



PZAT

PANGAEA ZIMBABWE
AIDS TRUST

Newsletter Issue 07

“
We are your
HIV
Prevention
Champions
”



In this month's edition:

- The work of CASPR HIV prevention champions.
- Increasing HIV prevention options for women.
- Big up to SFAZ! Hub.
- DREAMS activities in pictures.
- Low male engagement affecting women's access to healthcare services.
- "Disclosure was my key"- testimony from Oral PrEP client in Mazowe



PZAT trains HIV prevention champions in tertiary institutions

In 2021, PZAT in collaboration with SAYWHAT conducted trainings with Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) from seven tertiary institutions, namely the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), Midlands State University (MSU), Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE), Joshua Nkomo Polytechnical college, Masvingo Polytechnic college, and Hillside Teachers' college on the available PrEP options.

Two models were used for the trainings namely the HIVE model and the Peer Support model. The HIVE model is meant to increase reach to AGYW while creating a strong base for HIV prevention and SRH services among AGYW. The Peer Support model is based on a shared experience of health experiences of the AGYW to encourage and support the use of the available PrEP options. UZ and MSU were selected to use the HIVE model, whilst GZU, BUSE, Joshua Nkomo Polytechnic college, Masvingo Poly, and Hillside Teachers college. Each of these universities has two HIVEs with two AGYW leaders.

The objectives of the trainings were to raise awareness of available HIV prevention options, those in the pipeline, and sexual and reproductive health issues.



MSU HIV prevention Champion showcasing the Dapivirine Ring

Moreover, the trainings sought to create demand for Oral PrEP and promote informed decisions in the use of available HIV prevention options.

From these trainings, PZAT identified and trained 35 HIV prevention champions who have been working in their various institutions raising awareness of the availability and accessibility of PrEP options since March 2022. The prevention champions are currently receiving training and ongoing support from PZAT to enable them to sensitize their peers with correct and accurate information on HIV prevention options.



MSU HIV prevention champions

Since April 2022, the prevention champions have been using the two models to conduct dialogues, discussions, and outreaches to raise awareness on HIV prevention and SRH issues. From the activities that have been carried out, the champions identified barriers to Oral PrEP demand.

Lack of youth-friendly services and negative attitudes by health care workers at local health facilities, lack of information on HIV prevention options, and negative attitudes towards the use of HIV prevention methods by male partners and community, at large,

are some of the main barriers to accessing HIV prevention methods.

One prevention champion reported that “As prevention champions with the support of the PZAT team, we have managed to engage AGYW in our various institutions, sensitizing them about how the different PrEP methods work as HIV prevention methods”

“Our role is to push forward the knowledge we have attained through the trainings and workshops to other AGYW. We aim to move towards achieving zero new HIV infections”.



GZU and Masvingo Poly HIV prevention champions



Increasing the HIV prevention choices for women: Spotlight on the MATRIX project

There is a need to address the unmet needs of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) in sub-Saharan Africa to promote usage, accessibility, and availability of HIV prevention options. AGYW in sub-Saharan Africa is among the vulnerable groups in society at risk of HIV.

A [survey](#) conducted by the Zimbabwe Population-based HIV Impact Assessment (ZIMPHIA) in 2020 indicated HIV prevalence was higher among women than men [15.3 percent versus 10.2 percent]. In 2020, an estimated 4,200 young women aged 15 –24 years became infected with HIV each week.

Adolescent girls aged 10-19 years accounted for the majority of these new cases. The gender disparities are most acutely felt by adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa, where six in seven new HIV infections among adolescents aged 15-19 years occur among girls. Girls and young women in affected communities would benefit from the aggressive scale-up of user-powered prevention methods, alongside a transformation in community norms to enable their empowerment [HIV in Adolescence | Children & AIDS \(childrenandaids.org\)](#).

The MATRIX project seeks to develop a range of HIV prevention products that are acceptable, affordable, scalable, and deliverable by providing a platform for efficient benchmark-driven portfolio management. The project seeks to incorporate the end user's perspective early in product development by providing rapid feedback to ensure that products being developed are acceptable among the AGYW in sub-Saharan Africa.

Find more of what PZAT, as a member of the MATRIX Consortium is doing [here](#).



“It’s our own safe space”- Big Up to SHAZ! Hub

Despite the progress made in the past 10 years, in reducing HIV infections among adolescents and young people (15–24 years), the world is still behind in achieving the targets set for young people. Two out of every seven new HIV infections globally in 2019 were among young people (15–24 years).

Additional efforts need to be made to address the structural factors that increase the vulnerability of adolescent girls, young women, and young key populations and their risk of acquiring HIV, such as gender inequalities, gender-based violence, poverty, stigma and discrimination, and insufficient implementation of comprehensive sexuality education programmes (<https://bit.ly/3zwEACC>).

UNICEF HIV/AIDS statistics have revealed that 1/3 of all new HIV infections in Zimbabwe are in AYP (15– 24 years) (<https://uni.cf/3yN54lf>). The goal to end HIV 2030 is achievable when policies include promoting access to SRH services

by AYP and sensitizing communities on the need to address these barriers for a positive direction toward zero new HIV infections, zero HIV-related deaths, and zero discrimination by 2030.

In light of this, PZAT through the Shaping the Health of Adolescents in Zimbabwe (SHAZ! Hub) conducted consultations with AYP to understand what they propose for AYP to have access to SRH services.

Community outreaches were highlighted as vital means to reach out to AYP. Community mapping exercises were carried out by the



SHAZ! Hub team explaining services offered at SHAZ! Hub to client



AYP accessing services

Community outreaches were highlighted as vital means to reach out to AYP. Community mapping exercises were carried out by the SHAZ! Hub team who identified areas, where AYP hangs around. The plan was to go and interact with these young people and give them information on the services being offered at the SHAZ! Hub.

The team during community outreaches has been distributing fliers that reflected on what the SHAZ! Hub,

as a youth drop-in center, focuses on as well as carrying out SRH services such as HIV testing and Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) initiation.



Adolescents and Young People (AYP) have applauded the community outreach activities that are currently being conducted in Chitungwiza by the SHAZ! Hub team. They showed gratitude in the effort of trying to reach out to other AYP who are afraid of accessing sexual and reproductive health services within the local health facilities due to stigma and discrimination.

"It is our own safe space where we get to access services without fear of being stigmatized or judged. Reaching out to the community and raising awareness of such spaces is very important to us as young people in the community as this creates awareness that we have our own space to freely access SRH services. We applaud the good work".

They highlighted that most of their peers are contracting sexually transmitted infections because they fear going to get treated because of social norms that condemn and crucify young people for being sexually active. Safe spaces such as the SHAZ! Hub have been commended as paving a way toward winning the first against HIV among young people in Zimbabwe.

Upcoming...



DREAMS activities in pictures



*Young Women Selling Sex (YWSS) at Mbowane Safe Space
in Tsholotsho District during Centre for Disease Control
Field Visit*



*DREAMS Adolescent Girls and Young Women Enhanced
Economic Strengthening selection interviews using Computer
Aided Technology (CAPI) in Tsholotsho District.*

Lack of male engagement negatively influences women's access to healthcare services.

Lack of direct effort to engage men in health programs was cited as one of the major reasons hindering access to health services by women. Whilst the female counterparts are almost fully informed, men are generally lagging behind in terms of knowledge regarding health matters. This was highlighted during the Gender Norms Transformation (GNT) trainings that were conducted in the Lupane district by the Wild4Life team. From the trainings, it highlighted that for GNT to be realized, men have to be part of these health programmes.

A training of trainers training was conducted in Jotsholo, Lupane district with support from AIDS Counselling Trust who straining two facilitators. 37 community leaders, from all spheres including traditional leadership, local



Community dialogue-Lupane

authority, influential figures, youth leadership, and male advocates for Padare/Inkundla attended the training.

During the training, men expressed their disdain for being left out of many programs, including the health programs. This neglect was emphasized as one major reason why men are failing to understand the importance of transforming gender values to support women's access to healthcare services. They attributed most of the challenges in an effort to promote GNT to males' lack of education that women receive in most health programmes.

From the interactions, men indicated the need for health programs delivered to them through the resuscitation of "Idale/Inkundla", a man-only meeting and guest facilitators on health and other issues. The leaders were not privy to the new laws on marriages, which gave the right to children to marry without consent from parents of cultural rights being followed. Men challenged each other on the need to educate young men to marry their age mates and avoid marrying adolescents and teenagers.

Following the trainers' training, 13 other key trainings were held across the health centres in the district to ensure information dissemination, community awareness, and participation through dialogue to promote male involvement in health issues regarding modern health needs and family health needs. 404 men and 472 women were reached by community GNT facilitators.



Community dialogue-Lupane

From these discussions, community leaders especially the headmen encouraged village heads to convene village meetings to discuss some roles men can play to build positive communities. Home deliveries were discussed strongly in all cascade meetings and families it was agreed that community leaders will set penalties for families who still promote home deliveries.

“Disclosure was my key...”said one PrEP user

During several PrEP adherence support group meetings held in Mazowe, most clients cited that they are hesitant to disclose to their partners that they are using oral PrEP. They stated fear of being stigmatized, being labelled as unfaithful or HIV positive, and worry that they would not receive support from their partners as their major reasons for failing to disclose to their partners.

One participant opened up and shared how she managed to adhere to oral PrEP since March 2022. She explained that she understood that to ensure that oral PrEP works effectively, she had to adhere to medication (that is taking medication as prescribed). She emphasized disclosure to her partner as her main key to PrEP adherence and continuation.

“Opening up to my partner about my oral PrEP journey and taking pills at the same time as my HIV-positive partner has helped ensure that I do not skip doses”.

She testified that PrEP keeps her safe and she vowed to continue taking the drug during her period of risk. Her testimony generated discussions among participants who took the opportunity to discuss different strategies to disclose to their partners about PrEP use and the vulnerabilities which motivated them to take PrEP.

Participants appreciated PrEP adherence support groups which helped them to understand the importance of disclosure in promoting adherence. Disclosure fosters a good support system.

These PrEP adherence support group meetings are routinely held in Mazowe with PrEP users, to foster peer support, fill in information gaps, clarify any myths and misconceptions and promote PrEP adherence and continuation. WhatsApp platforms led by PrEP Champions augment the support group concept and ensure that all PrEP-related questions are responded to in real-time. Clients on PrEP are mostly individuals in serodiscordant relationships and women in sexual relationships with men of unknown HIV status.



Belgownie clinic literacy session



Nyakudya clinic literacy session



Mazowe secondary sclinic literacy session

COVID-19 Prevention Champions: Strengthening community confidence in COVID-19 vaccines

Pangaea Zimbabwe AIDS Trust in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Child Care conducted a rapid assessment in 2021 to understand the motivators and barriers to taking the COVID-19 vaccine among vaccinated and unvaccinated participants in rural and urban settings.

- To understand and respond to vaccine hesitancy in Zimbabwe
- To address emerging myths and misconceptions around COVID-19 vaccines and vaccination.
- To document key messages about the COVID-19 vaccines.

Findings from the rapid assessment showed that there was 1) a lack of correct and accurate information and 2) a lot of misinformation, myths, and misconceptions about the COVID 19 vaccines among the community, members. This indicated a huge need to sensitize communities, using preferred and trusted sources of information within their communities. Such trusted sources of information include such as the MoHCC, health workers including community-based workers.

To respond to some of the gaps identified during the rapid assessment, PZAT identified and capacitated Prevention Champions 15 prevention champions from Harare, Mazowe, and Chitungwiza to promote vaccine literacy and advocate for the uptake of COVID-19 vaccines in rural and urban communities.

The aim of the training was to explain the role of a COVID-19 vaccine prevention champion to address the findings of the rapid assessment.

Role of prevention champions



Prevention Champions are individuals who are involved in community-based health activities

How Prevention Champions can contribute to a better understanding of the COVID-19 vaccine:

- By openly sharing their support for vaccination or personal experience of getting vaccinated. This helps to promote vaccination acceptance as a social norm in the community.
- Building trust by being supportive of anyone coming in for vaccination

who has questions or asks for your advice. They should listen to any concerns and communicate in a way that is respectful and builds trust.

- Dispelling myths and misconceptions by giving correct information.

The champions will be sensitizing communities about COVID-19 vaccines through dialogues and awareness campaigns.

- The champions will also document community concerns around the COVID-19 vaccination documenting what people would want to see during the COVID-19 vaccination.
- Concerns raised by the communities will inform future vaccine research, development, and roll-out.



“Be sure to share your perspectives with the champions as soon as you see them in your communities”



PZAT

PANGAEA ZIMBABWE
AIDS TRUST

**Pangaea envisions an environment in which
all human beings live healthy, productive,
and quality lives**

