

## ZAMBIA

### Engaging Church Leaders as Advocates for Family Planning in Zambia

#### Challenge

In Zambia, the burden of unwanted pregnancy and its consequences disproportionately falls on poor women and adolescents. Poorly timed and unhealthy pregnancies are undermining the potential for women to complete their education and earn an income.

#### Why Religious Leaders Are Key to Family Planning Acceptance

Religious leaders are recognized as influential opinion leaders in their communities. Religious Leaders (RLs) were identified as key influencers in the uptake of FP and as such the government made a commitment to engage them in family planning advocacy. The Christian Advocacy for Family Planning in Africa project, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and administered by Christian Connections for International Health, engaged the Churches Health Association of Zambia (CHAZ) to equip religious leaders to be family planning advocates due to their influence on communities and policymakers. The support of religious leaders is essential in reaching the goal set by the Government of the Republic of Zambia to increase the contraceptive prevalence rate for modern methods (for married women or in union) from 33% in 2007 to 58% by 2020. The development and implementation of the Eight-Year Integrated Family Planning Scale-Up Plan 2013-2020, with the support of partners, will enable the fulfillment of this plan.

There are 17 churches working in health in Zambia with 168 Church Health Institutions among them, which collectively contribute to about 30% of health services in Zambia. Engaging the faith community and faith-based organizations in family planning advocacy and service delivery will greatly improve uptake of and access to family planning.

*Religious Leaders in Zambia attending Family Planning Advocacy Training coordinated by CHAZ.*



#### LOCATION

Lusaka, Zambia and surrounding areas.

#### KEY PLAYERS

The Church Leaders from the CHAZ network and one Religious Leader from the Islamic Council of Zambia.

#### APPROACH

CHAZ's approach was to build the capacity of religious leaders to talk about family planning with their congregations, in their communities and to policymakers.

#### TACTICS

CHAZ conducted trainings on Family Planning and Advocacy with the religious leaders and held meetings that included the Ministry of Health (MOH) and other FP stakeholders, to inform the religious leaders about the challenges Zambia faces in family planning, the progress that has been made and how FP affects national development. The meetings also helped secure religious leader commitment to partner with the Government to scale up family planning. Younger church leaders were also included in the training in response to the youth focus of the 2017 Zambia FP recommitments.

The religious leaders shared their churches' positions on Family Planning, which helped to dispel any misconceptions that their churches do not support family planning and clarify which methods they do support. In addition, CHAZ engaged the media to reach the public. The programs were aired live on national television and radio and gave the religious leaders an opportunity to interact with people who called in during the radio and TV programs.

To solidify support from church denominations for family planning and to be able to demonstrate to policymakers and the public the support of church bodies for FP, CHAZ collected 10 written positions on family planning from church denominations, which are now [publicly available](#).





“... the Salvation Army advocates for responsible parenting. As Christians, let us reduce the death of children and mothers either in childbearing conditions or due to poor nutrition by scaling up family planning in Zambia...”

-Major Angela Hachitapika Salvation Army Zambia

## OUTCOMES

The church leaders now all agree they have the responsibility to ensure that family planning is promoted in their communities and churches, in support of Zambia's national scale up plan. They have collectively adopted the following definition of family planning: **“Enabling couples to determine the number and timing of pregnancies, including the voluntary use of methods for preventing pregnancy (not including abortion) that are harmonious with their values and religious beliefs.”**

## IMPACT

CHAZ has developed a cadre of religious leaders who have become valuable advocates for family planning. They have collectively, with other stakeholders, promoted family planning to communities and policymakers, which has led to the following wins:

- The government has made a commitment to increase domestic funding of FP and to invest \$1,500,000 towards FP by 2020.
- The government has signed a policy on task-shifting to enable community-based distributors (CBDs) to provide injectable contraceptives.
- The MOH now gives a monthly report on stock status of commodities at the FP Technical Working Group meetings to increase commodity security and avoid stock-outs at service delivery points.
- Church leaders have been called upon to speak about the church and FP by the MOH and communication between the church and MOH is continuous.
- CHAZ was named as the Lead CSO (civil society organization) for FP2020 and the Family Planning Technical Working Group Advocacy Subcommittee thanks to its leadership on advocacy.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Unlike common perception, religious leaders do support family planning and envision a place where healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies is practiced to promote healthy families. When they have the correct information and appropriate skills and training, religious leaders are powerful and effective advocates for family planning.

However, major shifts in thinking and changes in cultural norms take time. It takes time and more resources than expected to equip the religious leaders to be able to advocate effectively for family planning within their own church denomination and leadership structures, and for these changes to occur.

## NEXT STEPS

CHAZ plans to scale up the dialogue with religious leaders to include representatives of most faiths in Zambia where a joint commitment message will be developed to show that diverse religious leaders across Zambia are in support of Family Planning.