

Best Practices of:

Youth Advocates with Disabilities Driving Change Across Africa

Liliane
Fonds

MAKE
Way»



see the
strength in
every child

Youth with disabilities face many barriers in accessing their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), such as the absence of accessible infrastructure, information and inclusive communication, as well as misunderstandings about their sexual and reproductive needs, stigma and social prejudices. Inclusive advocacy by and for young people with disabilities is a strategy to call for policy and societal changes that reduce the barriers that young people face in accessing their SRHR.

Cheshire Disability Services Kenya (CDSK), Cheshire Homes Society Zambia (CHSZ), IPAS Ethiopia, Katalemwa Cheshire Home for Rehabilitation Services, the National Union of Disability Organisations in Rwanda (NUDOR) and Liliane Fonds have been working through the Make Way program since 2020 to break down barriers to sexual and reproductive health. They support young people with disabilities to (self)advocate for their own rights and more accessible, acceptable, available and quality sexual health services.

They achieve this by promoting the inclusion of young people with disabilities, for example by using the toolkit¹ developed during the Make Way programme to enhance the capacity, skills and knowledge of civil society groups and organisations regarding intersectional advocacy. This booklet captures the best practices in inclusive advocacy efforts across the five countries, including the Liliane Fonds case, over the five years of the program.

¹ www.make-way.org/toolkit/



PHOTO: NATIONAL UNION OF DISABILITY ORGANIZATIONS IN RWANDA (NUDOR)

Mentorship to movement: young disability advocates in Rwanda

Inclusive advocacy requires mentorship, training, and resources. In Rwanda, NUDOR has trained over 50 young people with disabilities to become advocates for human rights-based SRHR. This training has allowed them to gain more confidence and speak out about stigma, barriers, and discrimination affecting their lives.

Through mentorship and resources access, these young advocates participated significantly in a governmental consultation on the new National Youth Health strategy, sharing their personal testimonies about the exclusion they face from SRHR information and services. Their stories have proven to be powerful tools to challenge stigma and influence decision-makers, gradually shaping the policies that affect their realities.

In the Nyagatare district, many young people with disabilities lacked access to SRHR due to physical barriers, communication gaps, and stigma from the

healthcare workers. As part of the Make Way advocacy training, a team of youth advocates, including those without disabilities, documented their challenges. Afterwards, they organized a community dialogue that included local leaders, health workers and young people with disabilities. They used the method of drama to share their experiences of being denied privacy and clear information at the health center. As a result, the health center committed to training staff in disability inclusion, and a ramp was installed to improve access to the clinic.



PHOTO: CHESHIRE DISABILITY SERVICES KENYA (CDSK)

How Youth-Led Intersectional Advocacy is Transforming SRHR in Local Governments for Sustainable Change

In many underserved regions, meaningful youth participation has often been dismissed. As a result, young people, especially those with disabilities, are excluded from shaping policies and strategies, leaving their challenges unaddressed and voices unheard.

CDSK provided technical support to empower young people with compounded vulnerabilities through meaningful youth engagement. Youth led the administration of tools such as the Intersectional Community Score Card to assess the availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality of sexual health services. Youth champions facilitated community dialogues with facility heads and service providers, identifying pressing issues, scoring service delivery, and using findings to inform budget allocations and service improvements.

At Kombewa County Referral Hospital in Kisumu, the ICSC process led to tangible improvements, including accessible wheelchair ramps, sign

language-trained providers, and youth-friendly service desks. Young people with disabilities were also included as representatives in the County's Quarterly RMNCAH Performance Review meetings, influencing the integration of youth-friendly services into the county health strategy.

The meaningful youth engagement approach has proven transformative in SRHR advocacy and broader governance and social accountability spaces. Make Way tools and best practices are now adopted beyond the original partnership, reflecting the power of intersectional youth engagement in driving systemic change.



PHOTO: KATALEMWA CHESHIRE HOME FOR REHABILITATION SERVICES

From training to transformation: disability advocacy in Uganda

In Uganda, youth with disabilities advocated for actions to improve accessibility and equal treatment. One of the strategies implemented was training for health workers that covered disability identification, the diversity of impairments, and the use of inclusive language.

Alongside this training, adjustments to health facilities were made, including provision of sign language interpreters, constructing accessible structures like special chairs for people with disabilities to avoid long queues, installing ramps, and posting clear information boards.

In the Kalangala district, young people with disabilities were able to start attending meetings of the health management unity committees. As a result of their participation and advocacy, one young person with a disability was elected to be part of the committee to represent his peers at local and district level.

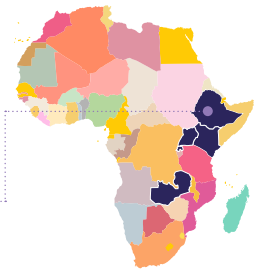
Additionally, young people with disabilities were trained in budget analysis and advocacy. They learned that no funding is allocated to a local health facility unless it is included in the budget. Now, they always make themselves heard at budget conferences at the village level in Nama sub-county. After the training on meaningful youth engagement, Eriabu Bam, a young man with a physical disability, decided to join the election for direct counsellor for persons with disabilities in Nama Sub County.



PHOTO: IPAS ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia

Ipas
ETHIOPIA



Empowering Voices, Transforming Lives in Ethiopia

In Debre Birhan in Ethiopia, the challenging reality for internally displaced people (IDPs) became the backdrop for a powerful story of change. The dire circumstances that led to the creation of these centers, coupled with the harsh living conditions, created an environment filled with hardship, particularly for young women and girls with disabilities who are constantly at risk of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV).

One such case involved a young girl with hearing impairment who spent a significant part of her adolescence in an IDP-center and experienced SGBV herself. Eventually, she found the courage to seek help by confiding in a peer her story. Her friend participated in coffee ceremonies organized through the Make Way program which provides a vital Safe Space for discussing critical issues like SGBV and sexual and reproductive health among youth. These gatherings offer valuable resources for education and empowerment.

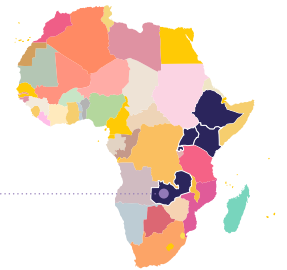
With this knowledge, her friend recognized the urgent need for support. They attended the ceremonies together, where the young girl could access essential services and began a healing journey. Her story of recovery has inspired others, encouraging more girls to share their experiences and seek help, particularly concerning SGBV. The coffee ceremonies show how inclusive advocacy can be transformative when it prioritizes the voices of those most affected, giving them Safe Spaces to speak out, heal and empower others.

**Leonard
Cheshire
Disability**

Zambia



PHOTO: CHESHIRE HOMES SOCIETY ZAMBIA (CHSZ)



Inclusive health budgeting by Groups Focused Consultations using budget tracking and analysis tool

Key challenges for sexual and reproductive health and disability inclusion of Zambia are the insufficient budget allocation for sexual and reproductive health and the lack of accessibility in health facilities. To address these gaps, Groups Focused Consultations (GFC) through the make way project engaged key provincial and district stakeholders in awareness raising and lobby and advocacy after undertaking budget tracking and analysis meetings on resources allocated to SRH.

Groups Focused Consultations with support from CHSZ conducted budget analysis meetings with Mansa District and Luapula provincial health offices to determine the effective use of resources allocated to SRHS, prioritising inclusive SRH service based on community needs and health outcomes for specific budget allocations for SRH services that include provisions for individuals with disabilities. Two meetings were held in 2023 and 2024 and were attended by Mansa District Luapula Provincial

Health Offices. Young people with disability took a leading role in advocating for increased budget allocation for inclusive SRH services

As a result of the budget analysis meetings and other engagements, the Mansa District health budget under health promotions was increased by 5% in 2025 which is a positive indicator towards improving SRHS among youths.



PHOTO: LILIANE FONDS

Liliane Fonds

From research to the United Nations: the Regional Youth with Disabilities Council's path to advocacy

In 2022, Liliane Fonds formed the Regional Council of Youth with Disabilities under the Make Way programme, bringing together fifteen young people from Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia. They come together once a month to share about their advocacy efforts in addressing the Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) challenges of young people with disabilities.

The Youth Council serves as a platform for mutual learning and capacity building, equipping members with skills and knowledge on intersectionality, SRH, and youth-led advocacy. A key initiative involved conducting youth-led research, allowing council members to develop proposals to assess the accessibility and inclusiveness of SRH services.

They gathered insights through focus group discussions and interviews with young people with disabilities, parents, community members, health practitioners, and other stakeholders. This data was crucial to inform health practitioners and decision-makers about the current challenges young people with disabilities face, advocating for inclusive practices.

Council members also participated in high-level meetings like the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, with logistical and capacity building support from Liliane Fonds. Before these events, the young advocate would be in close contact with their fellow council members, providing them with updates, and using their insights to prepare their speeches.

Notably, a young advocate from Ethiopia delivered a speech during the youth dialogue at the Commission, where she addressed gender inequality and ableism within Ethiopia. She was the only young woman with a disability to do an intervention in this space.