



A World Without Choice: The Global Gag Rule's Impact in Madagascar

Bako's Story

Bako, a young farmer, didn't imagine she would have two children by age 22. When her firstborn was less than a year old, she and her husband were shocked to find that she was pregnant again. "We were not ready for it," she explained.

When she traveled to her local clinic—an hour-and-a-half walk from her home—to give birth to her second born, the nurses told her that a Marie Stopes Madagascar Outreach team would be visiting soon. She had heard about Marie Stopes Madagascar from her sister-in-law, who uses an implant, so she saved the date. "Life is hard already with two children."

Thanks to their services, Bako received a long-acting implant to protect her from unplanned pregnancy while she and her husband focus on raising their family. "I just got my first implant and I think it will help us. I will be able to work, and we will be able to take care of our sons until they are big and strong enough. We will enjoy life more." It's hard to imagine what life would be like, she says, without Marie Stopes Madagascar's services.

“There might be another health center somewhere, but I have never heard of another one in our district. I don't know where we would go.”

Context

Madagascar is an island nation in southern Africa located in the Indian Ocean east of Mozambique, with more than 24 million inhabitants.

Poverty levels are high. Almost 80% of the population lives on less than \$1.90 per day, and 50% of children under 5 suffer from stunting.

Moreover, Madagascar is particularly vulnerable to climate change. This weakens economic stability, hampers poverty reduction efforts, and leaves the poorest segments of the population at constant risk.

Need for Contraception

Madagascar's population is projected to nearly double by 2050. While the total fertility rate is steadily declining it remains at 4.2 births per woman. According to a recent progress report from Family Planning 2020, 25.6% of married women of reproductive age have an unmet need for contraception.



An estimated 32% of women aged 15-19 years already have children or are currently pregnant. Among the poorest young people, 51% of adolescents have children. Early marriage is also common in Madagascar, with 48% of girls married before the age of 18.

The Global Gag Rule in Madagascar

The Trump Administration's expanded Global Gag Rule blocks the US Government from partnering with organizations like Marie Stopes International (MSI) that believe in women's choice and deliver safe and legal abortion services, even with non-US Government funding. This decision will not only deprive women of their right to have children by choice, not chance, but in many cases their access to primary healthcare. An estimated 40% of Malagasy women who use contraception receive their services through Marie Stopes Madagascar, which delivers 60% of all long-term contraceptives in the country.

Prior to the Global Gag Rule, the US Government supported more than half of Marie Stopes Madagascar's work:

- Funding focused on clinical outreach work and a voucher program, which enabled more than 170,000 free, voluntary contraception services previously unavailable to women in remote and rural areas.
- The program also supported MSI franchised private sector clinics and worked to strengthen Madagascar's public health sector.
- An estimated 75% of women, men and youth who accessed these services live on less than \$1.25 per day, and almost 90% live on less than \$2.50 per day.

Allowing women and girls to take full charge of their reproductive choices enables them to achieve their educational and employment aspirations. Contraceptive access is critical to tackling poverty, building more equitable societies, and ultimately achieving the goals of sustainable development.

Safeguarding Reproductive Health in Madagascar

While many other donors have risen to help meet this need, funding gaps remain. The Global Gag Rule will have devastating effects on women like Bako, who depend on organizations like Marie Stopes to access high-quality, voluntary contraception. The US Government-funded voucher program is now closed and a further 22 outreach teams, that Bako and her community rely on, are at risk.

The United States is the largest bilateral donor to family planning, accounting for 45% of total bilateral funding in 2016. The Global Gag Rule reduced funding to UNFPA and US policy changes have created uncertainty for family planning programs in Madagascar and around the world.

The Global Gag Rule means that millions in the developing world will lose access to contraception. We need to take strong, collaborative action to ensure women and girls don't pay the price.

Since 1992, Marie Stopes Madagascar has been working with national government and non-governmental partners to provide a full range of sexual and reproductive health services including contraception, maternal health, post-abortion care, and screening for sexually transmitted infections and HIV.

To learn more, visit www.mariestopes.org/where-we-work/

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¹ World Bank, 2017

² World Bank Population Reference Bureau, 2011

³ World Bank Open Data, 2015 See http://progress.familyplanning2020.org/user/data/estimate-table/pdf/indicator_03.pdf

⁴ Madagascar Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2008-2009

⁵ UNICEF, 2013