

AmplifyChange: Using advocacy to remove barriers to safe and legal abortion

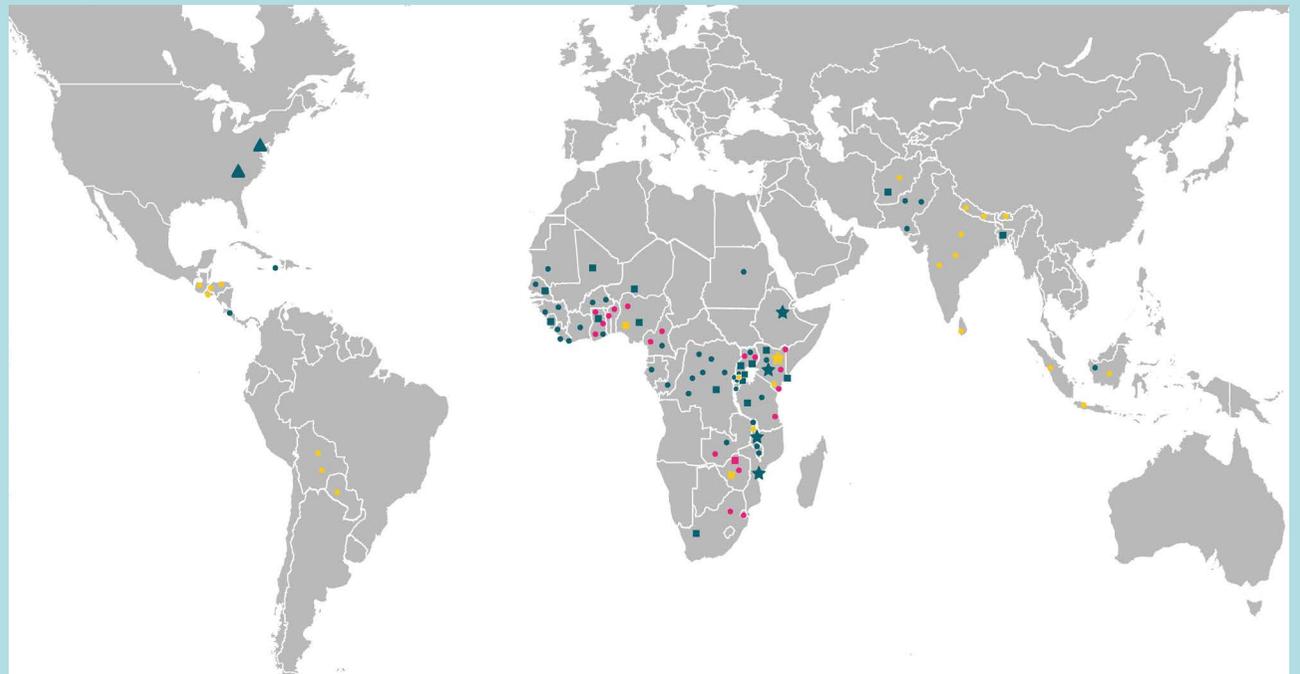
The ability of women to access safe abortion is an important component and indicator of their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and of the autonomy they have in realising other basic human rights.

Nearly 22 million women worldwide experience an unsafe abortion each year; 98% of whom are from developing countries. Estimates suggest that unsafe abortion causes approximately 13%-15% of the total number of maternal deaths globally. Data from around the world indicates that legal and access barriers to safe abortion services don't stop women from seeking abortion; they just force women to resort to unsafe options putting their lives, health and dignity at risk.

Removing barriers to safe abortion is a priority issue for AmplifyChange. We want to see the decriminalisation of abortion and we support a woman's right to safe and legal abortion. We therefore support civil society activists across the Global South leading advocacy efforts to change policies and laws regarding access to safe abortion.

AmplifyChange is supporting 100 grants that work on removing barriers to safe and legal abortion

The grants cover 42 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.



Lessons learned: challenges

1. Conservative social norms are a central influence on policies and laws around sexual and reproductive health and rights in many countries. These norms can be rooted in interpretations of religion, as well as natalist beliefs that are often politicised
2. Anti-abortion rights movements are gaining ground around the world, which has bolstered opposition campaigns in countries where policies and laws around access to abortion are being discussed. Opposition movements often find sympathetic political allies who promote their agenda on a governmental scale
3. Global politics has negatively affected Southern-based civil society efforts to promote safe abortion laws and policies, most notably the reinstatement of the American government's Mexico City Policy, now called [Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance](#), but more colloquially known as the Global Gag Rule. These restrictions prevent funding for global health programmes that provide or make referrals to abortion services, mention abortion as part of their counselling, advocacy, or educational efforts, or directly campaign for increased access to abortion services. Without access to USAID funding, many clinics and NGOs based in the South are forced to close, further shrinking the resources available to individuals seeking services or promoting access to safe abortion
4. In countries where sexual and reproductive health and rights laws are non-existent, or in the process of being developed, abortion struggles to be prioritised within national debates over what the most crucial aspects are to include, especially when programmatic funding and resources are low. Much less stigmatised issues, such as access to family planning services and eliminating gender-based violence, find more support from national governments and international donors
5. Stemming from religious and cultural social norms against abortion, [social stigma](#) negatively affects abortion rights advocacy efforts. Across the world women who have had abortions are classified as sinful, morally-lacking, or evil, and face discrimination or exile from their communities. This pushes them to find clandestine, mostly unsafe, methods, [even in settings where abortion is legal](#), to avoid prejudice. Advocates who wish to improve safe abortion policy in their country are faced with similar negative rhetoric, which can sometimes lead to risks to their lives
6. Within the context of sub-Saharan Africa weaker abortion advocacy movements in Francophone and Lusophone countries, are in part the results of lower levels of international support for abortion rights campaigns, has contributed to slower changes in policies and laws. Donor support in sexual and reproductive health has generally been stronger in Anglophone Africa.

Successful strategies

1. **Advocating for safe and legal abortion** is a daunting task as an individual or as a sole organisation, but coalition building and working with partners strengthens and broadens the pool of resources and expertise to support the movement. Furthermore, coalitions build resilience amongst their members who may find it difficult to persevere after times of setback.



Réseau Siggil Jigeen is leading a coalition of diverse sector organisations advocating for the liberalisation of Senegal's strict abortion laws. The Taskforce, as it is known, has mobilised resources, identified key stakeholders, collected evidence and case studies linked to the consequences of the laws, and built the capacity of new members, including youth organisations. The momentum has encouraged advocacy planning and reaching out to allies in government to work towards the goal of liberalising the abortion law in Senegal.

Réseau Siggil Jigeen

Strengthening



Senegal



A mural advertising the Aunty Jane public service hotline run by TICAH, who provide information on safe abortion and SRHR

2. **Working with sympathetic political allies is a crucial step in policy change advocacy.** Rigorous advocacy planning that includes stakeholder mapping can help to identify champions in the government with whom activists can work. By engaging with known allies, there is a wider opening to begin reaching out to those who may be on-the-fence about the topic of safe abortion access. Collaborating with local government leaders on improving abortion access can also contribute to a bottom-up approach to policy change.
3. **Addressing abortion related stigma** is a key strategy to further promote abortion rights. Normalising the topic of abortion and [giving voice](#) to women can lead to more positive reception by society, as well as by key stakeholders. Other interventions such as Values Clarification and Attitudinal Transformation with policy makers have had success in instigating changes in social norms surrounding abortion, contributing to a more open environment for law and policy change.

4. **Strategic litigation has successfully promoted policies and laws to increase access to safe abortion.** Legal cases that highlight people's experiences of restrictive abortion regulation can lead to the establishment of standards which hold the government accountable to their duty to ensure fulfilment of human rights.



Through their individual AmplifyChange projects, Health Development Initiative (HDI) and Great Lakes Initiative for Human Rights and Development (GLIHD) are using strategic litigation to target restrictions on abortion in the Penal Code and advocating for broader permissions to access abortion in Rwanda. Together, through a national coalition of which they are members, both HDI and GLIHD led a successful advocacy campaign to pass an amendment that updates the abortion provisions in the Penal Code to [eradicate court orders for accessing legal abortion](#), which at the time of writing, was waiting for final approval from President Paul Kagame. This amendment will reduce the barriers an individual must go through to access a legal, safe abortion service.



Rwanda

Health Development Initiative



Strengthening

Great Lakes Initiative for Human Rights and Development

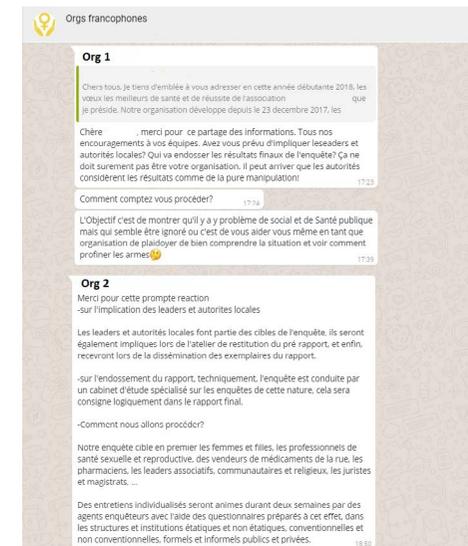


Strengthening

5. **Reinforcing the evidence base** on the current state of abortion rights, abortion access, and consequences of restrictive abortion laws, can strengthen the legitimacy of the abortion rights movement and build stronger advocacy campaigns. Once the evidence has been collected and analysed, dissemination via conferences, media, and advocacy activities allows for a diverse range of stakeholders, including policy makers, to have access to data and facts that can inform their position on access to safe abortion.

How we are learning as Fund

- **Mentorship:** Closely cooperating with grantees throughout the grant set up and implementation periods. The relationship developed at the beginning of the grant cycle is essential for developing bespoke advice and support as well as identifying general areas of support for grantees
- **Digital communities:** A French-speaking WhatsApp group has allows for grantees working in restrictive contexts, and in nascent abortion rights movements, to exchange best practices and lessons learned for advocating for change. Since the group was set up in October 2017, over 30 participants from 9 Francophone African countries are networking through the group. Members are predominately from grassroots organisations and local NGOs. Photos, useful documentation, and advocacy tips are regularly exchanged. Learning about the advocacy successes of other grantees working on increasing safe abortion access at various levels increases motivation and builds resilience among grantees



- **Working with technical leaders from our grant portfolio:** We have hosted webinars on abortion rights advocacy delivered by both globally recognised and grassroots advocacy organisations. Strategic Grantee, Ipas, facilitated values clarification and opposition monitoring webinars. Senegalese advocates from Réseau Siggil Jigéen shared their story of building a coalition for abortion law reform. Women Help Women shared their insights into using technology and digital security to protect abortion advocates. These topics were identified by grantees as priorities to help their campaigns. More grantees have expressed an interest in sharing their experiences in the future
- **Cross-consortium knowledge sharing:** A working group was established across the consortium partners that provides a platform for sharing ideas and expertise on abortion rights advocacy across consortium members

Going forward we will:

- **Linking and learning:** Create more opportunities for grantees to connect, share and learn from each other through diverse platforms, including through digital communities. The successes that we've seen from grantee-led webinars demonstrates that this technology is accessible and well-received. It allows grantees to share their best practices to build knowledge-sharing communities as well as stronger connections. It also reinforces the capacity of organisations to continue advocating for safe abortion rights. Furthermore, the development of films and guides on advocacy best practices will complement existing resources
- **User-centred design:** Capture learning in grantee-centred technical guidance and organisational development resources, designed in conjunction with users: our grantees
- **Amplify Southern voices:** Provide opportunities for grantees to boost their profile internationally and contribute to global conversations on safe abortion
- **Fund the hard places, not just windows of opportunity or the easiest environments to work in:** Continue to support initiatives where they are most needed, including in challenging contexts where SRHR is weakest or civil society movements are least developed
- **Long-term, results-based financing:** Provide renewal funding to support existing, successful grantees to build on and further develop their initial projects

More information

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- [AmplifyChange abortion grantee page](#)
 - [Abortion Policies Database link](#)
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AmplifyChange social media:

