THE CHALLENGE:
Over the last two decades, Zambia’s HIV response has achieved some notable results. Adult HIV prevalence is projected to have declined from 14 per cent in 2007 to 12 per cent in 2013. Despite this progress, HIV remains a major threat to the country. Women are particularly vulnerable to HIV, with females more likely to be HIV positive than males. The epidemic continues to have a tremendous effect on young people as well, particularly adolescent girls. The country’s latest DHS estimated an HIV prevalence of 11 per cent among young women aged 20-24 years—almost twice that of young men of the same age group (estimated at 5 per cent). Building national capacity for effective delivery and uptake of family planning and adolescent sexual and reproductive health services (ASRH), along with HIV services, is a priority for the Government of Zambia.

THE CATALYST:
Existing health services rarely meet the unique SRH needs of young people and adolescents, especially those affected by HIV. Through the SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights) and HIV Linkages Project funded by the European Union, and the Governments of Sweden and Norway (2011-2015), Zambia has reached adolescents and young people with critical SRH and HIV services using peer-to-peer mobilization, media campaigns, male involvement, and existing community networks.

In collaboration with UNICEF, UNESCO, UNAIDS, Planned Parenthood Association of Zambia (PPAZ) and other stakeholders, the project successfully launched the Love Life? Ziba HIV! HIV Testing and Counselling Campaign targeting both in- and out-of-school youth in Lusaka province. This dynamic campaign, which utilized both traditional media and an SMS platform to share information and resources, reached an estimated 23,000 adolescents and youth from 20 high schools and 3,500 out-of-school youth with SRH and HIV information and services, including HIV testing and counselling and referrals for ART.

Working with the Ministry of Community Development, Mother and Child Health, along with PPAZ, the project supported the development of national standards for adolescent friendly health services. In collaboration with UNESCO, the project also supported the Ministry of Education to develop a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum and is strengthening SRH-HIV linkages within the curriculum.

THE CHANGE:
The project has, in collaboration with UNICEF, UNESCO, UNAIDS and PPAZ, made significant progress in reaching adolescent and youth with ASRH services and through its key implementing partner (PPAZ) improved the capacity of service providers and increased male involvement in the project.

The number of young people reached with adolescent/youth-friendly services through demand generation activities increased from 23,000 in 2013 to 35,000 in 2014.

The number of service providers trained on youth-friendly service standards increased from 0 in 2013 to 112 in 2014.

The number of men and influencers reached through interventions increased from 0 in 2013 to 700 in 2014.

Rationale and Benefits of SRH and HIV Integration
Given that most HIV infections are sexually transmitted—or are associated with pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding—and the presence of certain sexually transmitted infections (STIs) further increases the risk of HIV transmission, linking SRH and HIV services simply makes sense. The benefits of integrated services are multifold. SRH services can provide a platform for reaching clients with crucial HIV prevention, care, and treatment interventions—helping them to understand their risks for HIV and make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. At the same time, HIV services can provide an effective entry point for addressing the unmet family planning needs of female clients living with HIV and can increase access to and uptake of key SRH services, such as cervical cancer screening and antenatal care.

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