensuring consistent provision of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and GBV information and services to those in need.

In the first half of 2024, UNFPA provided critical support to the cholera treatment centers, ensuring that pregnant women received the care they needed. We also worked closely with the Ministry of Health to deploy outreach mobile clinics, bringing essential services to communities affected by the drought. This outreach mobile clinics are still ongoing.

In addition to our programmatic work, UNFPA has continued to support the government of Zambia in high-level engagements to advance the principles of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). A key gesture during this half-year was Zambia's delivery on behalf of 81 other countries at the UN General Assembly meeting marking 30 years of the ICPD.

This momentous occasion demonstrated Zambia's leadership and commitment to global partnerships in advancing the ICPD's principles and Programme of Action. We are honored to have supported the government in this effort and look forward to continued collaboration in promoting the rights and dignity of all Zambians.

Furthermore, we celebrate the enactment of Zambia's new Marriage Act, which criminalizes marriages for all under 18 and protects those already in such marriages. Building on this success, UNFPA has intensified efforts to end child marriage and protect girls who are already in marriage. We are proud to have published an Ending Child Marriage Policy Brief, which outlines our strategy and commitments to this critical cause.

Thank you for joining us on this journey.

Seth Broekman,

Country Representative

Midwives Become Unsung Heroes, Saving Mothers and Newborns

Amidst Cholera Crisis

January, 2024

“How is my baby? Is my baby going to be okay? Has my baby moved?” Bastaba Mwanza asked the nurse in her hospital ward, barrage-style, when she gained consciousness after being out for an entire day.

“Well,” the nurse responded, “your baby is fine. The doctor was here and checked on you.”

“Are you sure?” Bastaba asked sharply.

After further explanation and assurances from the nurse, Bastaba finally gained composure and thought about the events that led her to the facility.

Just the previous day, she was at home, enjoying full health, doing house chores, and caring for her two children as she always did. Things changed by mid-day when her four-year-old son developed a running stomach, which Bastaba dismissed as nothing serious. By evening, she was also experiencing diarrhea and, unlike her son, was also vomiting violently.

She initially didn't think about going to the hospital, but by the time she was preparing for bed, she knew that her and son's condition had become too serious to ignore. She had to go to the hospital. “We had gone to the toilet countless times at that point and were extremely weak,” Bastaba recounts.

Her husband rushed them to a local clinic, where Bastaba's worst fears were confirmed: she and her son had cholera. “I knew of the cholera cases in the country and its symptoms. When the diarrhea and vomiting started, thoughts of cholera crossed my mind, but I was hoping it wasn't the case,” Bastaba says.



“I knew of the cholera cases in the country and its symptoms. When the diarrhea and vomiting started, thoughts of cholera crossed my mind, but I was hoping it wasn't the case,” Bastaba says.

Her son was immediately put on an drip at the clinic and showed signs of recovery by morning. For Bastaba, however, the situation had only gotten worse. She had to be transferred to a bigger hospital for treatment.

“I was barely conscious when I was taken by ambulance to the hospital. Throughout this time, my biggest worry was for my unborn child. Immediately we arrived, I passed out.”

“Bastaba woke up that night at the Levy Mwanawasa Teaching Hospital Cholera Center, one of the referral hospitals fighting Zambia's worst cholera outbreak in more than a decade. She was in the maternity ward, set up to offer specialized care to pre- and post-natal women with cholera.

Cynthia Mandele, one of 15 midwives in the maternity ward provided through UNFPA support as part of its emergency response to the cholera outbreak, was on her night shift when Bastaba arrived.

“The women here come very weak and worried, not only for themselves but also for their pregnancies. It's not easy for anyone to fight cholera; it's worse and more complicated for pregnant women. It's our duty to nurse them back to health and ensure the safety of the unborn child,” Cynthia says.

Through UNFPA support, the maternity ward cared for and discharged 69 pregnant women and delivered 21 babies in the course of the outbreak.



“I have resumed going for my monthly antenatal visit at my community hospital, and everything is fine. I'm grateful for the care and support I got from the midwives at the cholera center. They were around to cater to our every need, constantly checking on me and the baby.”

Bastaba Mwanza- Beneficiary

Zambia's Commitment to ICPD: Review of Zambia's participation at CPD 57



April, 2024

Zambia was proudly represented at the 57th Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD57) by a high-level delegation led by Hon. Princess Kasune, Minister and Member of Parliament, who also serves as the Chairperson of the Zambia Parliamentary Caucus on Women. The delegation included Lois Mulube, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and National Planning, Seth Broekman, UNFPA Representative, as well as other government officials from the Ministries of Health and representatives from civil society.

Delivering Zambia's National Statement at the conference, Hon. Kasune said Zambia has made progress in promoting dignity and equity by implementing policies such as the free education policy, the re-entry policy and the population policy.

Hon. Minister stressed the importance of international and national partnerships in addressing interconnected challenges with adequate resources to fulfil the country's commitment to a full implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action.

And Hon. Kasune said new laws such as the Children's Code Act, have been enacted to safeguard human rights in the country.

"This commitment was further demonstrated by Zambia hosting the successful 10 year continental review of the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development (AADPD+10) in November 2023," said Hon. Kasune.

Zambia was nominated deliver the Joint Statement on behalf of 81 countries at the General Assembly Meeting to mark the 30th Anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development.

Minister Kasune emphasized that despite progress, significant disparities remain, posing complex challenges to women's and girls' wellbeing. She highlighted the exacerbating effects of multiple crises, including COVID-19, on issues like inequality, sexual and gender-based violence, and maternal mortality.

Kasune stressed the importance of reaffirming commitment to the ICPD Programme of Action and its principles, uniting to accelerate implementation and ensure no one is left behind.

UNFPA and Zambia Side Event

UNFPA with the Zambian Government hosted a side event under the theme *Safeguarding Motherhood: ICPD @30 Commitment to Reducing Maternal Mortality*. The side event showcased interventions being undertaken by the Zambian Government, working with different stakeholders to end preventable maternal mortality.

It also highlighted challenges and opportunities in addressing maternal mortality. This included increasing financing to the health sector from 8% in 2021 to 12% in 2024, promotion of facility-based delivery, expansion of Healthcare Infrastructure in the country, improvement in human resources, and modernization of Health Information Systems.

It was reported that Zambia had reported significant progress, reducing Pregnancy-related Mortality Ratio from 729 per 100,000 live births in 2001 to 278 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2018. She indicated that Zambia had abolished Traditional Birth Attendants in favor of Safe Motherhood Action Groups (SMAGS) to promote institutional and skilled deliveries

UNFPA Supports Mobile Clinics in Drought Affected Districts

Ensuring Access to Essential Sexual and Reproductive Health Services for Vulnerable Communities in Zambia

June, 2024

As Zambia grapples with a climate emergency caused by the driest agricultural season in over 40 years, the Ministry of Health, with support from UNFPA, launched mobile clinic outreaches to deliver essential Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) information and services to affected communities.

These services included family planning, antenatal care, HIV testing and clinics for children under five years. Mobile teams, comprising healthcare professionals and community volunteers, travel to remote areas to provide quality SRH services, promote health education, and address the specific needs of women and girls in hard hit districts in Southern Province and Eastern Provinces, including four constituencies in Lusaka district.

"Some of the indicators - like the first antenatal visit - have been negatively affected, which is a cause for worry," says Linda Muleya Libingi, Principal Maternal and Child Health Nursing Officer in Southern Province, one of the hardest-hit provinces. "Because of the lack of food, some women are not prioritizing coming to health facilities, taking services to the communities is critical in times like these" Nurse Libingi says.

Monze district in Southern Zambia has around 43 health facilities, but in times of crisis, some residents cannot embark on sometimes long journeys to seek services. Some of these communities live hours from the nearest health facility - in Hakukunla village, the nearest clinic is at least 30 km away.



Forced marriages and sexual exploitation, which expose women and girls to unintended pregnancies and increase the risk of HIV, are also a high risk during the drought. Nurse Loveness Miyoba provides antiretroviral therapy (ART) in the mobile clinics outreach. "Today, we are providing ART (Antiretroviral therapy for people with HIV). We are providing antenatal services. We are also providing children's clinic services, also family planning, and a bit of OPD."

UNFPA is also supporting 60 Safe Motherhood Action Group volunteers, who are tirelessly working to provide crucial information and education on safe motherhood practices to families in their communities, empowering them to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and wellbeing



[Double click to watch video of UNFPA Zambia drought response](#)

"In times of crisis and drought like this, sexual reproductive health of women and girls may not be prioritized. UNFPA is providing support to 43 facilities in this district to conduct mobile clinic outreaches, ensuring the health outcomes are not affected by the crisis."

Leonard Zulu - UNFPA Programme Analyst (GAPS)



Traditional Leaders Engaged to Ensure Sexual and Reproductive Health Services During Drought

May, 2024

UNFPA Zambia with Ministry of Health held crucial meetings with traditional leaders from the Southern and Eastern Provinces to orient them on the protection of girls and continued provision of sexual and reproductive health services, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response amidst the drought emergency affecting the country.

The meetings were aimed at addressing the pressing concerns that arise during humanitarian crises like droughts, where accessing maternal health services may not be a priority for communities struggling to survive

Traditional leaders, who play a vital role in shaping cultural norms and influencing community behaviors, were urged to support the continued provision of essential SRH services, including maternal health care, family planning, and GBV prevention and response.

Leonard Zulu, UNFPA Programme Analyst (GAPS) in Southern Province called on the traditional leaders to use their significant influence and authority to protect the well being of the girl child during the drought.

Zulu noted that the risk of gender-based violence increases during times of drought, with girls facing heightened early marriages and teenage pregnancies. He emphasized that traditional leaders are crucial in addressing these issues, as they enjoy the trust and respect of their communities.



Saving lives in humanitarian crises through comprehensive training

UNFPA trained various stakeholders involved in drought response on how to provide critical reproductive health services during emergencies. This training aimed to enhance their capacity to respond to crises and ensure that essential health services, particularly for women and girls, continue uninterrupted

This training equips health service providers and staff with practical skills and tools to support women and girls affected by droughts and other emergencies. Participants will learn how to identify and respond to sexual and physical violence, and provide referrals for support. They will also learn cholera prevention and treatment strategies, and how to promote healthy practices in emergency settings.

The Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) training took a crucial step forward in protecting girls' rights in Zambia. We integrated awareness of the new Marriage Act, which raises the minimum age for all marriages - including customary ones - to 18 years. This groundbreaking law also criminalizes child marriage, making it punishable by law.

The collaboration between government entities, NGOs, and UNFPA highlights the importance of a multi-sectoral approach in addressing humanitarian challenges. By working together, stakeholders can ensure a more effective and coordinated response, ultimately benefiting communities across the region.

"There is need to increase sensitization and advocacy for the welfare of girls and young people in our communities. It is also important to ensure that this work is all inclusive and involves all stakeholders, including the parents."

Chief Choongo - Monze District



Government and Partners Call for Strengthened Efforts to End Maternal and Neonatal deaths



May, 2024

In May 2024, UNFPA Zambia working with sister UN agencies, UNICEF and WHO and other partners supported the Government of Zambia to host the first ever National Maternal and Newborn Health Summit.

The summit held under the theme, "Accelerating the Reduction of Maternal and Neonatal Deaths in Zambia through Multi-Sectoral Approach," focused on evaluating progress and developing strategies. Key challenges discussed included the "three delays" in care: delays in seeking care, reaching care, and receiving care.

Zambian Vice President Mutale Nalumango who was the key note speaker at the summit, expressed concern on over the high levels of maternal and neonatal deaths in the country, calling for concerted efforts to tackle the problem.

While acknowledging notable reductions in maternal and neonatal deaths over the years, the vice president said that current figures remain high and fall short of the national target to reduce deaths by 2026.

Maternal deaths in the country stand at 278 per 100,000 with the current estimate at 135 (in 2024) live births against the national target of less than 100, while neonatal mortality is at 27 per 1,000 live births against the national target of less than 12 per 1,000 live births, she said.

The vice president said the country needs to analyze the root causes of maternal and neonatal deaths apart from focusing on poor health services. She added that the government is committed to improving the health of citizens, especially mothers and their newborn babies, through various interventions in the health sector.

Beatrice Mutali, the United Nations resident coordinator in Zambia, called for more efforts to tackle the problem of maternal and neonatal health in Zambia, which remains high.

She said that preventive deaths continue due to limit access to affordable healthcare services, among other reasons, and expressed the UN's commitment to supporting the government in improving access to healthcare services, especially for vulnerable populations.

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Some commitments from the summit

- 1 **Improving data-driven decision-making and enhancing the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System.**
- 2 **Strengthening health supply chains and logistics**
- 3 **Integrating quality improvements in maternal and newborn health services,**
- 4 **Addressing human resource gaps**

The summit brought together technocrats in maternal and reproductive health, government and civic leaders, traditional leaders, members of the clergy, civil society and health service providers.

"Though there have been some improvements in maternal and neonatal health outcomes in recent years, the country is still far from achieving the 2022-2026 national health strategic plan targets. This is unacceptable for our country."

Her Honor. W.K. Mutale Nalumango
Republican Vice President



Zambia Launches Ending Child Marriage Policy Brief

June, 2024

The Government of the Republic of Zambia, with support from UNFPA, launched the Ending Child Marriage Policy Brief, aimed at contributing to the eradication of child marriages in Zambia. This brief was developed by the Population Council, with technical assistance from UNFPA, following the landmark amendment of the Marriage Act, which criminalized child marriage under all laws, including customary law.

The policy brief seeks to raise awareness about the prevalence and harmful effects of child marriage, foster collaboration among stakeholders, and galvanize national commitment to end the practice. Its ultimate goal is to empower adolescent girls and boys through access to education, reproductive health services, and social protection, thereby implementing sustainable solutions to prevent child marriage.



Zambia has a high prevalence of child marriage, with 29% of adolescent girls married by age 18, translating to 1.7 million girls, 400,000 married before age 15 and 29% of adolescent girls become pregnant by age 18. (2018)



"Ending child marriage, requires a collective and accelerated effort from the government, civil society organizations, communities, and individuals. No organization or sector can do it alone. That is why we are pleased by all the organizations represented here today. By collaborating and sharing our expertise, resources, and influence, we can achieve far more than we could alone."

Seth Broekman - UNFPA Zambia Country Representative

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UNFPA works with First Lady for Ending Adolescent Pregnancy Convention

March, 2024

Zambia's First Lady Mutinta Hichilema announced ending child marriage and adolescent pregnancy as her priority area for the year 2024. On 22nd March 2024, with the support of UNFPA and UNICEF, the first lady hosted a conference on ending early child marriage and adolescent pregnancy with stakeholders that included government officials, diplomats, traditional and religious leaders to launch her roadmap towards the cause.

The First Lady pledged her commitment to ensure girls have an opportunity to thrive and fulfill their potential. The First Lady also announced a mentorship programme for young boys and girls that will help them realize their full potential in life before thinking of marriage which should be considered when the time is right.

'Mrs. Hichilema emphasized the need for further investment in awareness campaigns that will challenge the harmful traditional practices and traditions and highlight the importance of delaying marriage until both parties are ready and willing.



"I implore each one of you to lend your support, whether it be through advocacy, education or mentorship. let us all envision Zambia where every child has the opportunity to dream, to learn and to thrive."

Mrs. Mutinta Hichilema
First Lady of the Republic
Zambia

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Ensuring a national tollfree helpline that helps to end child marriage in a drought context

July, 2024

Lifeline Childline Zambia which is the government mandated helpline operating two national toll-free lines 116 and 933, plays a pivotal role as a first point of contact for reporting, outreach and information-sharing mechanism, particularly in the fight to end child marriage in the context of drought-stricken areas of Eastern and Southern Provinces.



These regions face heightened vulnerabilities due to the compounded effects of poverty and environmental stressors, which can lead to increased rates of child marriage as a coping strategy

With technical and financial support from UNFPA, Lifeline Childline's community-based interventions include awareness campaigns, educational workshops, and collaboration with local leaders to promote understanding of the newly amended Marriage Act No. 13 of 2023, which sets the minimum age of marriage.

By educating communities about the legal age of marriage and the associated legal protections, Lifeline Childline helps to safeguard the rights of girls and boys, ensuring they have the opportunity to pursue education and development free from the threat of early marriage.

Since May 2024, Lifeline Childline Zambia has reached 15,866 individuals through its helpline as a direct result of its outreach activities with funding from UNFPA. The efficacy of Lifeline Childline's toll-free helplines in disseminating information about legal frameworks and accessing services cannot be overstated.

These helplines serve as critical conduits for reporting cases of child marriages, real-time information sharing, allowing individuals to seek advice and receive referrals to essential services. In the context of drought, where mobility and access to information can be severely limited, the toll-free lines provide an accessible and reliable source of support available for 24 hours allowing flexibility in reporting.

By offering confidential and immediate assistance, Lifeline Childline ensures that the public, especially vulnerable populations, are fully informed about their rights and the available resources, thereby empowering them to make informed decisions and seek necessary interventions.

Moreover, Lifeline Childline Zambia has assisted 16,506 callers on drought related GBV matters, highlighting the integration of psycho-social support through its outreach initiatives and toll-free services, which enhances the overall impact of its efforts to end child marriage.

In times of drought, stress levels within communities rise, exacerbating social issues and increasing the risk of early marriage as a perceived solution.

By providing comprehensive support that includes both legal information and psycho-social counselling, Lifeline/Childline addresses the root causes and immediate impacts of child marriage. This holistic approach not only aids in preventing child marriages but also supports the emotional and psychological well-being of children and their families, fostering resilient communities better equipped to handle the challenges posed by drought and other crises.



Double click to watch video of UNFPA work with Lifeline/Childline supported by the Government of Finland

Drought response and broader resilience building include action against hunger and prioritisation of nutrition, SRH, HIV and GBV requires collaborative strategies to ensure more holistic support to women, men, and youth.

Anna Holmstrom
UNFPA Deputy Country Representative





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