

Choice on wheels: How a mobile bus expanded contraceptive access during the COVID-19 lockdown in Madagascar

KEY LEARNINGS

With a national lockdown restricting movement, barriers to sexual and reproductive healthcare have increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure clients could continue to access essential services, MSI Madagascar started to deliver contraceptive services using a bus which travelled across cities to offer services on demand. This supported clients by maintaining existing access to family planning and by expanding contraceptive access for new users, as well as access to general health services. This innovative model safeguarded access through service disruptions. Ensuring clients have a choice in how to access services is critical.



THE CHALLENGE

COVID-19 and new barriers to care

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated lives and communities across the world and has impacted access to essential sexual and reproductive healthcare due to lack of information, supply chain disruptions and restrictions on travel. It is estimated that 1.9 million fewer women were served by MSI programmes due to COVID-19-related disruption from January to June 2020.

In March 2020, three major cities in Madagascar – Antananarivo, Toamasina, and Fianarantsoa – went into partial lockdown. The Ministry of Health declared sexual and reproductive healthcare as essential during the lockdown, and MSI Madagascar wanted to ensure continued access, despite restrictions on movement and fear of infection.

WHAT WE DID

A new mobile service

MSI Madagascar deployed the new service from March to September 2020, using three mobile buses that travelled across cities to ensure clients could access essential sexual and reproductive healthcare.

While it was critical for MSI centres to stay open during this time, the buses were able to operate as an extension to MSI's usual services.

This addressed new access barriers created by COVID-19, safeguarding access for clients who were unable to visit our centres.



To access the mobile bus services, clients called **MSI's contact centre** or sent a **Facebook message** to book an appointment.



The bus also served "walk-in" clients they encountered on their journeys.



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WHAT WE FOUND

Serving a new client base

Analysis of available data for the period June to September 2020 shows that during this time, 264 clients accessed sexual and reproductive health services from the mobile buses. The booking system through the contact centre proved to be effective, with an estimated 77% of booked clients keeping their appointments.

Of the clients served on the buses, 94% were new users of MSI services. The clients also tended to be older and more educated than MSI's fixed centres' client base, with over half having completed university education and only 8% under 20 years of age. The bus was also reaching 'adopters' – 3 out of 4 clients had not used a method of contraception in the past 3 months which may reflect intention to delay pregnancies during the pandemic.

% of FP clients' method of choice



By offering integrated services, the buses also increased access to a broader range of essential health services.

77% of clients who accessed services from the buses also received a general health consultation, and 66% purchased other health-related products.

This is not surprising as access to private and public health services were more restricted during the lockdowns. By bringing services to the doors of clients, the buses offered choice to those who may otherwise not have had access.

However, we found that for the service to be sustainable in the longer-term, it would need to run for fewer days and serve more clients per day.

WHAT THIS MEANS

Innovating through disruption

During the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting movement restrictions, this mobile bus service complemented the static centres network and increased access for new users.

The service identified new areas with high demand for MSI's services, increased access to integrated health services, built a new client base, and provided an innovative way to safeguard access when usual services were disrupted.



Around the world, lockdowns led to curfews, transport blocks, and the cancellation of market days, which would usually provide a cover for clients wanting to access MSI services discreetly.

By adapting rapidly, MSI Madagascar has worked to **ensure clients who cannot access static health facilities were still able to access essential sexual and reproductive healthcare.**



MORE INFORMATION

For more information on MSI Reproductive Choices and the work that we do, please contact:
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