

Addressing reproductive health needs with innovative health financing in Malawi

Key learnings

The Health Services Joint Fund was established by the Malawi government in 2015, with development partners pooling resources overseen by the government. The model allows the government to better allocate resources, aligning them with national health priorities and strengthening health sector strategies.

Since 2021, MSI Malawi has been an implementing partner, receiving funding

from the Joint Fund to deliver sexual and reproductive health services to underserved communities. While setting up this new operating model has been challenging, open dialogue and space for reflection has been crucial for responsiveness and adaptation.

Ongoing iterations of the model result in stronger, more efficient and effective mechanisms that maximise impact for communities.

The challenge

Meeting women's contraceptive needs and reaching young people

Despite significant progress in expanding access to contraception, **1 in 5 women in Malawi** still have unmet contraceptive needs, with demand particularly high in rural areas and among adolescents. Teenage pregnancy remains a critical issue with **29% of girls aged 15–19** having experienced pregnancy (DHS 2020), contributing to school dropout and limiting economic and social opportunities for young women. This further exacerbates gender inequality, especially in rural communities where teenage pregnancy rates are even higher.

Historically, Malawi's healthcare system depended on donor funding but lacked coordination and government oversight. The Health Sector Joint Fund, introduced in 2015, aimed to address these challenges by aligning donors and the government for more effective resource use from implementing partners. MSI Malawi has become a key partner in increasing access to sexual and reproductive health services for underserved communities, especially adolescents.

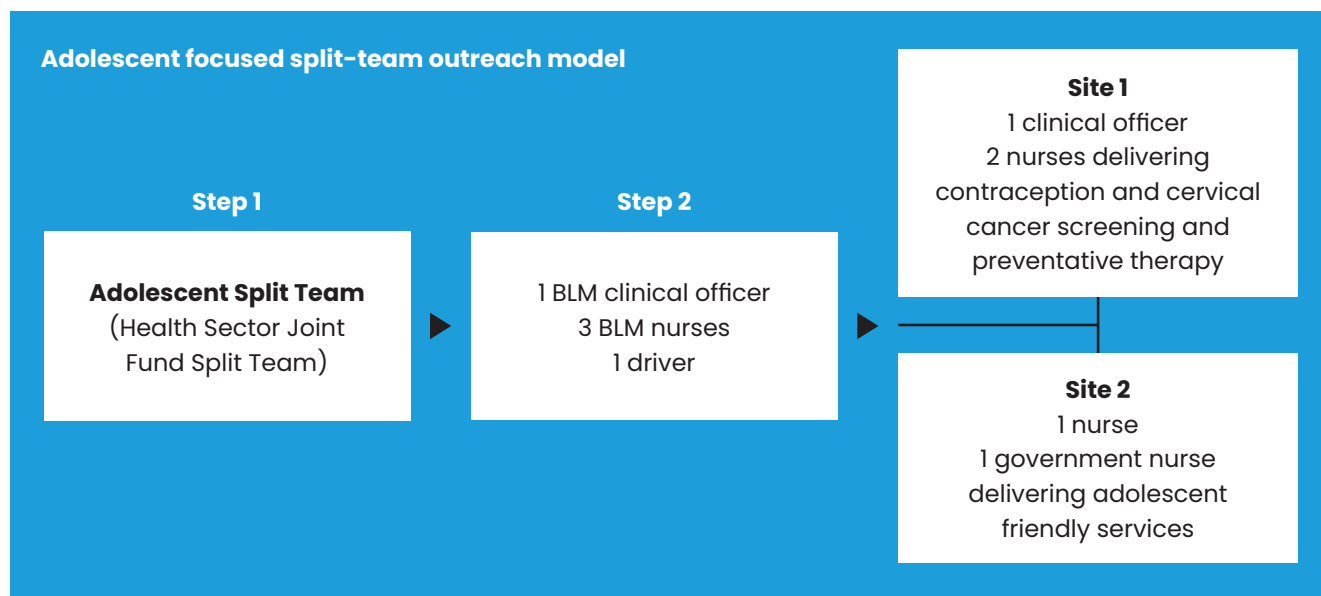
What we did

Since 2021, MSI Malawi has received funding from the Joint Fund to support seven outreach teams and 20 public sector facilities across 24 districts, expanding access to contraceptive services in rural areas. Our mobile teams visit hard-to-reach communities, with a focus on reaching adolescents with unmet needs. We also provide training and mentorship to government providers at district hospitals and rural health centres, boosting access to long-acting reversible contraception and post-abortion care to ensure services will be available in the future. **As Malawi's largest non-profit provider of sexual and reproductive health services, MSI Malawi contributes to meeting over 30% of the country's family planning demand.**

As a key implementing partner of the Health Services Joint Fund, we collaborate closely with the Ministry of Health's Planning and Policy Directorate and Reproductive Health Directorate. Funding is renewed annually with joint

supervision, quarterly reports, and an annual review to ensure transparency and effective implementation in line with government goals. Through ongoing collaboration with the government and donors, MSI Malawi aligns service delivery with national health priorities.

Recently, we've focused on enhancing adolescent-friendly services to better meet their needs. This included developing an adolescent focused split-team outreach model (below), as well as adolescent-tailored educational activities that address social norms through social behaviour change communication. We hold and visit events for adolescents and young people to deliver information and services in safe spaces where they are more comfortable to talk and receive contraceptive services. The events include youth open days and sports bonanzas. We also directly work with youth networks and clubs organising interpersonal communication sessions.



What we found

Through seven outreach teams and supporting 20 public sector sites funded by the scheme, MSI Malawi has provided services to 5,000 remote communities. From May 2021 to September 2024, we served:

375,000 clients
including 60,000 adolescents.

We generated
820,000 CYPs at £5 per CYP.

This funding has allowed us to continue reaching the most underserved populations in Malawi, with 37% of our clients living in poverty and 42% having no other access to family planning services. Quality of care and client satisfaction are top priorities for our team, so it's encouraging to see that:

More than 86% of clients
are highly satisfied with their experience.

The services provided through this initiative will help avert an estimated

365,000 unintended pregnancies
76,000 unsafe abortions,

and save the lives of at least

760 women.

What we found

Challenges and lessons learned

Engagement with the scheme has not always been smooth and implementing partners have faced several challenges such as delays in proposal approval and fund release, disrupting service continuity. The implemented financial controls have streamlined these processes, improved efficiency, and reduced delays.

Annual planning cycles hindered service delivery, but multi-year funding commitments will ensure smoother continuity by eliminating yearly approvals. Flexibility was essential for implementing partners to align with the Ministry of Health's evolving priorities, particularly in reaching adolescents, leading to adjustments in strategy and service delivery.

What this means

The Health Services Joint Fund in Malawi provides an example of an innovative health financing model that has enabled MSI to successfully provide services and reach underserved communities. By shifting from donor-managed funding to a more collaborative approach, this scheme enhances coordination between governments, donors and implementing partners, ensuring that funding is directed in a way that supports national health goals and provides clear oversight of all activities between partners.

“I surely knew that Banja La Mtsogolo comes to... Health Centre to provide family planning services... But I have always had fears. Today, I had a chance to listen to the topic of family planning in full. I did not hesitate to come when I heard experts on family planning will be here for us teen mothers. This renews hope.”

A young person accessing services with MSI



More information

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

T: +44 (0)20 7636 6200 E: evidence@msichoices.org. Alternatively, visit our website: www.msichoices.org