

# Linking Policy to Programming

## Reducing HIV risk and improving sexual and reproductive health of young key populations in the Southern African Development Community

In the Southern African Development Community (SADC), young sex workers, men who have sex with men, people who use drugs, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people and young people in prisons – or ‘young key populations’ – experience challenges in accessing HIV and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services.

This is due to several interrelated factors, including restrictive political and legal environments such as age specific laws and policies that limit equitable access to important services such as HIV testing, contraceptives, abortion and pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP and PEP). Lack of youth-friendly SRH services in health facilities, schools and prisons as well as limited capacity of service providers and a lack of data and information on these

vulnerable groups also continue to pose challenges.

There is also limited capacity of young key populations to claim their rights to access SRH services, and to participate in decision-making spaces and policy reform processes.

The Linking Policy to Programming project seeks to improve SRH outcomes for young key populations in the SADC countries of Angola, Madagascar, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The project is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in partnership with the African Men for Sexual Health and Rights (AMSHer), and the Health Economics and HIV and AIDS Research Division (HEARD) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, with support from the Government of the Netherlands.

## Achievements

### Bringing the voices of young people to the forefront

A movement is emerging of young African advocates who engage in different spaces (national and regional) to claim their rights, space and ensure their voices are heard in policy making and interventions that affect them. The project is supporting the participation of young key populations in regional and international platforms, including the Annual SADC National AIDS Council Directors Meeting, the Africa Key Populations Experts Group Meeting, the Pan African ILGA Conference, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Annual Meeting, the International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa, and through interactions with the UN Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

### Improving capacity of young key populations

The project is working to improve capacity of young key populations and groups to effectively advocate for their HIV and SRH-related human rights. In the 5 countries, 15 skills-building trainings were organized with more than 270 people. National advocacy working groups have been established and are operational to engage with national institutions and policy processes on rights and access to HIV and SRH services.

With the support of the project, two new young key populations groups have been formed in Zambia – Zambia Intersex Society, and Decisive Minds.



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## Generating new strategic information

National Legal Environment Assessments have been completed for Angola, Madagascar, Zambia and Zimbabwe to assist governments, civil society and other stakeholders to develop evidence-informed policy and strategy, to review and reform laws and policies based on human rights considerations, and to support increased capacity to achieve enabling legal environments for effective HIV responses. Stemming from these, National Action Plans were also developed to implement the recommendations of the LEAs by different stakeholders.

HEARD produced baseline reports on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young key populations in each country and is currently conducting country-specific operational research around topics such as young sex workers' vulnerabilities, mental health issues in young men who have sex with men and structural drivers of discrimination and exclusion. Research findings contribute to the scant literature from the region on key populations between the ages of 15 to 24 years.

In addition, civil society engagement scans in health policy and law have been completed for all five project countries and are vital tools for civil society organizations (CSOs) working on HIV and sexual and reproductive rights to plan, strategically engage in and advocate for legal and policy reform and action where gaps and challenges have been identified.

A 'score card', adapted from an existing WHO tool, that measures countries' progress on national targets on HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care for young key populations has been developed by AMSHeR and piloted in Zimbabwe.

## Strengthening regional mechanisms

As part of efforts to strengthen the capacity and leadership of the SADC to support member states to put in place and implement legal, policy and strategy environments that respect the rights of young key populations, the project has supported development and implementation of a Regional Strategy for HIV Prevention, Treatment and Care and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights among Key Populations. Annual progress reports are produced and presented to the SADC National AIDS Council Directors and the Health Ministers Meeting.

The project also supported successful efforts to integrate the issues of young key populations into the SADC parliamentary Minimum Standards for the protection of key populations in the context of HIV. The Minimum Standards were developed based on international good practices and customized to the Southern African region, and act as a guiding resource for parliaments as they enact legislation relating to key populations.

## Country highlights

### Removing legal barriers and enforcing enabling laws

- Same-sex relationships in Angola were decriminalized in 2019.
- A Bill for reducing the age of consent for SRH services has been tabled in Zimbabwe.
- A review of the law on premature union has been initiated in Mozambique and Zimbabwe.
- Enforcement of a law protecting sex workers from police violence has been supported through capacity building and sensitization of law enforcement officers in Madagascar.

### Creating enabling policies and strategies

- Attention to young key populations's specific needs was integrated into the training curricula of health workers in Zimbabwe.
- Prison reforms were undertaken in Madagascar for young inmates to access HIV and sexual and reproductive health and rights services.
- Draft guidelines have been initiated on the holistic management of transgender and intersex people by the Ministry of Health in Zambia.
- Integration of key populations issues in police training curricula in Zambia, Mozambique and Madagascar.
- Increased opportunities for evidence-based policy and programming through the engagement and capacity strengthening of in-country academia in carrying out and disseminating research on under-researched and hard-to-reach groups.

### For more information:

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