



# VOICE FOR YOUTH PROMOTING YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS



WE MUST TAKE UP OUR SEAT AT THE TABLE WHERE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS DECISIONS ARE BEING TAKEN

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people, who are in the majority, actively participating in activities addressing SRHR.

In 2020 the CCM held four trainings in Maputo in partnership with

## INTRODUCTION

In 2019, The Christian Council of Mozambique joined interfaith dialogues on sexual and reproductive health and rights and religion in Southern Africa. It co-created three interfaith briefs on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender-based violence (GBV) and teenage pregnancies.

The Christian Council in Mozambique (CCM) plays a major role in promoting gender justice in Mozambique. Having been formed in 1948 to promote ecumenism, the CCM has engaged in efforts to challenge the marginalisation of women in the country. Women are negotiating challenges such as low literacy levels, high HIV prevalence rate, and the higher ratio of women than men living below the poverty line. They also struggle against the challenges of polygamy, early marriage, low school enrolment and low school completion rate.<sup>1</sup> Having participated in the development of Interfaith Faith Advocacy Briefs on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in 2019, the CCM has been actively involved in responding to the challenges that women in Mozambique face. In particular, the CCM has placed the emphasis on having young



IT'S THE YOUNGEST TREE THAT  
MAKES UP THE FOREST

### AN AFRICAN PROVERB

civil society organizations to promote awareness of SRHR in the country, with particular reference to issues of teenage pregnancy and gender-based violence (GBV). Recognising the importance of collaboration, the CCM has worked with partners such as Bread for the World, Norwegian Church Aid and AMODEFA to extend its reach. For example, AMODEFA, which works in the HIV sector, built on its partnership with the CCM to network with community radio stations to spread SRHR information across the country. The CCM's

openness is informed by its commitment towards combining resources to address SRHR in Mozambique.

Inspired by the conviction that young people are leaders of today, and not just of tomorrow, the Council utilised the Interfaith Advocacy Briefs on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) to bring the youth to the centre of discussions on gender-based violence (GBV). Whereas the dominant trend has been to make SRHR decisions for young people without their active involvement, the Council sought to pursue a different path. The activities implemented by the CCM made young people the drivers of change in the SRHR sector in the country.



**YOUNG PEOPLE MUST BE GUIDED TO A LIFE THAT HONOURS THEIR YOUTH; A LIFE WHERE YOUNG GIRLS ARE NOT FORCED INTO PREMATURE MARRIAGE AND PARENTS ARE HELPED TO ALLOW GIRLS TO GET AN EDUCATION RATHER THAN USING THEM AS BARGAINING CHIPS DUE TO POVERTY**

**REVEREND JOAO DAMIAO ELIAS, GENERAL SECRETARY, MOZAMBIQUE CHRISTIAN COUNCIL**

## **BREAKING THE SILENCE THROUGH KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION**

Education will always be one of the most important tools in fighting ignorance and harmful practices. Teaching faith leaders about teenage pregnancy, GBV and access to SRHR information has gone a long way towards building their knowledge and making them more aware of the impact of their sermons and interpretation of scripture. The four inter-generational workshops and dialogues between the youth, religious and community leaders, facilitated discussions about stigma and discrimination and the mainstreaming of reproductive health issues in religious and community work. The impact of child marriages on the growth, development and education of the girl child was identified as a major challenge in Mozambique. Dialogues on harmful cultural and social practices included discussions about violence against women as 'sponsored by families' who always encourage women to 'tolerate' violence or abuse and not to 'expose' perpetrators. In some cultures in Mozambique, as soon as a girl starts her menses she is considered a woman and therefore ready for marriage regardless of how young she is at the time. The discussions helped to break the silence on issues often considered taboo, never to be spoken about and so-called family secrets.

The Council's efforts were hampered by limited resources but they managed to reach most of Maputo and its surrounds. Stigma and discrimination of the LGBTIQ+ community in Mozambique is also a challenge the council hopes to work on and eradicate.

## **PLACE AND VOICE AT THE TABLE**

The Interfaith Advocacy Briefs were well received by young people in Mozambique. They appreciated the fact that their voices were taken seriously and that their views on the issues they face carried weight. The Council recognised the importance of engaging young people on SRHR issues. In dialogues, it became apparent that



responding to teenage pregnancy, for example, requires the full and active involvement of young people.

The Council recognises that it is ineffective to come up with positions on SRHR issues that affect young people, without young people participating in the drafting of such positions. The opening up of spaces for dialogue was an important beginning and provides a start that has religious leaders and community members questioning what they have always believed to be true as part of tradition and culture.

Ultimately, real behavioural and attitudinal change will happen over time through established processes of intervention. The creation of these safe spaces enabled free respectful communication and conversation without fear of victimisation or discrimination.

## **GO WHERE THERE IS NO PATH AND LEAVE A TRAIL**

Going forward, the Council recommends further engagement with young people on SRHR using the Interfaith Advocacy Briefs. It is also expected that there will be more concerted efforts made towards empowerment and policies to protect the rights of the girl child, prevent child marriages, and help the youth to avoid teenage pregnancy. With young people leading, the CCM is looking forward to the future with hope.

## **REFERENCES**

1 [https://www.jica.go.jp/english/our\\_work/thematic\\_issues/gender/background/c8h0vm0000anj6-att/mozambique\\_2015.pdf](https://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/thematic_issues/gender/background/c8h0vm0000anj6-att/mozambique_2015.pdf)

ELCSA participated in a series of interfaith dialogues on women's rights and gender equality facilitated by the Faith to Action Network and ACT Ubumbano. On that occasion, 12 faith organizations from seven countries in Southern Africa declared, "We can no longer be silent as we are called to uphold human dignity for all creation." Coming from Bahai, Christian, Muslim and Traditionalist faiths, they developed three

Interfaith briefs on sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence and teenage pregnancy. They also identified opportunities to engage more effectively within their faith communities. Faith to Action Network and ACT Ubumbano supported their action plans through micro-grants and technical assistance, contributing to the inspiring results documented in this case study.

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