

UNITED VOICES FOR GLOBAL IMPACT (UVGI)

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REPORT ON YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (MHPSS) AND THE FIGHT AGAINST DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

FROM: Brown Masingati and Dafter Molande, UVGI Ambassadors.

TO: UVGI Board of Directors and UVGI Director, USA.

Activity Name	Youth Empowerment in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and the Fight Against Drug and Substance Abuse
Activity Date	27th June 2025
Activity Venue	Mtima Village Headquarters
Planned Funding	With Support from UVGI-US



Group photo taken at the end of the Anti-drug and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Awareness Meeting

Introduction

Youths from Mtima and Liti villages in Traditional Authority Nkagula, Zomba district have been called upon to stand strong and fight against drug and substance abuse and to be champions of social behaviour change in both their families and their community at large. The call was jointly made by Pempho Chinyama and Saidi Ndau—Gender and Social Behaviour Change expert, and

Mental Health specialist, respectively. The two experts made the call during a Youth Empowerment in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and Prevention of Drug and Substance Abuse awareness meeting held at the headquarters of Village Headwoman Mtima on 27th June, 2025. The meeting was held under the theme: **“Let’s Unite in the Fight Against Drug and Substance Abuse!”**

Interestingly, more than twenty-five women from within Mtima village also attended the youth awareness meeting. The aim of their participation was to build their capacity on issues of mental health and prevention of drug and substance abuse as women are mostly the victims of such malpractices in their families.

Activity Objective

To build more knowledge and understanding in the participants (both the youth and women) in mental health, in dangers of and how to prevent or fight drug and substance abuse.

The aim of this awareness meeting was to empower the participants to become champions/models of social behaviour change at both family and community levels.

Project Goal:

To reduce the number of youths involved in drug and substance abuse through prevention, education, and awareness in Traditional Authority Nkagula by 2028.

This goal will be achieved through provision of alternatives to drugs and substance abuse among the youths in the area. The alternatives will include engaging them in sporting activities, revamping youth clubs where they will be participating in different vocational and entrepreneurial skills trainings.

Project Mission:

To have productive and reliable youths who will actively participate in decision-making processes and in different developmental activities in their community and the nation at large.

Participants

- Trust Youth Club members
- Youths from Mtima and Liti villages
- Some women from Liti village

Facilitators

There were two facilitators:

- Mental Health specialist from Zomba District Health Office – Saidi Ndau, and
- Gender and Social Behaviour Change expert from Zomba District Social Welfare Office – Pempho Chinyama.



The Facilitators

Mode of delivery of the message

The facilitators used different methodologies to deliver their messages to the participants (youths and women) and to also interact well with them. The following are the methodologies they employed during the awareness meeting:

- Focus group discussion
- Brainstorming
- Role playing

AREAS COVERED

The facilitators covered the following areas during the meeting:

A. DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

1. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO LEARN ABOUT DRUG AWARENESS?

Drug education helps children and young people understand that all drugs, legal or illegal, have the potential to cause harm, and that the drug experience is because of many factors including the person, the drug and the environment.

2. OBJECTIVES OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Education and Awareness: Increase youth awareness about the risks of substance abuse and the importance of prevention.

Skill Development: Equip youth with decision-making and refusal skills to resist peer pressure and temptations related to substance use.

3. WHY IS SUBSTANCE ABUSE AWARENESS IMPORTANT?

Health, finances, relationships and careers can be ruined. The abuse of drugs and alcohol is by far the leading cause of preventable illnesses and death in our society. The importance of substance abuse treatment is cannot be overstated, and fortunately many effective treatments are available.

4. COMMON DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES USED BY ADOLESCENTS

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| i) Alcohol | vii) Amphetamines |
| ii) Cannabis | viii) Mandrax |
| iii) Cocaine | ix) Valium |
| iv) Coffee | x) Morphine |
| v) Caffeine | xi) Opium |
| vi) Hallucinogens | xii) Heroin |

5. CAUSES OF DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| a) Stress | h) Culture |
| b) Depression | i) Myths |
| c) Anxiety (Fear) | j) Poor family socio-economic background |
| d) Low self-esteem | k) Low parental education |
| e) Peer pressure | l) Unemployment |
| f) Academic pressure | m) To relax |
| g) To be intelligent | n) To forget problems |

6. HOW CAN DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE BE PREVENTED?

10 WAYS OF PREVENTION:

- 1) **Educate yourself on the dangers of drug abuse:** This refers to proactively pursuing knowledge regarding the detrimental impacts drugs have on one's physical, mental, and social environment. A solid foundation for prevention and a decrease in addiction rates is formed when people are aware of the harmful consequences of substance use and are able to support and protect persons around them.
- 2) **Learn and practice healthy coping skills:** This is the development and application of constructive techniques to manage stress, emotions and life events without resorting to negative practices including drug use.
- 3) **Foster strong family relationships:** Strong family ties are important because such bonds deter substance misuse and promote healthy behaviours.
- 4) **Live a healthy, balanced lifestyle:** This is about the preservation of one's physical, mental, and emotional health with a good diet, consistent exercise, adequate sleep, and constructive daily routines.
- 5) **Resist peer pressure:** Resisting peer pressure means defying the influence of people who promote dangerous or unhealthy practices, such as drug use. One is and can be able to resist peer pressure only if he or she is strong enough to make his/her own decisions based on one's own values.
- 6) **Take only prescribed medication:** This means using medicines exactly as directed by a licensed healthcare provider and avoiding drugs not intended for personal

treatment. One ought to stay within medical guidelines –a thing which helps one to prevent misuse and discourages casual or recreational drug intake.

- 7) **Maintain self-esteem and purpose:** This is defined as recognizing personal value and having a clear sense of direction or goals in life.
- 8) **Take part in social activities:** This refers to attending gatherings of people for the purpose of making new friends, having fun, and nurturing existing connections. Some of the benefits of strong relationships and engaging interactions are the reduction of stress, improvement of overall well-being and protection against drug use.
- 9) **Seek professional help when warning signs are present:** This simply refers to reaching out to qualified experts, such as doctors, counsellors, or therapists, at the first signs of emotional distress, behavioural changes, or possible substance misuse. Obtaining expert assistance at an early stage is so significant in that it averts the development of more severe issues.
- 10) **Set clear expectations and boundaries regarding substance abuse:** This is the process of defining particular norms and guidelines for acceptable behaviour connected to drugs and alcohol inside families, social groups, or communities. Drug abuse is reduced with the support of well-defined limits, the promotion of responsible decision-making, and regular reinforcement of good conduct through communication.



A cross-section of the participants paying much attention to the Facilitator

7. EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN INDIVIDUAL

- Eating and/or sleeping too much or too little
- Pulling away from people or usual activities

- Having low or low energy
- Feeling numb or like nothing matters
- Having unexplained body pains
- Fighting with family members and friends
- Feeling helpless and hopeless
- Having persistent thoughts and memories you can't get out of your head
- Smoking, drinking liquor and using drugs more than usual
- Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared
- Hearing voices and believing things that are not true
- Thinking of harming yourself or others
- Inability to perform daily tasks like taking care of your kids or getting to work or school

8. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN MALAWI

In Malawi, Mental Health services are provided at:

- ✓ Zomba Mental Hospital
- ✓ St. John of God Hospital in Mzuzu
- ✓ All hospitals in the country—these offer different forms of mental health

9. MENTAL HEALTH MYTHS AND FACTS

Here are some of the myths and facts about mental health:

Myths:	Facts:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children don't experience mental health problems. • People with mental health problems are violent and unpredictable. • Prevention doesn't work. It's impossible to prevent mental illnesses. • There's no hope for people with mental health problems. Those with such problems will never recover. • I can't do anything for a person with a mental health problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health problems are actually very common. • One in 10 young people have ever experienced a period of depression. • Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in Malawi. • People with mental health problems get better and may recover completely. • Friends and loved ones can make a difference.

10. WAYS TO MAINTAIN POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

- Getting professional health if you need it.
- Connecting with others.
- Staying positive.
- Getting physically active I.e. physical exercises.
- Helping others
- Getting enough sleep.

- Developing coping skills.

11. SOME EXAMPLES OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AND THEIR SYMPTOMS

- a) **Depression:** It is a state or condition that differs from normal sadness in its intensity, duration and effect on daily activities. This is also understood as chronic stress.

Symptoms of Depression

- Insomnia/Sleep disturbance, early awaking
- Anorexia/Constipation (digestive problems)
- Multiple body aches and pains
- Suicidal thoughts
- Loss of libido (lack of interest in sex)
- Lack of energy
- A feeling of loss of control/weakened immune system
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- Fatigue or exhaustion

- b) **Anxiety/Fear**

Symptoms of Anxiety

- Ache and pains in the muscles
- Increased heart beat
- Cold hands
- Tension headaches
- Tight chest
- Difficulty in breathing
- Hypertension
- Avoidance of particular situations
- Fast movement
- Disturbed sleep
- Vivid dreams
- Nausea, no appetite
- Diarrhoea, frequent bowel movement

- c) **Anger:** This is an intense emotion you feel when something has gone wrong or someone has wronged you. It is a reaction to and distraction from inner suffering—feelings such sadness, powerlessness, shame, anxiety, inadequacy, and isolation.

Symptoms of Anger

- A faster heartbeat
- Muscle tense/unable to relax

- Feeling guilty
- Frequent temper tantrums/Resentful towards other people or situation
- Getting easily irritated
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling humiliated
- Excessive arguing with adults
- Blaming others for mistakes
- Active defiance and refusal to comply with requests



Mtima village women who also benefited from this Mental Health and Anti-drug and Substance Abuse Awareness meeting

12. PSYCHO-EDUCATION

This is process of providing education and information to those seeking or receiving mental health services

Approaches to Psycho-education

- ✓ One to one
- ✓ Psycho-education to a couple or lovers
- ✓ Group education/counselling e.g. youth clubs, girls' clubs, community etc.

Importance of Psycho-education

- It helps in prevention of mental health problems relapse.
- It enhances better treatment adherence.
- It lowers/reduces self-stigma; and provides better quality of life.
- It improves social competencies.
- It promotes active engagement in rehabilitation.
- It lowers cost of care.
- It promotes information sharing.

IMPACT AND SUCCESSES OF THIS MEETING

- The participants visibly understood the dangers of drugs and substance abuse.
- From the meeting, the youths and the women voluntarily offered to be champions of social behaviour change right from their families all the way up to their community level.
- Even Village Headwoman Mtima was visibly very convinced that the meeting has brought great impact to the participants, and eventually to the families of Mtima village.

IMPACT OF A DRUG USE PREVENTION PROGRAM

- It fosters antidrug use attitudes, particularly with respect to legal drugs.
- It facilitates participant friendships with conventional others and tends to discourage thoughts about dropping out of school.
- It reduces cases of drug crimes in a society
- It prevents premature mortality, illness, injury leading to incapacitation, and imprisonment—things that could reduce national productivity.
- Reduction in illegal drug trafficking and use leading to saving in public financial resources that could have been expended in the areas of health care and criminal justice.

CHALLENGES

The implementation of this activity was faced with mainly one challenge. It is the devaluation of the local currency for a number of times in the last five months. This has affected our budget which was at **US \$90** for the two activities, but rose up to **US \$130**. This is the sole reason for the over-expenditure. The local currency devaluated in March, then in April, and at least twice in the month of May this year.



Some of the youths who participated in the activity expressing their joy just after the awareness meeting

CONCLUSION

The intervention was a combination of two project activities of Youth Empowerment in Mental Health as well as Empowerment in the Fight against Drug and Substance Abuse. Therefore, the

budget allocation indicated in the 'Planned Budget' above was initially intended for the two activities.

The combination of the two activities was due to two main factors: one, because the two activities are health-related and according to the facilitators, there was no problem having them done together. Two, the idea was to ensure that we control the budget expenditure having already been hit hard by the devaluation—we felt that conducting the related activities separately could have resulted in much higher over-expenditure.

Very finally, the community of Mtima and Liti villages—specifically the youth, women and their leaders—are certainly expressing their gratitude to the UVGI for the support towards this activity, which has translated into their empowerment in issues of mental health and drug and substance abuse prevention.

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END OF REPORT