

A CHANGE OF DIRECTION FOR THE PROJECT



We started our Family Planning and Sexual Health project in 2017 with the aim of understanding the views within the community surrounding family planning, relationships and other relating topics. Once we had a baseline of knowledge, the project focused on delivering Family Planning, Sexual Health and Life Skills education - and particularly ensuring women could make informed choices about contraception.

Originally led by Khumbo Mphande, a nurse midwife, and Watson Chirwa, a health worker, Rebecca Manda joined the team in 2022, and in 2025, Ben Banda took over from Watson who was promoted to Education Coordinator.

However, despite an educational and informative nine years, we are changing direction partially due to a lack of funding but also because it is clear to Ripple Africa that whilst we have been able to engage at local level, it is a complex project that requires more specialist staff than we are able to provide in the various Districts where we operate in Malawi. Therefore, we have decided to merge part of this project with the Menstrual Cup project.

Rebecca, who is also one of our trained menstrual cup coordinators, will take the opportunity during menstrual cup training and follow up sessions to discuss female health issues with those attending. We hope to continue providing a safe space where girls and women feel comfortable asking questions and seeking advice.

In addition, we hope to continue providing Life Skills lessons to pupils in Standard 5 to 8 at the primary schools where we are introducing menstrual cups. This report is a summary of the work that we have carried out and the achievements made during the lifespan of the project.



We have worked with 4,500 adults on average each year through village banks, Under Five Clinics, women and men's groups, and sports clubs. In addition, we have met with individuals and couples who were interested in understanding more about relationships, family planning methods and sexual health.

One exemplary member of the community that we worked with is Andrea. He opened a small shop when he was 24 and was encouraging his girlfriend to finish her education before they considered marriage. Andrea was also encouraging other young men in his village to attend project meetings and he did this by opening a bao game outside his shop. He said, "People need to understand that they can take responsibility for the number of children they have and learn that by having fewer children, they can provide them with the clothes, food and education they need."



ANDREA



BAO GAME



TIYESIYEPU WOMEN'S GROUP



GRACE

A women's group that has been passionate about the project since the start is Tiyesiyepu Women's Group. They met with our team each month to listen and share information on topics they wished to cover. One member, Ruth, said, "Meeting together gives us the chance to talk about issues within our community and come up with solutions, and we learn from each other too. Our group also encourages us to save money so that we have it for farming and school fees for our children."

Another lady we met was now actively planning her family to make sure she can afford to support her children. Grace, now 24, finished school in 2013 and was pregnant within a year. She and her husband really want another child but are choosing to wait until 2028 due to their financial situation. They earn money by farming and doing piecework.

We are proud to have provided these individuals, and many more in our community, with the knowledge to make informed decisions, and despite our focus changing, our menstrual cup sessions will continue to be a safe space to have these important conversations.

Watson said, "Generally in rural areas, women have been sidelined and are not involved in decision making which we believe is slowing development in Malawi. During our meetings we take time to listen to them, we ask questions about their relationships, and encourage them to begin talking with their husbands with the idea that the husbands will be keen to engage with us to learn more."

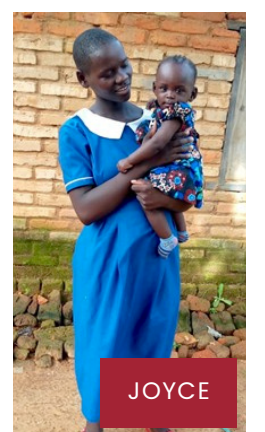
These sessions have also been important to provide accurate information or disperse myths as over the years we have heard many untrue statements and been asked many questions including 'Are condoms are a cause of cancer?', and 'Is it true that bathing after having sex can protect you from HIV and is a family planning method?'

In the first few years of the project we were also able to track the uptake of different contraceptive methods. Whilst we have been unable to access data for the past few years since the pandemic, we hear more and more from the women we meet that they are accessing contraceptives, more especially the monthly Depo-Provera injection, and three and five year implants.

We supported Life Skills lessons at 12 primary and secondary schools, reaching some 3,000 students yearly and in 2021 the slogan *Success is my dream* became the focus for our school sessions following the drop out of girls from school during COVID-19.

Joyce was one of the girls behind the slogan. She got pregnant during the time that schools were closed and ordinarily, she would not have been allowed to return after having their baby, but the Ministry of Education made an exception for those in their final year of primary or secondary school so that they could sit their leavers examination.

Although given this lifeline, many of these girls felt uncomfortable about returning because they feared their peers would laugh at them. We worked closely with individuals and their families and supported girls like Joyce in their return to school.



We also engaged with around 5,000 young people at sport and youth clubs, and throughout the project we worked with teachers and parents to provide them with knowledge and understanding of the challenges facing their young people.

Questions and statements raised by adults were often discussed with the younger members of the community to ensure that they too were equipped with the correct knowledge as often it is an aunt or elder that is passing on inaccurate information, beliefs and traditions.

During Q&A sessions our team would take the opportunity to talk about the consequences of casual and unprotected sex including unplanned pregnancies, HIV and other STIs. Typically we would engage youngsters through games and activities to show for example, how easily HIV can be spread. Whilst the activities are fun, they are also memorable, and have played an important role in making sure these youngsters understand to take precautions to protect themselves and prospective partners.



Over the years we have welcomed some wonderful medical volunteers who have worked closely with the project team and shared ideas and suggestions including the creation of new interactive games and workshops to engage beneficiaries.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported this project including donors, volunteers, and of course, our dedicated team in Malawi. The success of this project at local level led us to trialling the menstrual cup project and we are excited to see how that project develops in the future.