

# IPAS MALAWI: 2019-2023 STRATEGIC PLAN

## UNSAFE ABORTION IN MALAWI

Malawi has one of the world's highest maternal death rates, and unsafe abortion is a leading cause, accounting for up to 18% of maternal deaths each year. Though abortion is not illegal, it is restricted: The only legal exception is for abortion performed to save a woman's life. Harmful social norms reinforce the restrictive legal environment and intensify fear and stigma around abortion.

Malawi has committed to reducing maternal mortality in its national health policy, *Towards Universal Health Coverage*, which seeks to reduce maternal mortality. Its *National SRHR Policy 2017-2022* seeks to attain comprehensive, integrated sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services to improve the quality of life for all. This commitment was reaffirmed at the Nairobi Summit marking the 25th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 2019.

## IPAS IN MALAWI

Since 2005, Ipas Malawi has worked in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and other partners—including government ministries at national, district and community levels; civil society organizations; and community stakeholders—to improve treatment for abortion-related complications at public health facilities. We have worked to build an advocacy movement that includes broad-based support for improved access to safe abortion care and law reform.

In 2009, Ipas Malawi collaborated with the Ministry of Health and Population and the World Health Organization to conduct a national strategic assessment of abortion. Informed by the findings, in 2010 Ipas helped establish the Coalition for Prevention of Unsafe Abortion (COPUA), which educates the public on unsafe abortion and builds grassroots momentum for law reform. COPUA's members include community-based organizations (CBOs), youth-focused non-governmental organizations, policymakers and traditional leaders.

## IPAS MALAWI'S 2019-2023 STRATEGIC PLAN

Ipas Malawi's strategic plan, *Towards Woman-Centered Sexual and Reproductive Health and*



*Rights Interventions*, reflects three interconnected pillars: **policy, health systems strengthening** and **community engagement**. We aim to expand our collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Population and the private sector to increase women's access to postabortion care (PAC) and contraceptive services. We plan to train health-care providers, support commodity and equipment supplies, and upgrade facilities to ensure safe services. This effort will leverage our ongoing work with the Ministry of Health and Population on the development standards and guidelines for PAC that are in the approval process. It builds on a 2011 intervention in which Ipas Malawi supported the MOH to strengthen PAC provision at 36 public health facilities.

Our health systems, policy and community engagement work will focus on the following districts: Karonga, Mzimba South, Kasungu, Salima, Lilongwe, Mulanje, Mangochi, Chikwawa and Blantyre.

## POLICY

Ipas Malawi will bring renewed focus to policy efforts and partnerships at the local and district levels.

As part of our policy work, Ipas Malawi will:

- Engage stakeholders to reduce abortion stigma and encourage open conversation and social behavior change around sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and galvanize support for law reform;
- Advocate for the Termination of Pregnancy Bill's enactment in Parliament and promote other policies that advance universal access to SRHR;
- Work with ministries and institutions to realize SRHR, as highlighted by Malawi's Gender Equality

Act and international human rights instruments to which Malawi is a party;

- Continue to support COPUA, including by helping to build members' ability to be vibrant change agents at the grassroots level;
- Build cross-movement alliances that tackle other barriers to SRHR access like child marriage, gender-based violence (GBV), migration and disability.

## HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING

In 2019, Ipas undertook a needs assessment, which revealed that there are few operational manual vacuum aspiration (MVA) sites at the health-center level. Most cases are handled at district hospitals, which can lead to congestion and delay in patients receiving care. And most providers are not confident providing MVA. The assessment showed the need for a strengthened health system to provide easier access to care for patients and reduce the burden at referral hospitals.

As part of our health systems work, Ipas Malawi will:

- Collaborate with the MOH, professional bodies and the private sector to provide comprehensive PAC;
- Empower people and communities with SRH information;
- Partner with organizations to provide training to health personnel; youth-friendly services; PAC commodities, supplies, equipment and infrastructure;
- Support analysis of the government of Malawi's budget to ensure that appropriate allocations are made to finance SRH and work with parliamentary members and other non-governmental and international non-governmental organizations.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Young people can lack SRHR information and knowledge because of limited social support, reluctance by parents and teachers to share information, and myths and misconceptions perpetuated by peers. Stigma associated with young unmarried women's sexuality, GBV and power dynamics are barriers to contraception access and use.

Communities are at the center of our strategy. As part of our community engagement work, Ipas will:

- Work with partners to include comprehensive sexual education in the life skills curriculum already provided in schools;
- Engage national and grassroots organizations to expand community engagement reach;
- Train adolescent girls and young women as SRHR advocates and mentor CBOs in SRHR advocacy;
- Support communities to address low knowledge on prevention of unwanted pregnancies, delays in seeking health care, and harmful cultural and social norms.

## IPAS MALAWI: OTHER PRIORITIES

Ipas Malawi intends to work with the government and communities to ensure the provision of comprehensive abortion and contraceptive care in humanitarian crises. Ipas Malawi will combine local knowledge with our global expertise to provide on-the-ground technical assistance that prepares humanitarian agencies to provide safe abortion and contraceptive care. Ipas will mainstream gender transformative programming to start tackling structural challenges and harmful gender and power dynamics, like GBV, that women face.

Ipas Malawi will uphold its value of collaboration and will continue convening partners to support the government in implementing its SRHR strategies to realize our shared goals.