

ADVANCING ADVOCACY EFFORTS TO MEET THE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH NEEDS OF YOUTH IN ANGOLA

Angola has a high maternal mortality rate, a high infant mortality rate, and a low contraceptive prevalence rate when compared to other sub-Saharan African nations. Adolescents and youth in particular face disproportionately poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes. To address this, Pathfinder, in partnership with the Government of Angola and UNFPA, began implementing the USAID-funded Healthy Families II/Muiji Wa Disanze II project in March 2014. This project aimed to ensure availability and quality of adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health services and contraceptive security, at the central level and in Luanda Province, through advocacy.

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The USAID Family Planning program supports the Angolan Ministry of Health's goal of reducing maternal and child mortality. USAID key objectives remain to create demand for and to promote use of family planning as the main strategy to reduce maternal and child mortality, empower women, and improve women's economic status. Also at the core of USAID's work to advance family planning services is strengthening service delivery. USAID works in Angola with the full engagement of the Ministry of Health and other international and local partners.

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Background

In 2002, Angola emerged from a 27-year civil war that significantly impacted the country's infrastructure, economy, and public administration systems—particularly the health system. Despite the advances in overall health status in Angola, issues related to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) continue to be of concern. The maternal mortality ratio and infant mortality ratio remain high at 460 deaths per 100,000 live births¹ and 95 deaths per 1,000 live births² respectively, and women face a 1 in 39 lifetime risk of maternal death.³

Exacerbating the maternal and infant mortality ratios is a low contraceptive prevalence rate: 18 percent of women in Angola between the ages of 15 and 49 use contraception.⁴ Finally, Angola has a total fertility rate of 6.1 births per woman, one of the highest in the world.⁵ Nearly 50 percent of Angola's 24,383,301 million people are under 15 years of age, and 34 percent are between the ages of 10 and 24.⁶ These adolescents and youth face disproportionately poor SRH indicators when compared to their older counterparts. Socio-economic and cultural factors contribute to these poor SRH outcomes and in turn, these poor SRH outcomes contribute to Angola's high maternal mortality and infant mortality rates. Angola is a pro-natalist society, in which having a large family often suggests power or wealth. Further, women are viewed as ready to marry, not when they have reached a certain age, but rather when they have demonstrated their fertility.⁷ These trends contribute to low contraceptive prevalence among young women. For example, the contraceptive prevalence rate for modern methods among women aged 15 to 19 living in union is 12.4 percent. Meanwhile, the fertility rate for females between the ages of 15 and 19 is 146 per 1,000 births⁸ (see Table 1).

Having children at a young age carries serious risks for the health of young girls. Evidence suggests an increased risk of maternal death and disability. Opportunities for education, work force training, and livelihood development are also frequently curtailed for adolescent mothers.⁹ Delaying the first birth by ensuring adolescents have access to contraception can have an important positive effect on maternal morbidity and mortality, as well as Millennium Development Goal 5 (to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters between 1990 and 2015, and to achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015).



GPSL team and Pathfinder's Logistics Assistant at the provincial warehouse.

In response to the sexual and reproductive health needs in Angola, Pathfinder International's USAID-funded Healthy Families project (2012-2015) collaborated with the Angolan Ministry of Health to reposition family planning (FP) as a national strategy, with a goal of reducing maternal mortality across the country. Recognizing the importance of contraception for reaching this goal, Phase I of the Healthy Families project focused on creating an enabling environment for FP advocacy and contraceptive security. This phase strengthened the national commodity supply management system through an initial assessment of the supply chain, developing and distributing

TABLE 1: EPIDEMIOLOGICAL CONTEXT: ANGOLA

INDICATOR	ANGOLA	SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	GLOBAL
Percentage of population aged 10–24 years ¹⁰	34%	32%	25%
Contraceptive use among married women aged 15–49 ¹¹	18%	29%	63%
Fertility rate (live births per woman aged 15–49) ¹²	6.1	5.1	2.5
Adolescent fertility rate (live births per 1,000 women aged 15–19) ¹³	146	101	52
Maternal mortality ratio (maternal deaths per 100,000 live births) ¹⁴	460	510	21



Mothers waiting for family planning services at a health facility.

standardized tools for supply chain management, building local human resource capacity in contraceptive logistics best practices, and advocating for a system reoriented toward data-driven decision making.¹⁵

In 2014, the Healthy Families project assisted with drafting a National FP Strategy for the Ministry of Health outlining the ways the Government of Angola could advance its commitment to reducing maternal and infant morbidity and mortality in ways that maximize equity, effectiveness, and sustainability. One proposed approach for reaching this goal was to strategically implement a focus on adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health (AYSRH) within a comprehensive FP strategic framework. Phase II of the Healthy Families project targeted advocacy for quality, sustainable, youth-friendly FP services in urban and rural settings throughout the country, and building the capacity for local organizations to advocate specifically for the SRH needs of adolescent and youth populations.

Meanwhile, Pathfinder continued its work in contraceptive commodities logistics, an important component of ensuring the quality of contraception and AYSRH services through consistent availability of a broad method mix to meet the needs of adolescents and youth.

Project Experience

To achieve these goals, the Healthy Families project used two approaches: first, advocating with the Government of Angola at central and local (Luanda Province) levels for improved quality of and access to SRH services for youth; and second, strengthening the capacity of two local youth-focused nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to design and implement SRH advocacy action plans focused on advancing AYSRH services in Luanda Province.

At the core of SRH services for youth is advancing contraceptive use for healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies (HTSP). Populations practicing HTSP typically see a reduction in the likelihood of pre-term, low birth weight, and small-for-gestational-age babies, thus lowering neonatal mortality in general and allowing for extended breastfeeding. HTSP also improves child survival indirectly by reducing the probability of maternal death from complications of pregnancy and birth such as pre-eclampsia.

Stakeholder Advocacy: Workshops

To advocate with the government and other key stakeholders for improved access to quality SRH services for adolescents and youth, the Healthy Families project organized two workshops and invited key stakeholders to participate in discussing first, the status of AYSRH in Angola, and second, the future of AYSRH in Angola. The first workshop was organized in collaboration with the National Directorate of Public Health (DNSP). At the workshop, stakeholders (including local and central government representatives, representatives from local

organizations, and representatives from USAID, UNICEF, and UNFPA) examined key statistics and current and recent work in Angola in the field of AYSRH, discussed health priorities for Angolan adolescents and youth, and identified elements to be included in the National Adolescent Health Strategy.

In order to increase awareness and commitment of key program managers to meet the SRH needs of adolescents and youth in the Luanda province, and to identify concrete issues affecting SRH services and ways to improve them, the project coordinated a second workshop specifically for the Luanda Bureau of Public Health (GPSL). At this workshop, participants (including representatives from two Angolan NGOs, the Provincial Director's office, and the departments of Reproductive Health, HIV, Child and Adolescent Health, Communications, and Social Mobilization) examined attitudes of service providers and health workers towards adolescents and youth, the technical competence of service providers, the physical location of services, restrictions to access to services, confidentiality, stigma around adolescent sexual activity, and knowledge and skills of providers and opportunities to receive further training.

Building AYSRH Advocacy Efforts

In addition to advocating with key stakeholders for quality AYSRH services through collaborative workshops, the Healthy Families project worked with two local NGOs, Centro de Apoio Jovens (CAJ) and Associação Angolana para o Bem Estar da Família (ANGOBFA), to bolster their AYSRH advocacy skills through capacity building work sessions. In addition, the project provided each NGO with a grant to advance their AYSRH outreach efforts.

Pathfinder has worked around the globe to improve access to and quality of reproductive health services for adolescents and youth, and many activities and lessons learned are relevant to the Angolan context, particularly those experiences from other sub-Saharan African countries. For example, Pathfinder implemented the Geração Biz project in Mozambique between 1999 and 2009—a project that aimed to improve AYSRH, increase gender awareness, reduce the incidence of unplanned pregnancies, and decrease young people's vulnerability to STIs, HIV, and unsafe abortion. The Healthy Families project provided a unique opportunity to share these experiences through technical tools and a learning exchange trip.

Three manuals designed and utilized in Mozambique were reproduced, adapted, and shared in Angola as examples of successful sub-Saharan AYSRH best practices: the Geração Biz Activist Trainers' Manual on Ethical Guidelines, the Trainers' Manual on Methodological Guidelines, and the Trainers' Manual on Conceptual Guidelines. In addition, Contraception Cue cards, also originally designed in Mozambique, were adopted by the Healthy Families project and adapted to the Angolan context. These cards supported FP providers at health facilities in Luanda Province

by providing visual aids on different contraceptive methods and facilitating discussion around contraceptive choice between providers and young clients.

Further, the project facilitated the first Pathfinder learning exchange trip between Angola and Ethiopia. In July 2015, representatives from DNSP, GPSL, CAJ, the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MINJUDE), and Pathfinder travelled from Angola to Ethiopia to learn how their Ethiopian counterparts designed, drafted, and implemented an AYSRH strategy; encouraged youth-friendly services (YFS); improved contraceptive commodity access for youth; implemented a national gender strategy; and implemented an mHealth project targeting youth with SRH messaging. Finally, the project provided grants of \$12,000 to each of the two NGOs (CAJ and ANGOBEFA) to support their AYSRH advocacy efforts, and provided technical assistance to increase the depth of AYSRH learnings and to identify activities that best address the specific contexts of the particular communities with whom CAJ and ANGOBEFA work.

Outcomes

Stakeholder Advocacy

In the first workshop, participants defined roles and responsibilities for the work going forward. Specifically, DNSP committed to draft the National Adolescent Health Strategy and to create programs specifically designed for adolescents and youth. The NGOs CAJ and ANGOBEFA agreed to strengthen their technical knowledge of AYSRH and to develop strategies for working jointly with the government and the community for the advancement of AYSRH in Angola. Non health-sector partners were also identified, such as the Ministries of Education (MINED); Youth and Sports (MINJUDE); and Family and Women's Affairs (MINFAMU) as key champions to further advance the advocacy efforts to bring attention to the AYSRH needs of youth. Finally, workshop participants agreed upon the need to include adolescents and youth in the preparation of AYSRH activities, as well as the need to identify methods and mechanisms to solicit this feedback from adolescents and youth.

While results from the first workshop were primarily concerned with establishing roles, responsibilities, and commitment from key stakeholders, the second workshop focused more specifically on AYSRH service delivery. As a result of the second workshop, representatives from DNSP and GPSL established capacity building exercises for service providers, created plans to establish a dedicated "training nucleus" to ensure providers are up-to-date on SRH knowledge and technologies, and created an AYSRH checklist for supervision visits to assess the quality of AYSRH services

Building Local AYSRH Advocacy Capacity in Angolan NGOs

The AYSRH learning exchange trip to Ethiopia contributed to the knowledge and motivation needed for the drafting of the National Adolescent Health Strategy to which DNSP members had previously committed. The draft was written under the leadership of DNSP and with the engaged support of the key stakeholders such as members of a government-led reproductive health working group.

Centro de Apoio Jovens used the grant supported from Pathfinder to conduct an all-day forum in Luanda, "Reflection of the Civil Society Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Rights of Adolescents and Young People in Angola." Participants, including Angolan government national directors, leaders, and senior ministry technical experts, discussed the priority of improving youth access to quality health care services that are adapted to meet their AYSRH needs. The activities of CAJ reflect its more political and policy advocacy orientation, whereas ANGOBEFA works specifically in surrounding communities. ANGOBEFA used its grant to facilitate a series of monthly trainings for peer educators on best practices in AYSRH services, and how to effectively advocate for adolescent and youth needs within their communities. Twelve peer educator sessions on AYSRH were held in schools, neighborhoods, and health facilities in the two districts of Sambizanga and Rangel, in the municipality of Cazenga.

Other AYSRH Advocacy Events in Angola

There are several other youth-focused events occurring in Angola, enhancing the momentum of the Healthy Families project that suggest a growing commitment to AYSRH in Angola. For example, a national dialogue between the Commonwealth of States of Southern Africa and the East on its commitment to AYSRH was held in October 2015. At this meeting, an AYSRH school curriculum was introduced.

Further, "Sixteen Days of Activism"—an annual event that has been successfully launched in other sub-Saharan African countries to bring attention to youth needs—will be organized by MINFAMU and MINSÁ with support from United Nations Agencies, in November and December 2015.

In addition, the Ministry of Youth and Sports developed a National Youth Development Plan for 2014 to 2017. The plan includes developing reproductive health projects aimed at the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, early pregnancy and the influence of habits and customs with harmful effects on the health condition of young people.



Young mothers at the vaccination campaign also had the opportunity to learn about the importance of contraceptive method options.

Legacy of Healthy Families II/ Muiji Wa Disanze II

With the endorsement and commitment of the Government of Angola, Phase I of this project was able to advance contraceptive security in Angola as demonstrated through the following outcomes: development of a situational analysis report on contraceptive security in the country; creation of the first ever data-gathering system to define Average Monthly Consumption from health facilities and provinces about contraceptive commodity usage in Angola's eighteen provinces; establishment of the first ever regularly updated and shared commodity distribution plan to prevent commodity stock outs in health facilities; training staff on best practices for conducting routine physical inventories of warehouse contraceptive stock levels to meet users' FP demands; and finally, the coordination of an update of the Ministry of Health's Manual of Logistics to be utilized as the guide throughout Angola.

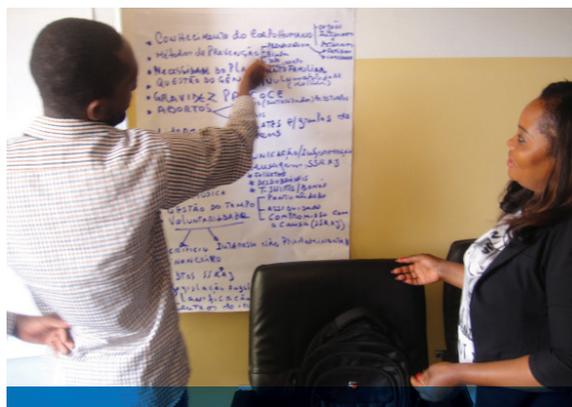
Government support and leadership from Phase I of the Healthy Families project has enabled the AYSRH agenda to move forward in Angola. The following outcomes are the manifestations of this

government commitment and successful collaboration between key stakeholders: the drafting of the first ever National AYSRH Strategy and the development of a situational analysis series on family planning and contraception best practices shared with DNSP and a government-led reproductive health technical working group as a guide for the development of a family planning framework for Angola.

The Healthy Families project, with leadership from the Angolan Ministry of Health, two Angolan NGOs, and with fundamental USAID support has significantly contributed to improved contraceptive security and the advancement of the family planning and AYSRH advocacy agenda in Angola. Crucial to this process has been leadership and political will from both the Government of Angola and the youth-led nongovernmental organizations, CAJ and ANGOBEFA. Lessons learned from Ethiopia and Mozambique have enhanced the opportunity for advancing realistic and contextually relevant FP and AYSRH strategies in Angola. These cross-country and shared AYSRH best practices have built bridges among sub-Saharan African SRH leaders and activists who will advance the health and well-being of Angolans into the future

Endnotes

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Led by Nurse Maria Antónia Nogueira, local NGO ANGOBEFA hosts an SRHR workshop with adolescent and youth participants.



Local NGO CAJ hosts a Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights reflection event, with Angolan stakeholders.

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