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SCOPE SUCCESS STORY

MALAWI



Youth involved in the *Family Life Education* program.

USAID/World Relief: Photo by Patrick Kantwanje, Project Supervisor

NAME AND ROLE

Faith leaders in Nkoola TA

LOCATION

Nkoola TA, Malawi

SUMMARY

SCOPE's *Family Life Education* curriculum is helping faith leaders engage in difficult conversations around family planning with youth in their communities.

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FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION ON THE GO...YOUTH'S LONG-AWAITED DISH SERVED

Discussions around family planning are often uncomfortable, but creating a space to have open conversations around this area is critical to help families to survive and thrive. Nkoola traditional authority (TA) has a total population of 87,930, and with a large youth population, access to information about sexual health is minimal. This is why SCOPE is working with faith leaders through Family Life Education to address this challenge.

Family Life Education is a five-part training for Christian and Muslim faith leaders, equipping them to communicate about sexual and reproductive health from their faith perspectives. During the five sessions, faith leaders learn essential reproductive health information and build communication skills to guide youth to make informed decisions about engaging in sexual activity. At the end of the course, faith leaders develop an action plan for outreach to youth and the adults who are often key influencers for young people.

FAITH LEADERS TAKING ON THE CHALLENGE AND MET WITH EXCITEMENT

Since completing the Family Life Education training, faith leaders in Nkoola TA were eager to share the learnings they acquired with their communities. Faith leaders immediately began to organize themselves to introduce the community to their new roles as champions of Family Life Education. They did so to share how their roles as faith leaders interacted with this new champion role. Tackling these sensitive topics can be uncomfortable, but their communities welcomed the information due to the trust that the faith leaders had cultivated over the years.

Once introductions were made, faith leaders proceeded to roll out Family Life Education to youth in their communities, and within two weeks, they were delivering lessons. Youth involved in the program were excited and motivated to share. The discussions on growing up and body changes caused both heated debate and laughter in the group.

When given a chance to share their thoughts on what was causing an increase in early pregnancies in their communities, the response of youth was uniform: low access to contraceptives. In Nkoola TA it is a challenge to access condoms. Often, the woman travels to the village clinic, where she is asked to work in the clinic's garden earn a share of the condoms. As one youth shared: "It comes a time when you can no longer abstain, and without a condom [...] the result is pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections if not lucky."

To cover the gap, faith leaders suggested that they be custodians of condoms, and that they would share with community members for free. In addition, youths were linked with SCOPE-trained community based distribution agents



Faith leaders introducing themselves and *Family Life Education* to their church members at Mikachu Church of Central African Presbytery (CCAP).

who provide door-to-door family planning services and counseling.

Sex and sexuality are topics that youth in Nkoola TA are already talking about; thanks to *Family Life Education*, faith leaders can engage in these conversations thoughtfully. Youth now have the knowledge to make informed choices.

This story is written by Patrick Kantwanje, World Relief Project Supervisor for Nkoola TA