

Gender equality and social change at Options



Gender equality is a universal human right. It is foundational to our vision of a world where everyone can access high-quality health services, no matter where they live and without financial burden.

Around the world, women and girls face structural barriers to health, stemming from gender norms that consistently undervalue them. Gender inequality also holds back health systems and economies: women's leadership and full, equal and active participation in the health workforce and civil society are critical for achieving universal health care.

Since 1992, Options has worked to transform health systems by improving access to health services and outcomes, especially for women and children, with a strong focus on reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (RMNCAH). We have pioneered rights-based approaches to strengthen women's movements, reduce unsafe abortion and end female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C).

During COVID-19, we have placed women and girls at the centre of our programmatic responses, with a focus on continuity of essential RMNCAH services.

Research and design with women and girls



Options has pioneered methods for conducting participatory research and co-creation with women and girls to ensure that our solutions to addressing gender barriers to health respond to their needs. These include our Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research (PEER) method and human-centred design (HCD) approaches. Our programmes are based on a holistic understanding of people's lives, including analysis of how gender may present opportunities or constraints. We also use political economy analysis (PEA) across the programme life cycle to examine how other social markers of difference (e.g. ethnicity, socioeconomic status) result in experiences of inequality.

- Participatory approaches have helped us understand drivers of FGM/C and maternal mental health in different country contexts, and have shaped the design of our Safire programme, which promotes girls' choices to reduce unsafe abortion in Kenya and Nigeria
- We carried out PEAs to inform the design of the UK Aid Support to the Africa-Led Movement to End FGM/C programme, analysing the social, political and economic context of the practice. This analysis is informing context-specific strategies for girl-centred, gender transformative approaches to end FGM/C in several high-prevalence countries.

Gender-responsive quality health services



Applying a gender lens is critical to improving the quality of, and access to, health services. We provide technical assistance (e.g. on health financing and planning) to support national and local governments to strengthen health systems for quality RMNCAH services, overcoming financial and other barriers to access. Through advocacy and coalition-building, we also galvanise governments, civil society and the media to prioritise sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and family planning (FP) to meet the needs of women and girls.

- Our Evidence for Action-MamaYe and Women's Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) programmes work with governments, health workers and civil society to understand the realities women and girls face in accessing SRH and FP services and push for change for the most marginalised. This has resulted in governments creating RMNCAH budget lines and increasing investment in FP, as well as local action by health workers and policy changes that enable women and girls to receive well-funded, high-quality services.
- In Nepal, our Health Sector Support Programme works closely with the government to integrate gender and equity throughout its Nepal Health Sector Strategy and to ensure that health services are inclusive and responsive to women's needs, as well as those of other marginalised groups. We have supported a multisectoral approach to gender-based violence, which has led to the establishment of One-Stop Crisis Management Centres for survivors. We have been working hard to maintain these critical services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- We focus on reaching those with the lowest incomes. In Yemen, we worked on the Safe Motherhood and Family Planning Voucher Programme to distribute vouchers to women to cover the costs of RMNCAH services and transport, which helped keep these services afloat and accessible even during prolonged periods of conflict.

Putting products and technologies in the hands of women and girls



We aim to increase access to products and technologies that enhance the power of women and girls to control their own bodies and health. This includes devices such as self-administered long-acting reversible contraception, and drugs for medical abortion.

- When COVID-19 restrictions led to a fall in FP uptake in Madagascar, our WISH programme recognised an opportunity to accelerate the national roll-out of self-injectable contraception and worked with government to launch the programme virtually. Women and girls can now receive training on self-administration, receive the first three-month injection and take home two further doses to use themselves. Self-care approaches are expected to reverse the impact of COVID-19 on users.
- Through the Grand-Challenges-Canada-supported Options Learning Platform, we are supporting 40 organisations globally to achieve proof of concept and scale innovations to improve access to SRH self-care products and services for women and adolescents.

Tackling harmful gender norms: from grassroots dialogue to global advocacy



Options has led ground-breaking social and behaviour change communications (SBCC) initiatives on sensitive gendered issues, including FGM/C and safe abortion, that centre women and girls' voices and perspectives.

- Our multi-country end-FGM/C programme, **The Girl Generation**, created the largest global network to end FGM/C, with over 900 member organisations. The programme built networks of youth activists and SBCC Trainers to support sustained social norms change at multiple levels of society.
- We worked in partnership with women and girls leading the end-FGM/C movement to elevate their voices as powerful advocates for change, through media, campaigns and coalition building, and packaged powerful data and compelling stories of change to ensure that ending FGM/C remains a high priority on the international agenda.

- Support to the Africa-Led Movement to End FGM/C will build on these efforts, combining girl-centred gender transformative approaches at community level (e.g. community conversations, safe spaces) with advocacy and strategic communications.

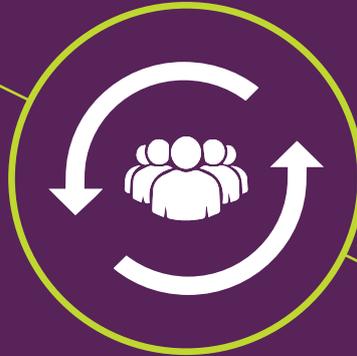
Empowering women-led organisations



Women's rights organisations and women's movements are widely recognised as key change makers, yet they are under-resourced and often excluded from decision-making spaces. We are experienced at designing and managing inclusive granting mechanisms that respond to the needs of frontline gender equality activists.

- Under **The Girl Generation**, we disbursed \$1.8 million to over 170 grassroots organisations across sub-Saharan Africa to support community-led efforts to end FGM/C.
- We provide technical assistance and capacity-building support to 40 global innovators across Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas to design, pilot and scale cutting-edge innovations and technologies that improve access to safe abortion for women, girls and LGBTQI+ groups.

Gender equality has been core to Options' programming and ethos from the start. As a wholly owned subsidiary of **MSI Reproductive Choices**, we share our parent organisation's commitment to gender equality as part of a broader intersectional approach to diversity and inclusion.



About us

Options is an international development consultancy delivering innovative solutions to some of the world's most complex health challenges. We drive transformational improvements in the health and well-being of the most vulnerable. Our work supports the vision of a world where women and children can access high-quality health services they need, without financial burden.

With over 25 years' experience, Options has a proven track record in building partnerships throughout Africa and Asia and tailoring approaches to the local context.

Options is continuously looking forward, innovating, and co-creating new solutions with our partners and clients. Further investments and partnerships will enable us to transform the problems of today into the solutions of tomorrow.

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