



## Community Forum (COFO)

### Adolescent book for girls and boys



*Everyone has HOPES and DREAMS for their life.*

*What are your hopes and dreams? What do you want to achieve in life?*

*Draw a picture or write a few words of your **hopes and dreams**. Share it with your friends, siblings, and parents. They can help you make your hopes and dreams come true.*

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to all contributors who have made this book possible. Most importantly the voices of boys, girls and community partners in Chikwawa district who shared their personal stories and questions about puberty. Much thanks to the Share-Net International and all COFO staff and partners who put the stories together.

Special mention goes to the following books which were used as references: Government of Malawi, Ministry of Health and Population, Chikwawa District Health Office, Education Office.

## *Foreword*

**This guidance booklet on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)** is intended for adolescent girls, boys and young women. Issues associated with **SRHR** are never discussed openly and the silence surrounding sexual burdens young girls by keeping them ignorant of this biological function. Even after the attainment of menarche, very little information is given to young girls and boys about the physiological processes involved and the sexual reproductive practices to be followed.

This booklet provides information on how to handle sexual reproductive, improve their knowledge of personal health and boost their confidence by answering their unanswered questions. It also provides information on the facts, myths and taboos surrounding this issue. It is a compulsory read for adolescent and young women, equally for facilitators, teachers and peer educators.

Overall the absence of SRHR in the policy debate and hence in investments and action, is striking. These points to a glaring need to highlight this issue in the policy debate together with practical work on what adolescent girls and women require managing their sexual reproductive needs in terms of materials, education and facilities for management and disposal. Gender sensitivity in health, hygiene and sanitation needs of women and adolescent girls is a critical input required to be integrated in the Government of Malawi's Total Sanitation Campaign, and other such programmes. A coordinated effort will reach many more youth and it is hoped that this book on "SRHR" will be utilized by all partners concerned with youth welfare and empowerment issues.

***This guidance booklet seeks to provide answers to questions that young adolescent girls have about themselves, their changing body, sexual reproductive, menstruation and its management at home and in school in a hygienic manner. This will not only empower the adolescent girls with knowledge of menstrual management but may also enhance their self-esteem and academic performance.***

Developed by:

Approved by:

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**BOARD**

# Growth and Development for girls

## What is puberty?

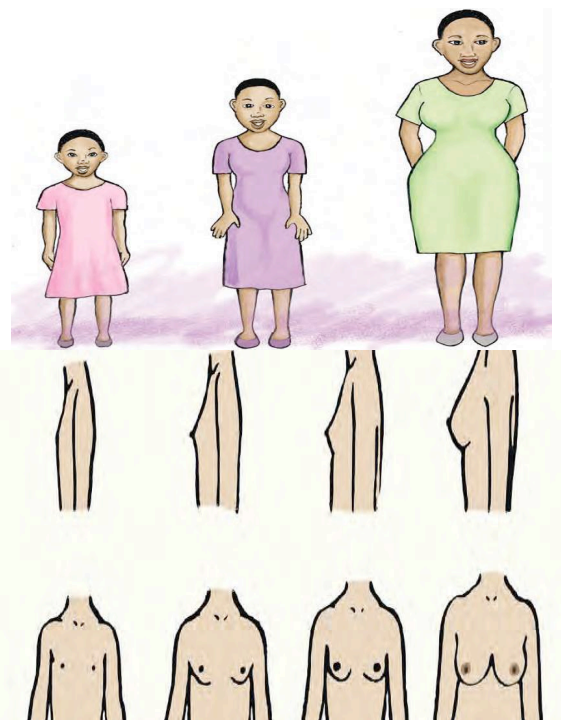
This is the time in a girl's life when she starts to experience changes in her body. This usually takes place between ages 10 to 14. Everyone experiences these changes, but some girls experience them earlier than others.

## Who is an adolescent?

An adolescent is someone who is undergoing puberty, but is not a grown up person or not matured yet. They pass through a period known as adolescence, which is a journey from being a child to being an adult. This lasts from about 9 or 10 years old, all the way to 18 or 20 years old. It is marked by dramatic physical, psychological and social changes.

## You will see the following body changes during puberty:

- You will grow taller
- You are likely to gain weight
- Hair will grow in and around your pubic area and armpits
- Your hips will get bigger
- Your breasts will grow and become more sensitive
- Your voice will become soft
- You may start to sweat more which can make you smell bad if you do not wash yourself
- Your face will become oily which may cause pimples
- Your labia and clitoris will grow bigger
- You will begin to experience menstruation



## You might also experience the following:

- Mood swings-happy today and sad tomorrow
- Become more concerned about your appearance and actions
- Shyness
- Become attracted to boys
- Desire for independence
- Sensitive to comments
- Desire to be loved or to love
- Desire to please others and not feel different from friends



- Desire to want others to understand your feelings
- Desire to form your own groups with girls only
- Sexual desire

## Growth and Development for boys

### What is puberty?

This is the period a boy starts to experience changes in his body. This usually takes place between ages 10 to 14. Everyone experiences these changes, but some boys experience them earlier than others.

### Who is an adolescent?

An adolescent is a young person who is undergoing puberty, but is not a grown up person or not matured yet. They pass through a period known as adolescence, which is a journey from being a child to being an adult. This lasts from about 9 or 10 years old, all the way to 18 or 20 years old. It is marked by dramatic physical, psychological and social changes.

### You will see the following body changes during puberty:

- You will grow taller
- Hair will grow on your chest, armpits, and around the penis
- You will start to see moustache and beard
- Your voice will deepen
- You may start to sweat more which can make you smell bad if you do not wash yourself
- Your face will become oily which may cause pimples
- Your chest will become wider
- You might experience the coming out of watery material from the penis (ejaculation while you are sleeping. These are called “wet dreams”. “Wet dreams are when a boy produces white sticky watery material known as semen”.

Besides body changes, you may experience many emotional changes. You may feel happy one day, and then all of a sudden feel sad or shy the next day.

These emotional changes are normal. All of these emotional changes can cause some boys to have new desires. For example:

- The desire to please others and not feel different from friends
- The desire to want others to understand your feelings
- The desire to form your own groups with boys only
- The desire to be successful in school and feel competitive with friends



- Sexual desire that makes you feel attracted towards girls
- The desire to feel independent

Furthermore some adolescents

- Become rude and aggressive which they can learn to control
- Eat more which promotes growth

### Faith's Story

When I was growing up, I noticed different changes on my body. Hair started to grow in my private parts, my breasts became bigger, my face became oily, my body became so&, my voice changed, and I started menstruating. I thought I had eaten something which was causing these changes, so I was frightened. I told my friend who was the same age as me who also did not know why I had these changes. I then told my mother, who said I should not be worried, as it was not a disease but menstruation and it happens when a girl is growing up.



**My advice to younger girls who have not gone through puberty yet is: When you start to feel changes in your body, tell an older girl or woman you trust and feel comfortable with. She will listen and help answer your questions.**



### Levinson's Story

I did not know anything about wet dreams before I experienced it myself. One day I saw a very beautiful girl, and at night I dreamt about her. When I woke up, I found myself wet. When I started experiencing this, I thought someone was bewitching me. I was afraid of what this meant, so I asked my brother about the changes of the body but did not tell him about my experiences of wet dreams. Fortunately, he asked me, "When you are sleeping, do you dream of being close to girls?" I answered,



"Yes". He explained to me that those were wet dreams. He told me that wet dreams are when liquid called semen comes out of the penis, known as ejaculation. This sometimes happens when a boy is asleep. It usually occurs when the boy is having a sexual dream.

### Questions to consider

1. What are the body changes Faith experienced when she was growing up?  
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2. Who did Faith tell when she saw the body changes? Did this person help her?  
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3. What made Levinson to have wet dreams for the first time?  
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4. What was Levinson's feeling when he woke up in the morning?  
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5. What have you learnt from the stories?  
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### Should I worry if... I have not gone through puberty yet?

Absolutely not! Puberty means you are going to start a long journey from childhood to adulthood. During this journey, your body and mind will go through changes. All your friends will be experiencing the same thing. So, do not worry as this is normal.

### There is a specific age for reaching puberty and I have not gone through it yet?

No. There is no specific age for reaching puberty. Everyone's body is different and every boy and girl starts puberty at a different age. Puberty is more of an ongoing process. Someone knows they're going through puberty by experiencing things like development of pubic hair, so& voice, development of breasts and menstruation.

### I'm starting to get pimples? Does it mean that I need to get married?

No. Pimples are part of puberty, and begin because you will start to produce more oil on your face. It should not mean that someone needs to get married right away. It is best to wait until you attain a good education and you are independent to get married.



It's understandable that most girls and boys worry a lot during puberty, but most of the things they worry about are entirely normal and happen to everyone. If you feel overwhelmed and confused by what you are going through, feel free to ask questions to older siblings, parents, aunties, teachers, and even health workers.



### Mary's Story

I did not know anything about menstruation before it happened to me. I was 15 years old. I saw the blood on my panties and just thought that I was not keeping myself clean. So I bathed several times, scrubbing my body to take the dirt away. But the blood kept on coming. That is when I got scared. I went to find my grandmother to tell her about what was happening. She told me that this is something that every girl goes through. It means that I am growing up and becoming a woman. She reminded me that just because I had started menstruating, this didn't mean that I was an adult yet, like her. She also showed me how to use cloth to absorb the blood and to wash and dry the cloth. She even gave me some money to buy some sanitary pads so I could use them in school and



not worry about soiling my clothes. She also told me that now I have to keep myself safe from boys because if I have sex with a boy, I could become pregnant.

### **Jonas' Story**

There are many changes I have experienced on my body from the time I was young up to now. My voice became deep, I increased in weight, hair grew in my pubic area, the penis and scrotum became bigger, I developed pimples on my face, I had mood swings whereby sometimes I was very happy or very sad, and I felt nervous most of the time. I also had sexual feelings and experienced wet dreams.

Even today the pimples on my face make me uncomfortable when I look at myself in the mirror. I was also scared by my penis getting bigger because I thought it meant that I had to get married soon. I had no intention of discussing these body changes with anyone because I thought it was very embarrassing.

I finally got the courage to ask my older brother about what was happening to me. He told me that all these changes are completely normal and necessary for all boys to go through. He also told me about the enlargement of the penis, and that when a person grows up every organ in the body also grows.

### **Advice**

My advice to younger boys is that when they experience changes in their bodies, they should ask parents or guardians, uncles or even a trusted older adolescent. I assure you that these body changes are just natural.



My advice to girls is that menstruation is something that ALL GIRLS experience in their lives, so you should not fear when it comes. Remember that having your monthly menstrual period does NOT mean you are suddenly an adult. It takes time to become a mature and responsible adult, so you should take your time and wait until you are in a long term, loving relationship to have sex.

## **For your information on girls**

### **What problems does a person have when they reach puberty?**

Girls experience different problems when they reach puberty. Some girls have fear because of the changes they are going through. Most girls do not have information on growing up and they do not know whom to discuss with. Some girls experience mood swings which may cause them to feel happy one moment and sad the next. Some feel withdrawn and they experience peer pressure leading to problems such as substance abuse, school dropout, rudeness, desire for independence, concern about appearance, curiosity to know more about sex and start to have sex.

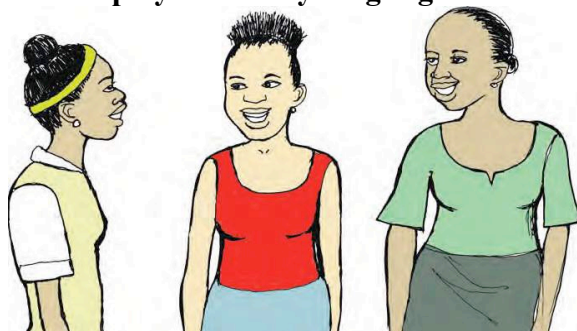


## What should I do when I reach puberty?

Tell someone close to you like an adult or reliable older adolescent. If you don't feel okay doing that, then try speaking to someone at a youth center or youth club, teacher, teacher aide, peer educators, Youth Friendly Health Service Provider, Youth Community Based Distribution Agent (YCBDA) or an adult or a reliable adolescent.

### Why is it that the mature girls do not want to play with the younger girls?

Maybe because they want to associate with those who have had the same experience as them. Although they are not adults yet, they may start to feel older and feel more comfortable with other older girls who have been through the same experiences.



## For your information on boys

### What problems does a boy have when he reaches puberty?

Boys experience different problems when they reach puberty. Some boys have fear because of the changes they are going through. Most boys do not have information on growing up, they do not know whom to discuss with. Some boys experience mood swings which may cause them to feel happy one moment and sad the next. Some feel withdrawn because they experience peer pressure leading to problems such as substance abuse, school dropout, rudeness, desire for independence, concern about appearance, curiosity to know more about sex and start to have sex. One of the hardest but most important things to learn to do during puberty is to resist peer pressure from your friends.



### What should I do when I reach puberty?

Tell someone close to you like an adult or reliable older adolescent. If you don't feel okay doing that, then try speaking to someone at a youth center or youth club, teacher, teacher aide, peer educator, Youth Friendly Health Service Provider, Youth Community Based Distribution Agent (YCBDA) or an adult you trust.

### Is it true that it is only girls who reach puberty?

Absolutely not. Both boys and girls go through puberty. However, girls start puberty before most boys do. Girls' experiences are commonly talked about more than the boys' experiences. This is why it may seem that girls are the only ones who go through puberty. But this is not true.

### **Is it a must to get married when one reaches puberty?**

It is not a must to get married when one reaches puberty. Puberty only means that one's body is maturing. In fact, boys and girls start puberty when they are very young when they are not ready to take on the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood.

## **What does menstruation mean?**

Menstruation is a special sign for a girl that her body is growing and preparing to have children in the future. During menstruation, every month, blood will trickle out of the vagina for three to five days. Do not be scared the first time this happens. It happens to all girls at puberty.

## **How does menstruation happen?**

In a girl's body there are eggs that start to be produced when one reaches menarche (when a girl has her first menstrual period). One egg is released each month from her ovaries, and the lining of the uterus thickens in preparation for fertilization. If a girl does not become pregnant, the egg does not develop and blood trickles out through the vagina. There is a monthly cycle of when women have their menses (also called menstrual period). Most women have their periods every 28 to 30 days. During this time, different women feel different things. Some may have abdominal pain; others feel very weak, while others may not feel ill at all. Girls should not get worried because the pain goes after your monthly period has finished



### **Will all girls menstruate?**

All girls will menstruate when they start puberty but every girl's experiences are different. Some girls' menstruation last longer than others, some girls see more blood and some girls do not get their menstruation every month. If you are concerned about menstruation, try talking to a Peer Educator, Youth Community Based Distribution Agent (YCBDA), teacher or teacher aide, Youth Friendly Health Service provider or an adult that you trust.

### **What is the cause of menstruation?**

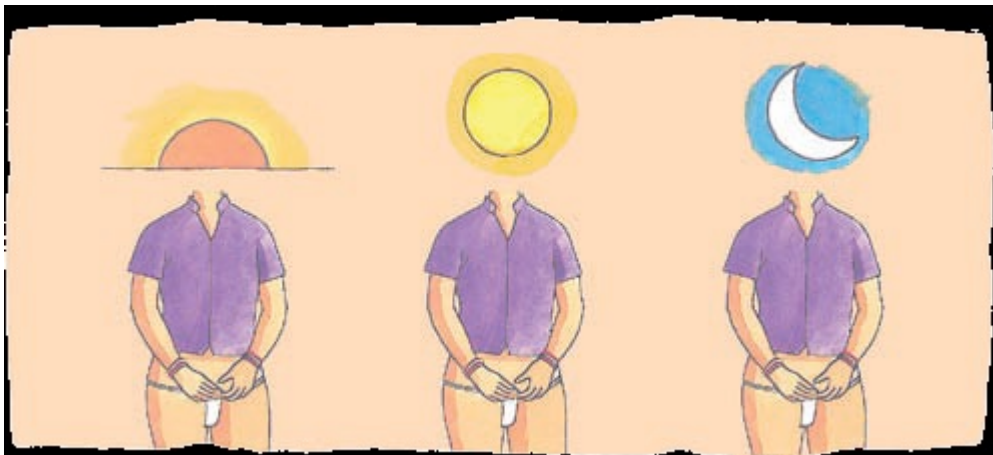
Menstruation is caused by the change in hormone levels in a girl's body during puberty. These hormones are the body's natural chemicals that lead to a layer of issue in the uterus that is shed every month when a girl has her menstrual period. This process will continue until you are between 39 and 50 years. Once a girl starts having her period every month, she must be careful to avoid pregnancy. If she has sex with a boy without a method of protection (such as a condom or use of birth control pills) she could become pregnant.

When a girl has unprotected sex, the egg which is released from the girl's body every month meets up with the sperm from the boy. This process, called fertilization, starts the development of a baby which means the girl has become pregnant.

It is very dangerous for a girl's body to become pregnant before she is 18 years old. The girl experiences a lot of problems during pregnancy, delivery and caring for the baby. Babies born to mothers under 18 also have more health problems. The most important message here is that it is better to wait until your body –and you mind—are mature enough to be a mother. So this means the best time to get pregnant is after you have reached 18 years of age and have attained a good education and you are independent.

## How often napkins or cloth pads should be changed?

Menstruation as a regular process needs hygienic management. Girls need to change their napkins regularly during the period of menstruation especially in the first three days. This can help prevent infections. During the heaviest days of your period, you may need to change them every 3-4 hours. Given below is a pictorial representation of the normal timings to change pads.



### When a boy or girl gets married, does it mean that they have reached puberty?

No! Marriage does not automatically start puberty. And starting puberty does not mean you should get married. Finish school first and try to achieve your hopes and dreams! It is good to get married after attaining a good education and you are independent to take care of yourself and your family.

### When somebody stops schooling, does it mean that they have reached puberty?

There are so many reasons why boys and girls leave school. Starting puberty should not be one of those reasons. What is your plan to stay in school?

### How can one take care of herself when approaching puberty?

Girls need to start learning about body changes so that they are prepared when the time comes. Girls must specifically learn how to handle menstruation so they are prepared each month and they do not soil their clothes. They may need to bring extra cloth with them to school in a bag with an extra pair of panties. Some



girls even make a point of wearing dark colored pants or skirt on the days when they have their greatest flow of blood (this will be the first 2-3 days). She should also think about which teacher she would ask for information.

### **How can a boy take care of himself when approaching puberty?**

He can learn more about body changes so that he is prepared to keep himself safe when the time comes by NOT engaging in sex.

### **How do you help those adolescents who have reached puberty?**

Puberty can be a confusing and overwhelming time in a boy's life and having people there to support him is a huge help. Teasing boys or girls because of the changes they are going through is mean. Talking and helping friends during puberty will earn you respect.



### **What should parents tell their children when they reach puberty?**

Some parents tell their children all about the body changes but other parents do not feel comfortable discussing puberty with their children because no one ever talked to them about it. It is OK to seek information from other adults in your life, like uncles, teachers, or health providers. You can even try asking your parents questions.

### **Is it good to get information about puberty from your friends?**

Friends may know some good information, because chances are that they are experiencing the same thing. However it is always better to get more advice from trusted adults because they tend to have more correct information.

### **Why do some adolescents become rude when they reach puberty?**

Puberty can cause great mood swings which may cause adolescents to act in new and different ways. So you may feel happy one day then isolated and confused the next day. You might even feel angry but not understand why. The changes in mood are normal but it can feel very overwhelming.

### **Why do boys become strong when they reach puberty?**

Puberty causes changes in adolescents' bodies which can make them stronger. Specifically with boys, their muscles will get bigger and stronger.

### **At what age should one start having boy/girl relationship?**

One can start having a boy/girl relationship when one is physically and mentally mature. One should be able to know the consequences of the relationship such as having sex. This can lead to pregnancies ending up with big responsibilities of taking care of the baby. It may also lead to getting Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) including HIV and AIDS. Preferably it is better to wait until you are older and know how to prevent pregnancy and STIs.



### **What happens when somebody gets married very young?**

When someone gets married too young, it can stop their schooling, and get in the way of achieving hopes and dreams. It often leads to having children early and taking on adult roles before you are an adult. One can also contract STI including HIV as they usually have unprotected sex. It is much better to get married after you have attained a good education and you are independent.

### **Why do some grown-ups force children to have sex with them?**

This is also known as sexual abuse. Some grown-ups like to take advantage of children because they are powerless and easily manipulated with girls like sweets and biscuits. Some grown-ups believe that children are free from STIs and HIV. This should not be tolerated because people need to be able to consent to having sex, and children can usually not consent to this. Should this happen to you or to a friend, report to a trusted adult or to a child protection worker around your school or even at the Community Victim Support Unit (CVSU).

### **Where should a boy or girl go to report when they have been raped?**

A boy or girl should tell a trusted adult, such as: parents, uncle, auntie, a teacher, a child protection worker or a health worker. They should make sure to tell someone so that they can get appropriate care and support

### **Why is it that big girls are not allowed to put salt in the food?**

When a girl is having menstruation, she may not be allowed to put salt in food because of tradition. This is meant to promote hygiene (many people consider menstruation as dirty, but it is not dirty, it is natural part of all womens' lives). There is no harm to put salt in food when one is having menstruation.



### **Why is it that adolescents who have reached puberty are not allowed to enter into their parents' bedroom?**

When one reaches puberty is considered to be starting a journey of becoming a grown-up and this is done as a way of respect to the parents.

### **Why do boys and girls stop schooling after initiation?**

When somebody undergoes initiation, they are considered as an adult and the girl thinks that she cannot go back to school because she is an adult now. This is not true, boys and girls should continue school as this



will help them learn and have a good life.

### **Why do boys and girls get married after initiation?**

This could be because girls and boys think they are adults when they undergo initiation. This is not right as their bodies and minds are not matured yet. They need to continue with education to fulfil their future dreams.

### **The difference between Sexual and Gender roles**

Sexual roles are defined by the way the person was born. One is born a boy or a girl and it cannot be changed. Boys and girls experience different body changes when they reach puberty. For example boys experience wet dreams while girls experience menstruation of which these cannot be changed.

A person's gender has to do with roles that are defined by the society and this differs from place to place. Expected activities a boy may do are different from what is expected of a girl. In some communities, a boy does not help with house hold work as it is considered as a girl's duty. In other communities, boys and girls can do any job. Boys can also help with household chores and remain being boys.

## ***Few facts about HIV/AIDS***

Since more than half of those infected with HIV virus are young people, following is some information on the issue. The HIV virus spreads through body fluids like blood, semen and vaginal fluid of an infected person.

### **Why do I need to know about HIV and AIDS?**

At present thousands of people in Chikwawa are infected with the HIV virus. However unlike other diseases HIV infection is preventable. While it can be disturbing to think about AIDS and consider your own risk, getting up to date information is the first step towards protecting yourself.

### **What is HIV and AIDS?**

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It weakens the body's defence or immune system. AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome and is the last stage of infection with HIV. AIDS is a syndrome which means that it is not one particular isolated disease but shows a variety of symptoms related to different disorders and diseases. The development of AIDS can take more than 8 to 10 years after infection with HIV.

### **How does a person become infected with HIV?**

There are four main ways or routes of transmission of the virus:

- Unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected person.
- Use of non-sterile, HIV infected or contaminated syringes or needles.
- Transfusion of infected blood.
- Through infected pregnant woman to her unborn child, before, during or after birth.

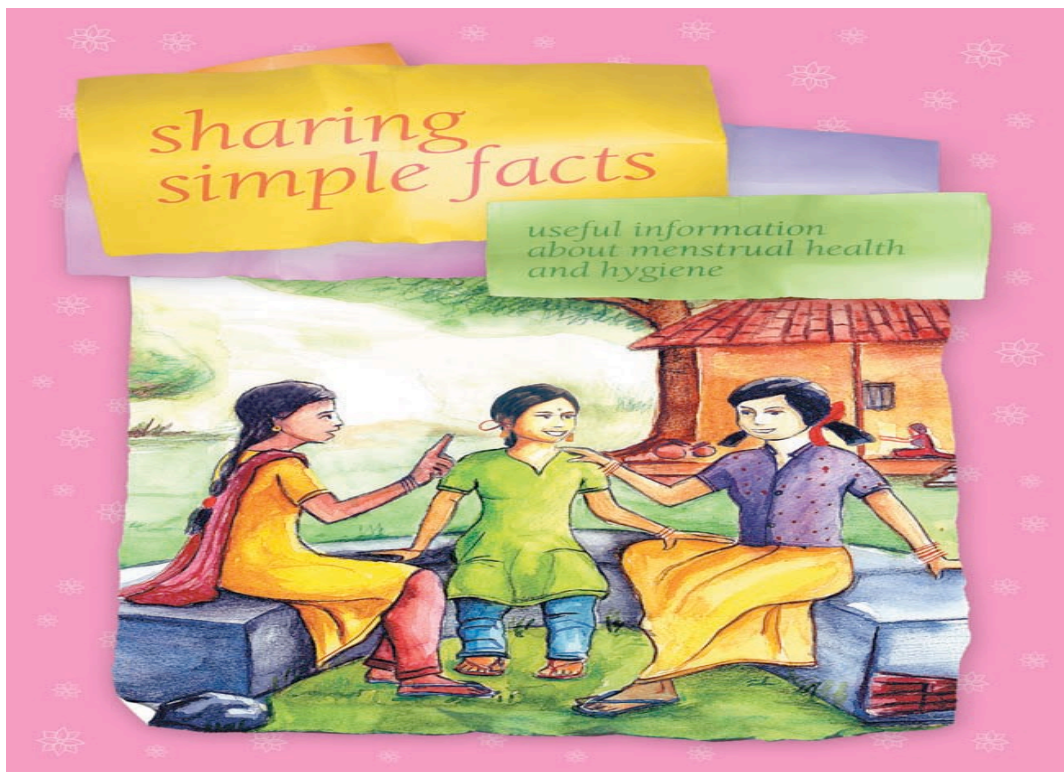
### **Does HIV positive means a person has AIDS?**

Not necessarily. Given access to appropriate treatment it is possible for an HIV infected person to lead a reasonably normal and healthy life. There are treatments that can slow down the rate at which HIV weakens the immune system. There are other treatments that can prevent or cure some of the infections associated with HIV.

### **How does it affect me?**

Young people are at the centre of the HIV-AIDS epidemic. Half of all new infections are occurring among young people between 10-24 years. Girls are more vulnerable than boys to HIV infection because, girls have fewer opportunities to education, career and freedom to speak and move.

However, given accurate information and a supportive environment, evidence shows that it is young people, compared to any other age group, who will most readily adopt safe and responsible behaviours. Learning to protect yourself, sharing information, dispelling myths, tackling stigma in school and in the community is where young people can contribute most. For more information on HIV and AIDS one must contact the nearby Integrated Counselling and Testing Centre (ICTC).



### **Contact information:**

Community Forum

Address:

P.O. Box 198

Chikwawa

Malawi

Phone: +265888451874/+265882272625

Email: [cofomw@gmail.com](mailto:cofomw@gmail.com)

Website: [www.cofongo.wordpress.com](http://www.cofongo.wordpress.com)