

HEALTH IN ACTION

Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet Newsletter

Winter 2022



In this edition:

Women's empowerment

Plus: Gender and mental health, working towards equality in Malawi and more...

**HEALTH
POVERTY
ACTION**

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the latest edition of your newsletter, Health in Action. My name is Anuj Kapilashrami. I serve on Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet's trustee boards, and I am Professor in Global Health Policy & Health Equity. I've spent over twenty years working and researching health and development issues, with a particular focus on gender equality, human rights, and social justice.



Much of our work with communities focuses on challenging social inequalities, and their impact on women – from gender-based violence to economic precarity and marginalisation. And through our policy work, we see how women are disproportionately affected by poverty and health inequality.

In this edition, we launch our Women's Empowerment Appeal, focusing on our work with women in Africa, Latin America, Asia to challenge unequal gender roles, power relations and socioeconomic structures. At a time when women's reproductive rights and bodily integrity are under attack from multiple forces, we are asking supporters to contribute whatever they can towards ensuring that women continue to be empowered and defend their rights.

Thank you for the part you are playing in building and sustaining a global movement for social change. I'm inspired every day by the amazing people that we work with; I hope you are too.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT – HEALTH FOR ALL IN A JUST WORLD

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Registered charities in England and Wales, numbers 290535 and 250456



IN THIS EDITION

- P2** Introduction
- P3** Women's empowerment appeal
- P6** Empowering women in Malawi
- P8** Gender and mental health
- P11** Get involved!

Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet share resources and expertise so we can better support marginalised communities to enhance their health, livelihoods and wellbeing.

▼ We work globally to address the barriers that women face



EMPOWER WOMEN, EMPOWER EVERYONE

Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet are launching our Women's Empowerment Appeal focusing on our work with communities, activists and health workers to ensure that women have fair and equal access to opportunities, resources, healthcare and a good quality of life.

For a society to truly be healthy and prosperous, all members of that society must have equal rights. And yet in so many places around the world, patriarchal practices are still dominant. This results in the oppression of women in already poor and marginalised areas, and this power imbalance heavily impacts their health, education, and economic status.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty, and many have little or no say in the decisions which affect their lives. They often get less food, receive less education, and are disproportionately affected by poor sanitation. Many have little or no money of their own which makes them dependent on others.

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SAFE SPACES



▲ **Esperance, one of the young mothers supported through our safe centres, and her daughter**

We have been working with women and communities in Rwanda since 1996 to address the challenges that women face. Alongside our partners, we have established three 'safe centres' in rural communities, where women who have experienced gender-based violence can receive vital support and information.

In addition to accessing key services through these 'safe centres', such as, psychological counselling, legal guidance, medical guidance, family mediation and family planning, survivors of gender-based violence can come together to learn skills, discuss their rights and support each other.

Furthermore, these 'safe centres' provide a space where the wider community, from families to teachers to police officers, can access information and support around gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health. We have held meetings around gender-based violence, where public officials, health workers, activists and community members can share their perspectives, so they can better understand the issues and coordinate their activities.

Through these 'safe centres', we have trained over 150 women who have experienced gender-based violence in work readiness and entrepreneurship to support them in securing, sustaining and creating jobs. They have undertaken training on saving methods, with many forming saving and loan groups, so they can access money for business, healthcare or other expenses.

Many women have also completed training in tailoring, and we have provided sewing machines, tissue paper, silk and other materials, enabling them to start tailoring businesses.

Esperance, a young mother who has been supported through the 'safe centres', tells us: "The training helped us to overcome stigma, and it taught us how to behave in employment and how to create some small businesses. Initially, we felt that they should give us money for doing this training. But now... we feel like we are the ones who should give money to the person who trained us."

This power imbalance also means they are often subject to sexual and physical violence, impacting on both their physical and mental health, and their overall wellbeing. This once again impacts on other areas of their lives, such as their ability to make a living.

Not only do women deserve equal rights and opportunities – gender equality and women's full enjoyment of human rights are essential to economic and social development. At Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet, we know that improving women's rights is essential to achieving health for all. This is why women's rights are at the core of so much of our work.

▼ **We work with women and girls in marginalised communities**





▲ **We advocate for fundamental social, economic and political change**

Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet are working with women in Africa, Latin America, Asia to challenge unhealthy gender dynamics - whether helping women in rural Sierra Leone protect their land rights or advocating for appropriate healthcare for indigenous women in Guatemala.

Right now, women around the world are empowering themselves. Together, we want to make sure all women have fair and equal access to opportunities, resources, healthcare and a good quality of life.

Donate now:

Donate to our Women's Empowerment Appeal and support community leaders, activists and health workers across Africa, Asia and Latin America who are helping women empower themselves, challenge discrimination and defend their rights.

 www.healthpovertyaction.org
 Health Poverty Action, Kemp House, 152-160 City Road, London EC1V 2NX



EMPOWERING WOMEN IN MALAWI

Executive Director of Find Your Feet Malawi, Melina Mtonga, tells us about our sister organisation's work supporting women's empowerment in the south-eastern African nation.



My name is Melina Mtonga. I work with Find Your Feet (FYF) Malawi as Executive Director, having joined the team originally in 2016 as Programme Manager. I hold over 22 years' experience of studying and working in community, social and economic development.

FYF started working in Malawi in 2004 and, in 2016, FYF Malawi registered as an independent and autonomous organisation, working with rural communities to find sustainable solutions to hunger, poverty and discrimination.

Women's issues

In Malawi today, one of the main issues we see driving poverty and hunger is gender inequality. Women do not have the same access to productive resources as men do. This

is largely due to social norms which dictate that men are to be regarded as superior to women.

As such, men generally own land and many other assets – limiting women's access to formal credit markets, as they often do not have enough resources to offer as collateral.

Women typically engage in subsistence farming, growing legumes for household consumption. Women face challenges in economic development because their spouses often prevent them from participating in economic activities.

Illiteracy levels are higher among women, with fewer girls completing secondary school than boys as many families believe that adolescent girls should focus on marriage rather than school.

Women's participation in household decision making is limited. Recent analysis in Balaka district revealed that 87% of households' key decisions are made by men and only 12.5% are made by women.

Most women and girls face some form of gender-based violence, whether emotional violence, economic violence, physical violence, sexual violence, child marriages or human trafficking.

Supporting women's empowerment

FYF works alongside women and community leaders to challenge the stereotypes and gender inequality that arise from harmful social norms and attitudes. We hold community awareness meetings on gender equality, human rights, and advocacy against harmful social norms.

Together, we focus on women's economic, social, and legal empowerment; breaking down the barriers that prevent women's participation in decision making and leadership.

We help Village Saving and Loans Associations, whose members are primarily women, to develop links with financial service providers who offer affordable loans. With better access to credit, women have more opportunities to empower themselves economically.

We also analyse gender relations in the areas where we work, so we

can understand their impact on our projects and the impact of our projects on gender relations.

This analysis helps us to better plan future activities and to better advocate for the elimination of harmful cultural practices that hinder women.

Steps towards equality

Many of the women involved in our projects take up leadership positions and are actively involved in decision making at community level, largely because they have increased their confidence through gaining knowledge on human rights and financial literacy.

Some now run their own businesses, and their economic status has tremendously improved. Some have managed to build their own houses and buy vehicles, such as motorcycles. Families report that they are becoming more prosperous as women play a greater role in household decision making.

Ultimately, fighting gender inequality is everyone's responsibility. Governments and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), development partners, traditional leaders and men should challenge exclusion and address harmful cultural practices that marginalise women.

Your contributions mean we can continue to work with partners like FYF Malawi to defend women's rights. Please visit www.findyourfeet.org to donate today.

GENDER AND MENTAL HEALTH



EXPLORING THE FACTORS IMPACTING ON WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH GLOBALLY

Due to huge deficits in government funding in most countries in the majority world (otherwise known as the Global South), families are forced to pay entirely out-of-pocket for mental health care. Most often it is the care givers – the majority of whom are women – that bear the greatest burden including isolation, high stress levels and impoverishment.

Although biological factors may play some role in prevalence rates, the interplay with psychosocial factors heightens the risks of mental ill-health for women and girls. For example, gender discrimination and gender-based violence have been reported to have a significant



▲ Our work with communities informs our understanding of mental health issues

▶ We advocate for better healthcare for women

impact on mental health including depression and anxiety disorders. Women can also experience considerable psychological disorders related to reproductive health, including antenatal and postnatal depression.

In some countries such as Somaliland and Ethiopia, women often experience harmful practices like female genital mutilation, that have been associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that more than 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) in 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia where FGM is practiced, with more than 3 million girls estimated to be at risk annually.

It is estimated that 60% of people attending primary care clinics, the majority of whom are women,

have a diagnosable mental disorder (WHO: 2008). As the COVID pandemic, environmental threats, conflict, displacement and growing global income inequalities have demonstrated, women are disproportionately affected by many of the major challenges facing humanity.

The COVID social distancing measures and self-isolation in particular exposed women and girls – more than men and boys, to mental health risk factors as a result of increased cases of gender-based violence and the burden of caregiving.

As we advocate for appropriate attention and support around mental health, both nationally and internationally, we recognise and will continue to address the specific challenges that women face globally.



**A GIFT IN YOUR
WILL HELPS PEOPLE
AROUND THE
WORLD CONTINUE
TO TAKE CHARGE OF
THEIR OWN HEALTH.**



Stand with the communities, campaigners and doctors who've been taking a different approach to tackling poverty and poor health for over thirty-five years.

Health Poverty Action was founded in 1984 by a young doctor on his return from Afghanistan. Today, because of our committed supporters, we are able to work in 18 countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America.

To find out how even a small gift in your will can make a huge difference, please contact

fundraising@healthpovertyaction.org

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GET INVOLVED

There are many ways to support the work of Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet. Here are just a few ways, and you can find more on our websites at www.healthpovertyaction.org and www.findyourfeet.org.



London Marathon 2023

Want to run the London Marathon 2023? Then join #TeamHPA on 23rd April and run to support health justice for all! Applications are only £100, and sponsorship targets are £2,000. If you're interested, email tl.jarsdel@healthpovertyaction.org for an application form.

Singing

Choirs for Change 2023. Are you part of a choir or singing group? Why not join us in Winter 2023 to raise funds for health equality with our Choirs for Change campaign! Please email tl.jarsdel@healthpovertyaction.org for more information and to register your interest.

Shopping

Fundraise for Free! If you're already plotting out your Christmas shopping, check out easyfundraising for a great way to raise money for Health Poverty Action whilst you shop online at no extra cost to you! easyfundraising works with over 4,000 retailers who donate to your chosen cause as a thank you for shopping with them. Simply sign up at easyfundraising.co.uk and select Health Poverty Action. Then each time you begin your shop at easyfundraising you'll be supporting our work for free.



Get involved!

If you'd like to get involved in any of these opportunities or have other unique fundraising ideas, please contact Tabitha-Levis Jarsdel via email at tl.jarsdel@healthpovertyaction.org.



POWERFUL WOMEN, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet are working with women in Africa, Latin America, Asia to challenge unhealthy gender dynamics and tackle inequality.

Make a donation today

Too often, women bear the brunt of poverty and ill health. Lack of economic opportunities, education and access to land makes women more vulnerable to poverty and loss of income.

As caregivers, women are often left to pick up the pieces, looking after those impacted by ill health. And discrimination in health care can result in poorer care for women. Meanwhile, gender-based violence poses a greater threat to women's health than traffic accidents and malaria combined.

How to donate:

Web: www.healthpovertyaction.org
Email: fundraising@healthpovertyaction.org
Mail: Health Poverty Action, Kemp House,
152-160 City Road, London EC1V 2NX

Your generous contributions support work with women and communities around the world to ensure that women have fair and equal access to opportunities, resources, healthcare and a good quality of life.

Whether bringing women together to demand their rights, supporting women to develop their livelihoods or ensuring that women can benefit from appropriate healthcare, we are committed to overcoming the barriers facing women globally.

Please give to our Women's Empowerment Appeal and help communities come together to defend women's rights.

Registered with

