

In February, 2002, the Minister of Health and Population, the Honourable Yusuf H. Mwawa, M.P., launched a new National Reproductive Health Programme. The purpose of the programme is to promote, through informed choice, safer reproductive health practices by men, women and young people, including increased use of high-quality, accessible reproductive health services. These reproductive health services are delivered through the public sector, CHAM facilities, non-governmental organisations, private providers, and others as a part of the nation's primary health care system. This brochure summarises the importance of reproductive health, describes the RH situation in the country, explains the components of the programme and describes how services are provided.

Reproductive Health

A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity in all matters related to the reproductive system and its functions and processes. (ICPD, 1994)

Why Is Reproductive Health Important?

The provision of high-quality, comprehensive and accessible reproductive health services is essential to the well-being of individuals and families. *Reproductive health* implies that people can have a satisfying and safe life, free from disease, and with the freedom to decide if, when, and how often to have children. It means that women, men and youth will have the knowledge,

the motivation, the access to services, and the commodities they need to make safe and responsible sexual decisions. High-quality and effective reproductive health services will:

- Help reduce infant and maternal mortality
- Promote choice, safety and equity in sexual decision making
- Prevent, treat and reduce sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV
- Reduce harmful practices and sexual violence
- Provide emergency obstetric and post-abortion care

Genesis of the Reproductive Health Programme

Malawi's Reproductive Health Programme builds upon the recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, Egypt, in 1994. Malawi, like other countries, adopted the ICPD's Programme of Action to guide the implementation of a comprehensive reproductive health programme. Guidance was also taken from the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China, in 1995. In 1997, the Government of Malawi decided to expand beyond family planning and to adopt a broader and more

comprehensive programme. It established a new Reproductive Health Unit within the Ministry of Health and Population to take responsibility for the new programme.

The Reproductive Health Situation in Malawi

The Reproductive Health Programme is designed to address a number of important health conditions of our population. According to recent surveys, the status of sexual and reproductive health of Malawians ranks among the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa. Among them are:

- High infant mortality — 104 deaths per 1000 live births
- High maternal mortality ratio — 1120 deaths per 100,000 live births
- High HIV/AIDS prevalence — 15% of adults 15 to 49 years old in 2001
- STIs — 6.3% of adults reported having an STI in the past 12 months
- High unmet need for family planning — 29.7%
- High total fertility rate — 6.3 children per woman
- Low modern contraceptive prevalence rate — 26%
- High rates of unwanted pregnancy, STIs, and HIV among adolescents
- Cervical, breast and prostate cancers
- Harmful practices and violence against women

Components of the Reproductive Health Programme

In order to address the health problems described above, the Reproductive Health Unit is implementing a comprehensive programme with the following components:

- Safe Motherhood — to provide quality pre-natal care, safe deliveries, post-natal care and related services
- Adolescent Reproductive Health — to ensure that youth acquire the knowledge and the

Reproductive Health Rights

... are the rights of all people to decide freely and responsibly on all aspects of their sexuality, including protecting and promoting their sexual and reproductive health; be free of discrimination, coercion or violence in their sexual lives and in all sexual decisions; and expect and demand equality, full consent, mutual respect and shared responsibility in sexual relationships. (International Women's Health Coalition, 1998)



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- friendly services they need as they enter into responsible adulthood
- Family Planning — so that infant and maternal mortality can be reduced and that all men and women can freely choose when to have children
- STI/HIV Prevention and Management — to prevent, detect and treat infections caused by STIs and HIV
- Cancer Screening and Treatment — to prevent, detect and treat cervical, breast and prostate cancers
- Harmful Practices and Violence — to reduce injury, disease and family breakdown

Programme Implementation

Reproductive health services are delivered as a part of the primary health care system of the Ministry of Health and Population. Clinical officers, nurses, midwives and community health workers are deployed at all levels of the health care system, and receive training, supervision and support from the Reproductive Health Unit. The Reproductive Health Unit and its collaborating partners provide pre-service and in-service training, drugs, supplies, equipment and technical supervision in support of the programme.

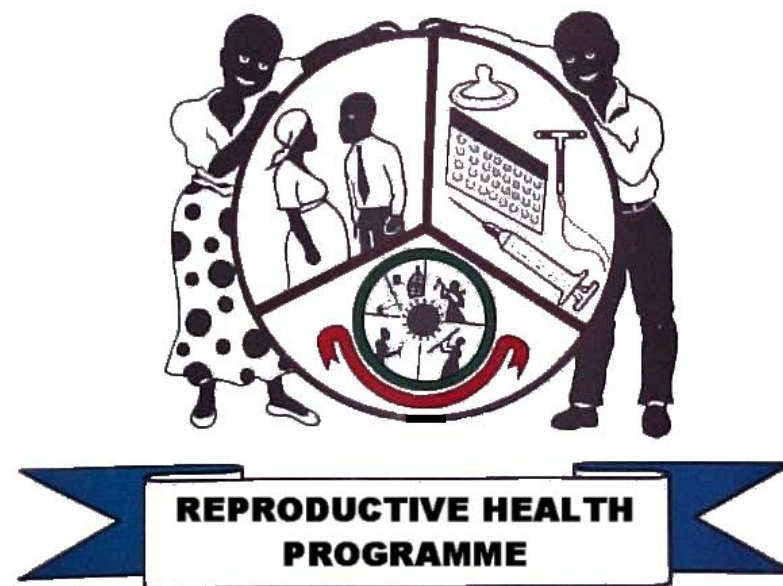
Summary

We must understand that reproductive health is a critical part of overall health. The problems that are caused when we do NOT have reproductive health---unintended pregnancies, illegal abortions, high levels of maternal mortality, rampant levels of sexually transmitted infection, HIV and AIDS, sexual exploitation and violence---are destructive of our social, emotional, and family well-being. Even though these are sensitive subjects, we must know that effective action is needed if we are to avoid problems that destroy our relationships and our families. We ask for your involvement and your support for a strong Reproductive Health Programme in Malawi.

For more information, contact:

Ministry of Health & Population Reproductive Health Unit
P.O. Box 30377
Lilongwe 3, Malawi
Telephone: 756-600
Facsimile: 756-869
E-mail: rhu@malawi.net

Malawi's National Reproductive Health Programme



To provide accessible, affordable and convenient comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services to all Malawian women, men and youth through informed choice in order to enable them to attain their reproductive health goals and rights