

ADVOCACY FOR THE PREVENTION OF UNSAFE ABORTION IN ZAMBIA



About the Project

The international Advocacy for Safe Abortion Project was implemented with national societies of obstetricians and gynaecologists in Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Panama, Peru, Uganda and Zambia from April 2019 to March 2022. In Zambia, the project was guided by the Zambia Association of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians (ZAGO). This summary of main activities and key achievements per pathway of change draws from the findings of the mixed-methods project evaluation.¹

Pathway 1: A Strengthened ZAGO

- Stakeholders who received training from FIGO and other experts to improve their knowledge and skills around advocacy and communication, social media, finance, monitoring & evaluation, research and fundraising felt a strong improvement in their knowledge and skills, while the project also provided space to operationalize various policies and systems that strengthened ZAGO as an organization.
- ZAGO established a secretariat and developed several new governance documents during the project, such as a communication and advocacy strategy, ZAGO constitution and operational manuals. ZAGO also strengthened its (social) media engagement and disseminated a position paper on abortion
- A majority of the surveyed gynaecologists felt that ZAGO's leadership role in sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) had strengthened, and they rated ZAGO's communication on various aspects, including on its position on abortion, as good or excellent. They indicated ZAGO played a role in the advocacy of safe abortion, and facilitated its members in advocacy
- The presence of a strong, supportive leadership was identified as an important factor to operationalize the project and strengthen ZAGO's role in advocacy.

Five strategic pathways of change:

1. To strengthen the management and organizational capacities of ZAGO
2. To establish or strengthen a coordinated network with like-minded stakeholders and health system partners to advocate safe abortion and improved access to Comprehensive Abortion Care (CAC)
3. To create increased acceptance of safe abortion among health workers, policymakers and the general population
4. To ensure communication and sensitization about Zambia legal frameworks and guidelines on safe abortion
5. To advocate better generation and use of evidence on abortion in Zambia.

Overview of Advocacy Results

Pathways 2–5 focused on achieving change through advocacy. Activities and results for each pathway influenced each other. Activities to increase awareness resulted in strong collaborations and vice versa.

Pathway 2: Strengthened networks

- Strengthened collaboration with youth, media and chiefs supported these groups to take leadership in advocating safe abortion, contributing to a wider reach for ZAGO. Youth groups in various provinces for instance started activities to support the advocacy for safe services and chiefs began to raise awareness in their communities. Media houses increasingly report on abortion-related stories
- Multi-stakeholder engagement and the provision of platforms for advocacy, such as ZAGO's Safe Choices campaign, contributed to amplified messages and spaces for building collaboration among different stakeholders

1. KIT Royal Tropical Institute (2022). Advocacy for the prevention of unsafe abortion, Zambia final evaluation report.

Main social actors who demonstrated change



- Collaborations with representative bodies of other professional cadres, such as the Midwives Association of Zambia, medical licentiates and clinical officers, helped to increase awareness raising of SRHR issues, including safe abortion, among other health workers, and also the visibility and recognition of ZAGO
- Increased visibility of ZAGO led to strengthened collaboration with Ministry of Health.

“What I can say is that ZAGO has really helped us because sometimes the youths would go elsewhere instead of going to the clinics, but due to the information we give, things are better.”

– Youth, Copperbelt

Pathway 3: Increased acceptance for safe abortion

Sensitization sessions, with elements of value clarification and attitude transformation, legal sensitization and sharing of ZAGO generated evidence, were key in creating increased acceptance among various stakeholder groups. Some examples:

- Health workers begin to change their approach and attitude when providing abortion services to young people
- Youths increase the demand for improved access to safe abortion services facilities
- Marriage counsellors start to integrate the topic of abortion in their counselling
- Traditional healers begin to refer clients seeking abortion medicines to the health facilities.

- Nurse tutors incorporate the teaching of CAC into the training of nurses after orientation
- Ministry of Health facilities improve access to comprehensive abortion care services
- Secondary school teachers demonstrate awareness of the importance of safe abortion and SRHR education in counselling their pupils

“We have seen an increase in the number of women and girls that are able to access safe abortion care services. Initially, we used to see a lot of clients who reported with complications from abortion compared to those that came for abortion care services so there is a change in the trend. The other thing is that we are seeing more and more of the healthcare providers becoming more open in terms of discussing abortion care services and also the provision of abortion care.”

– Healthcare worker, Ministry of Health

Pathway 4: Communication and sensitization about legal frameworks and guidelines

Various stakeholders confirmed that the integration of legal education in ZAGO’s training was key for the improved understanding of legal rights and was seen as an essential step contributing to an increased acceptance of abortion, as it encouraged stakeholders, including service providers, to believe that what they did was within the law.

- Health workers, marriage counsellors, teachers, police officers and youths demonstrate increased awareness on the legalities of safe abortion and share new knowledge with their communities

Key Project Outputs in Zambia

6  Joint network activities


5  Advocacy activities that made use of research findings

4  Research studies completed

51  Nurse tutors trained

8  VCAT Training of Trainers with tutors of 8 nursing schools

21  Workshops with elements of VCAT, legal sensitization and evidence sharing

682  Participants in workshops

Type of participants

Health care workers, judiciary officers, journalists, parliamentarians, traditional healers, chiefs and marriage counsellors

26  Dialogues with youth groups

Type of participants

Young people (101 in total)

- Police officers change their approach in handling cases of abortion
- Members of Parliament pledged support for the advocacy of comprehensive sexuality education, including SRHR and safe abortion services.

“And the issue of legal framework now came in, how they get protection, especially from us, who deal with law. We used to regard that it was an offence, we didn’t know, we used to take people to court because they have aborted but when ZAGO came in, they taught us that actually it’s not illegal, you can terminate the pregnancy if you don’t want it.”

– Police officer, southern province

Pathway 5: Generation and use of evidence

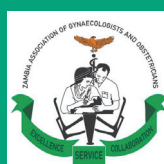
- ZAGO produced various research papers and has used in its advocacy the evidence it has generated for media communication and training activities, to increase the acceptance of safe abortion
- Throughout the project, ZAGO used monitoring and evidence on what happened in the field to inform its project activities.

A future for safe abortion

ZAGO’s approach to reaching and sensitizing a wide group of stakeholders and its strong engagement of the community was felt to be of importance to sustain and cascade widespread knowledge on the legal framework and the importance of comprehensive abortion care. Many stakeholders in the community were imparted with knowledge on safe abortion and the dangers of unsafe abortion. However, cultural practices, including social stigmatization, were identified as possible threats to the sustainability of the project. Transforming enshrined practices requires long-term effort and funding.

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