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# SCOPE SUCCESS STORY

## MALAWI



Woman receiving Depo-Provera birth control shot for the first time during the under-five antenatal clinic.

USAID/World Relief: Mbumba Ulemu Maseko, SCOPE Project Supervisor for Machinga Field Office

### LOCATION

Nyambi, Machinga District, Malawi

### SUMMARY

SCOPE Malawi is working to address fear and stigma around family planning in Nyambi Traditional Authority.

[WORLDRELIEF.ORG/SCOPE](https://www.worldrelief.org/scope)

## FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES: A WONDER IN TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY NYAMBI

Malawi has made great strides in improving key reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health over the last 20 years. Modern contraceptive use among married women has more than doubled to 58 percent, making it one of the highest rates in all of sub-Saharan Africa

Nyambi is one of the biggest Traditional Authorities (TAs) in Machinga District, a southern district in Malawi with over 70,000 residents. And even though almost a quarter of residents are women of reproductive age, the number accessing family planning services is very low. Nyambi is a traditional community in which a husband's word is final, even decision-making around a woman's *own* health. Women who do not heed these norms are often considered rude and unruly.

### MISCONCEPTIONS AND STIGMA AROUND FAMILY PLANNING

During a *Making Communities Better* faith leader training, Islamic leaders in Nyambi shared that they believed that men should not allow their wives/partners to access family planning services. This was due to family planning methods' perceived influence on the enjoyment of sex – though understood the production of excess fluids in their sex organs and weakening of men's sexual organs due to chemical reaction from the family planning taken by women – and resulting challenges to marriages.

Despite these concerns from leaders and perceived risks, it was reported that many women in Nyambi still wanted to utilize family planning methods – even without their partner's knowledge. This was not previously possible because family planning services were administered during certain days and locations, causing those who participated

to be exposed to their partners and larger communities, risking gender-based violence for women who attempted.



Health Surveillance Assistants giving a health talk at Chisusa under-five village clinic.

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## INTEGRATING FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES THROUGH SCOPE

The Strengthening Community Health Outcomes through Positive Engagement (SCOPE) Project began implementing

reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health activities in Nyambi in 2020. This included integrating family planning with the five village clinics to increase uptake of family planning services in its catchment areas. By March 2021, SCOPE witnessed a rapid increase in the number of women reported to have joined their friends who access family planning services. One woman shared that they were happy to have a "conducive place with a very good schedule for us to access a service we have wanted for a long time without fear of being judged and condemned by our community." One of the women was quoted with excitement at one of the clinics after accessing family planning services: we now have a "conducive place with a very good schedule for us to access a service we have been wanting for a long time without fear of being judged and condemned by our community."

## MAKING STRIDES FORWARD

An average of 30 women are accessing family planning services during an antenatal care village clinic – a 30% increase in the uptake from before. There is still work to do so that women can make their own health decisions without fear or shame, but progress is happening.

*This story is written by Mbumba Ulemu Maseko, SCOPE Project Supervisor for Machinga Field Office.*