

Building a Consortium to Address Climate Change, Inequality, and Other Complex Challenges Influencing Human Health (CHOICE):

The CHOICE Tanzania Project Annual Report for 2024

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Background

The CHOICE Project was designed by experts at The Institute for Global Health and Development (IGHD) at Aga Khan University Karachi, Pakistan, and the Centre for Global Child Health at the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids Hospital) in Toronto, Canada, to address slow global progress toward attaining the health and health-related sustainable development goals (HHSDGs) listed under the United Nations' (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030). Given that forming Think Tanks with memberships of key stakeholders from diverse yet complementary sectors is an organized and strategic way to bring together HHSDG experts who may not have crossed paths otherwise, a main focus of the CHOICE project was to enable the development of in-country multi-sectoral Think Tanks. The lower and middle-income countries (LMICS) selected for the CHOICE project were among those within the global south, demonstrating poor HHSDG progress but also possessing the capacity to make sustainable development improvements. By implementing the CHOICE project in the five selected countries—Tanzania, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kenya, and Ghana—IGHD and SickKids Hospital provided these nations with a platform for innovative and impactful HHSDG solutions to be developed.

Between July and September 2023, the CHOICE Tanzania project team recruited HHSDG experts identified as having the capacity to significantly improve the country's process toward Agenda 2030 and created the CHOICE Tanzania Think Tank. Since its inception, Think Tank members have collaborated with the CHOICE Tanzania project team to design solutions and interventions relevant to the Tanzanian Sustainable Development context. In 2024, the CHOICE Tanzania Project made strides toward its expected deliverables through stakeholder collaborations, awareness and advocacy events, healthcare sector capacity-building initiatives, and scholarly work. The report that follows touches on the state of the HHSDGs in Tanzania in 2024, as well as the main accomplishments and activities of the CHOICE Tanzania project.

Framing Tanzania's 2024 Sustainable Development Landscape

Globally, several challenges have hindered progress towards meeting the objectives of Agenda 2030. These challenges include the ongoing residual impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, the cost of living, and climate change (1). In 2023, Tanzania underwent a Voluntary National Review of its SDG status, highlighting areas of opportunity to enhance the country's progress and informing the work of the CHOICE Tanzania project for its 2024 operational year (2). As of 2024, Tanzania ranks 130 out of 166 on the UN SDG Country Ranking List, moving up four spots since 2023 (1,3). In addition to this improvement, Tanzania has also achieved a 1.4% increase in its Country SDG score, progressing from 56.8% to 58.2% (1,3). Notably, Tanzania has consistently been above the regional average, exceeding it by more than 3.8% in 2023 and 4.5% in 2024 (1,3). Between 2023 and 2024, Tanzania's SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) progress has remained stable, characterized as moderately improving despite major challenges persisting (3). Similarly, the nation has maintained its goal-achieved status on SDG 13 (Climate Action), with ongoing improvements assessed as moderate (3). Unfortunately, substantial challenges remain for SDG 5 (Gender Equality), as progress has decreased from "moderately improving" in 2023 to "stagnating" in 2024 (3).

Tanzania is a member of both the East African Development Community (EADC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Of the seven EADC countries, Tanzania ranks 3rd on SDG progress, falling behind Kenya's SDG rank of 123 and SDG index score of 62.17% and Rwanda's rank of 126 and score of 60.87% (3). Among the SADC, Tanzania is the 5th highest performing nation and is ahead of 10 member states, it is evident that much more work needs to be done (5).

2024 Progress on the Health and Health-Related Sustainable Development Goals (HHSDGs) in Tanzania

Mental Health

Since the launch of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and up to their completion in 2015, mental health has remained largely neglected in global development efforts. While the MDGs made significant strides in

narrowing health disparities between rich and poor countries and addressing diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, they failed to acknowledge mental health, despite its growing global impact and far-reaching consequences (4). Unfortunately, such a trend remains in Tanzania's political landscape, where no new mental health policies or legislation have been developed by the Government. Indeed, the political will to address the burden of mental health across the nation remains a challenge. However, given the large amount of stigma surrounding mental health in Tanzania, it is positive to note that much new research was been conducted and published in 2024, adding awareness on the types of challenges groups most vulnerable to mental health difficulties face. For example, research conducted by Aga Khan University investigating the mental health of frontline healthcare workers in Tanzania included over 1,800 participants from across six regions of the country (5). Their findings show that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was the most pressing mental health issue among Tanzanian healthcare workers, with 1 in 3 community health workers and 1 in 4 doctors, nurses, and midwives struggling with the condition (5). Depression and anxiety were also major challenges experienced by the study cohort (5). What this demonstrates is the dual importance of mental health care strengthening, to support practitioners in better treating their patients and also providing them with the awareness to acknowledge when their mental wellbeing is at risk and then take action to also care for themselves. Having healthcare workers as an example of knowing when to seek help can be a very effective way to combat stigma, allowing communities to learn from the example of their own providers. Such progress is fundamental for sustainable development, given the fact that countries in the global south experience a significant treatment gap (4). In these contexts, the majority of citizens living with mental health conditions receive no care but also frequently endure social exclusion, discrimination, and human rights violations (4). In Tanzania, one such group are those living with Albinism. In their daily lives, they face unique stressors that take a toll on their mental health (6). This has been demonstrated by research published in the *Journal of Disability and Society*, which found that Tanzanian women living with Albinism are at a higher risk of psychological trauma because of the threats to safety and security, discrimination, stigmatization, and abuse they face (6). Unfortunately, a significant contributor to the poor treatment of individuals living with Albinism in Tanzania includes a lack of knowledge on this medical condition and widespread myths that attribute albinism to witchcraft and magical powers and that are used to justify their dehumanization and social exclusion (6).

Tanzanian cultural beliefs also play a role in men's mental health, an area that is particularly stigmatized due to the intersection between gender norms and mental health misinformation. In February 2024, Jeong et al. published one of the first known studies aimed at exploring the mental health and coping strategies of fathers of children under the age of 2 in sub-Saharan Africa (7). Conducted in four communities across Mwanza, the authors found that the mental health challenges of their study participants included parenting stress, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (7). Another demographic group vulnerable to poor mental health is university-aged students. A cross-sectional study of undergraduate students studying at the University of Dodoma revealed that the prevalence of mental distress was moderately high, and that financial difficulties and romantic relationship challenges were the two common contributing factors (8). As 2024 has grown the Tanzanian mental health literature base, key strategies to address mental health challenges in the country have been uncovered, such as the development of culturally sensitive mental health awareness programs and the integration of mental health care into existing healthcare services by training healthcare workers in the basics of mental health to begin meeting the service demand among these demographic groups (9).

Gender Equality

On average, Tanzanian girls and boys face similar challenges and circumstances in their early years (10). As they progress through childhood, however, gender disparities become more pronounced due to gender norms that are deeply ingrained within Tanzanian society (10). For instance, adolescent girls disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid domestic work and early marriage (10). If that wasn't enough, they are also at risk of early pregnancy and experiencing both sexual and gender-based violence (GBV). One factor that upholds gender inequality is the country's judicial landscape, where laws and policies can enforce harmful gender norms and standards (11). Accordingly, UN Women Tanzania, in collaboration with the Government of the Netherlands and through funding from the European Union, conducted an in-depth analysis of laws in mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar (11). The purpose of this investigation was to determine the level of gender responsiveness of country laws and identify the presence of gender

discrimination within Tanzanian legislation (11). Using a gender perspective, their work resulted in 76 gender-responsive recommendations. In total, they identified that 12 laws in mainland Tanzania need to be revised or amended, 1 law needs to be repealed either fully or partially, and 3 new laws must be enacted (11). In response to these findings, representatives from Tanzania and Zanzibar's gender ministries and parliaments, CSOs, academia, the legal sector, UN agencies, and traditional and faith-based organizations gathered for a multi-stakeholder dialogue (12). The event took place in August 2024 and resulted in the issuing of a joint statement titled "Forging Pathways to End All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls in The United Republic of Tanzania" (12). Among the declarations presented in the statement was the acknowledgement that discriminatory laws, harmful traditional practices and the prevalence of GBV have compromised the country's process towards the UN SDGs (12). Therefore, their call to action included the development and implementation of action plans based on UN Women Tanzania's analysis, as well as enhanced legal aid for marginalized women and the protection of women advocating on the front lines of gender equality initiatives. Regarding mental health, the joint statement also included a commitment to expand access to psychosocial support and safe spaces for survivors of GBV, demonstrating a move in the right direction regarding the interconnections between GBV and mental health (12). Another milestone in 2024 was the release of UN Tanzania's gender equality scorecard, which provides a framework for how UN agencies in Tanzania can integrate gender equality and women's empowerment into their work to catalyze the realization of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) (13). Their findings revealed that the feminization of poverty and high rates of maternal mortality and GBV are major gender inequalities the country is facing (13).

Given the findings from the UN Women legislative analysis, as well as the gender scorecard, it is on a well-timed note that Tanzania launched two new gender policies in 2024, demonstrating the nation's commitment to creating a gender-responsive legislative environment. The Women and Gender Development Policy of 2000 and its associated 2005 implementation strategy have been replaced by the National Gender and Women Development Policy of 2023 (14). Released by the Ministry of Community Development, Gender, Women, and Special Groups in March 2024, this new policy fills in the gaps of the 2000 policy document and accounts for global changes, such as those resulting from climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, that directly impact Tanzanian women. Revisions of the old policy include recognizing psychological violence and online violence as forms of GBV, addressing the digital gender divide among women and men in Tanzania, promoting healthy behaviors for gender-sensitive health issues, dedicating sufficient attention to women's peace and security, and focusing on the issues of physical and sexual violence, such as that which occurs in educational institutions (14). Agenda 2030 was among the many regional and international agreements that were developed after the 2000 policy came into effect and was therefore not acknowledged by it. Fortunately, the new 2023 policy has incorporated the UN SDGs and addressed the 2000 policy's gaps, including but not limited to those in the areas of GBV, economic and legal rights, women's health, and women in leadership and decision-making (14). The second of these policies, Tanzania's Second National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children, was approved and launched in May 2024 (15). Notably, Tanzania created its first-ever National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, which is currently finalized and is undergoing an approval process, to increase women's leadership and participation during a variety of humanitarian processes (16).

Despite the country's progress in working to reform gender legislation, Tanzania still faces several challenges in achieving national commitments on gender equality. The Tanzania Generation Equality Program 2021-2026 was developed to guide public, private, and civil society sector activities in promoting economic justice and women's rights and empowerment to accelerate the country's investment in gender equality (17). This year, the Tanzania Generation Equality Forum Midpoint Moment Report was released to provide an update on the country's progress in implementing the Generation Equality Forum Commitments on Economic Justice and Rights 2021-2026 (17). While progress has been made, the country still faces many challenges. These include i) existing institutional barriers and discriminatory gender norms that hinder a woman's access to land, finance, and knowledge, ii) poor investments in activities needed to implement gender equality and equity initiatives in Tanzania, iii) poor gender-disaggregated data needed for informed decision-making, iv) the harmful effects of climate change on women and girls, and v) negative impacts of economic systems that leave women and girls behind (17). In addition to these challenges, it is important to note that, in addition to these challenges, women often have limited representation in household decision-making and also face financial particularly that limit their access to education (18). These barriers are driven by factors such as scarce resources, cultural norms, and the lack of affordable schooling options (18).

Across the globe, the African continent has one of the highest rates of GBV. Disturbingly, research points to the fact that GBV is also higher among women living with HIV, compared to HIV-negative women (19). A 2024 study conducted in Morogoro investigated the experiences of healthcare workers in managing incidences of GBV among HIV-positive women (19). In addition to poor training and a lack of time and directional guidelines to follow, findings also showed that HWCs experience a significant emotional burden when identifying experiences of GBV among their patients, underscoring the importance of building Tanzanian healthcare provider capacity to protect their own mental health while during their duty to support survivors during a vulnerable time in their lives (19). What the 2024 SDG landscape demonstrates, then, is that an effective response to these challenges also requires front-line, community-based changes. An example of this includes the engagement of local community leaders in promoting girls' education and fostering a supportive environment that encourages victims to report cases of GBV. Beyond making change at the front line, providing training and economic empowerment opportunities for GBV survivors is crucial to support their long-term recovery and financial independence (20).

Climate Change

Human-generated emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases continue to cause significant changes to the Earth's climate, leading to widespread environmental impacts. Glaciers and ice sheets are melting, and ice on rivers and lakes is thawing earlier than usual. Scientists are highly confident that global temperatures will continue to rise for several decades, primarily due to ongoing human activity (21). Indeed, over the last few years, climate change adaptation and mitigation have become key policy priorities for Tanzania. For example, the country's climate-resilient, low-carbon development approach has been implemented through the development of dedicated climate-related policies, strategies, and action plans, including the National Environmental Policy (2021), National Climate Change Response Strategy (2021-2026), National Determined Contribution (2021), and National Environmental Master Plan for Strategic Interventions (2022-2032) (22). Additionally, Tanzania has established regulations and guidelines to govern carbon trading initiatives, positioning it as a promising investment sector with benefits for climate action. These guidelines cover areas such as energy, transportation, waste management, forestry, agriculture, industrial processes, product use, and other land-related activities (22).

It is positive to note that the country's political will to address climate change has continued into 2024, demonstrated by the launch of the National Blue Economy Policy for 2024, the 2024-2034 National Strategy for the Use of Clean Energy for Cooking, and the Environmental Management Regulations 2024 (23-25). The National Blue Economy Policy for 2024 was introduced to promote sustainable development and economic growth in Tanzania by ensuring the efficient management and use of resources across the environmental conservation, transportation, energy, water, natural resources, and tourism sectors (23). Recognizing the country's vast marine and freshwater ecosystems, spanning 61,500 square kilometres and providing an estimated 126 billion cubic meters of water annually, the policy establishes a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach to enhance the contribution of Blue Economy activities to national GDP (23). It also integrates cross-cutting priorities, including gender equality, good governance, and environmental stewardship, while aiming to improve coordination, attract strategic investment, promote research, and expand the sustainable use of aquatic resources. The policy also seeks to address several critical challenges that have hindered the effective development of Tanzania's Blue Economy. A major issue has been the lack of integrated coordination among sectors, which has resulted in unaligned investments, unsustainable use of marine and freshwater ecosystems, depletion of water resources, and conflicts among resource users. Additionally, the policy targets persistent problems such as illegal fishing and fish product trade, ship hijackings, and theft from fishermen. It also addresses environmental pollution in marine and lake environments caused by plastic waste, oil spills, ship waste, industrial chemicals, and agricultural pesticides. Furthermore, the policy aims to combat serious criminal activities linked to water bodies, including human trafficking, drug trafficking, and the illegal harvesting and transport of mangrove forest products.

The National Strategy for the Use of Clean Energy for Cooking (2024–2034) aims to ensure that 80% of Tanzanians adopt clean cooking energy solutions by 2034 (24). It responds to the pressing need for a cohesive national framework to guide the transition away from traditional cooking methods, which are currently used by over 90% of the population and are heavily reliant on biomass such as firewood and charcoal (24). These practices contribute to severe deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, and significant health issues linked to indoor air pollution. The strategy, informed by SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), Tanzania's National Development Vision 2025, and the 2015 National Energy Policy, proposes a range of interventions. These include promoting awareness and education,

investing in accessible and efficient technologies like improved cookstoves, LPG, biogas, and solar energy, and strengthening policies and incentives to attract private sector investment. It also emphasizes the importance of monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress. The expected benefits of this strategy include improved public health, enhanced environmental conservation, increased gender equity through reduced burdens on women and children, economic growth, and broader access to affordable and sustainable cooking energy technologies.

The Environmental Management Regulations 2024 provide a structured framework for the sustainable management and protection of Tanzania's coastal zones (25). Aligned with the goals and approaches of the National Blue Economy Policy for 2024, these regulations aim to balance environmental conservation with socio-economic development (24,25). Key objectives include regulating the use of coastal resources to ensure their sustainable utilization, protecting ecologically sensitive and vulnerable areas from threats such as erosion, habitat degradation, and pollution, and promoting research, capacity building, and the adoption of best practices in environmental management. Through this framework, the regulations seek to support long-term sustainability and resilience in Tanzania's marine and coastal environments (25).

Unfortunately, this SDG has been facing numerous challenges in 2024. Unsustainable development practices, combined with rapid urbanization and population growth, are increasing GHG emissions while straining Tanzania's existing infrastructure (26). Governance and institutional frameworks remain insufficient to address the scope of the climate crisis, with many national development plans failing to fully consider current and future climate risks. Changing weather plans, a consequence of climate change, remain a large barrier to quality of life and sustainable development improvements. Between March to May 2024, East African floods killed hundreds of people and caused significant damage to crops and infrastructure while contaminating water supplies (27). It is estimated that the tens of thousands of people who were impacted required essential health-sustaining resources, including food, shelter, clean water, and healthcare (27,28). Losing loved ones and valued members of a community brings immense feelings of grief, helplessness, and despair, demonstrating the strong interconnection between mental health and climate change (29). Along with these immeasurable, emotional costs, Tanzania's agricultural sector is losing approximately \$200 million each year from climate-related risks, compounded by energy and water stress. Indeed, projections demonstrate that flood damage alone can cost the country \$60 million per year by 2050 (26). Despite the existence of a National Disaster Risk Management Strategy (2022-2027), its integration into broader development policies has been slow, and coordination among implementing agencies remains fragmented (27). Furthermore, while there are external financing opportunities, there is no domestic budget allocation for climate adaptation, leaving Tanzania vulnerable to future funding gaps (27).

Advancing the HHSDGs in 2024: A Snapshot of CHOICE Tanzania Project Achievements

A major finding from the work of the CHOICE Tanzania think tank in 2023 was how data gaps in the areas of climate change, mental health, and gender issues are major barriers toward evidence-informed policy development, which is needed to support long-term progress in these areas and improve the quality of life of those most vulnerable (30). Along with this, lack of community awareness and stigma play a large role in preventing these issues from being appropriately addressed at the community level. Therefore, in collaboration with the CHOICE Tanzania Think Tank, key SDG leaders, and innovative grass-roots organizations, the CHOICE Tanzania project team made significant strides towards these areas. Under each of the project's three thematic areas, a unique combination of capacity building and health-systems strengthening, community engagement and education, and scholarly initiatives unfolded to address persistent challenges, amplify local leadership, and accelerate progress toward sustainable, community-driven solutions.

The Aga Khan Health Services Tanzania (AKHST), one of Tanzania's largest private healthcare providers, has been a key partner of the CHOICE Tanzania project since its inception in July 2023. The AKHST network is comprised of the Aga Khan Hospital Dar es Salaam (AKHD), Aga Khan Hospital Mwanza, and 26 primary health care clinics (31). Given that AKHST is a leader in the Tanzanian healthcare sector, spearheading initiatives in collaboration with AKHST has allowed the work of the CHOICE Tanzania project to reach key mental health, gender, and climate change stakeholders and professionals across multiple sectors.

Mental Health *Capacity Building*

Task shifting, the redistribution of mental health care responsibilities among specialists and health care workers without formal mental health training, is a promising strategy to address unmet mental health needs in low-resource settings (32). In response to Tanzania's low number of mental health professionals, estimated at just 1.31 per 100,000 people, the CHOICE Tanzania project partnered with the Lady Fatma Trust, a United Kingdom-based civil society organization known for strengthening Zanzibar's mental health services, to implement task shifting within the AKHST network (33,34). Through this collaboration, 12 AKHST doctors and nurses received training on identifying and managing patients' mental health and psychosocial support needs. The training combined real-life case studies with interactive group discussions and covered key topics such as the mental health continuum, stigma reduction, stress management, caregiver wellbeing, and fundamental knowledge on common mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, substance use, and self-harm. Trainees were also introduced to the recovery model for mental health care and equipped with strategies to protect their own well-being and prevent burnout in high-pressure clinical environments. Upon completion, participants received a mental health first aid certification, and the initiative facilitated the integration of mental health support into AKHST's existing services. By building capacity among healthcare leaders of Tanzania's leading healthcare providers, this program is helping to improve access to mental health care and reduce stigma in a context where misinformation remains prevalent.

Community Engagement & Education

Throughout 2024, the CHOICE Tanzania Think Tank engaged in a range of mental health advocacy and awareness initiatives targeting diverse audiences. To mark Gender Day 2024, the Think Tank's mental health lead delivered a lecture to over 300 students at the College of Business Education in Dar es Salaam, where he highlighted the intersections between gender issues and mental health. Recognizing the persistent stigma surrounding mental health conversations, the Think Tank also conducted a lecture on mental health and resilience during a Continuing Medical Education (CME) session at Aga Khan University, reaching medical students, interns, residents, and physicians. These sessions aimed to equip the next generation of healthcare professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to support their future patients' mental health needs.

World Mental Health Day, celebrated on October 10th, provided a further opportunity to expand these efforts. In collaboration with AKHST, the CHOICE Tanzania project team led a series of education and awareness events. The main event, a Mental Health Walk-a-Thon, attracted over 600 participants (35). Partner organizations, including the Lisa Jensen Foundation, Marcus Mwemezi Foundation, and Women Tapo Organization, collaborated to address critical issues such as depression, stigma, and burnout. A key message emphasized during the event was the role of positive mental health in enhancing workplace productivity, reinforcing the importance of supportive environments for all individuals. In the lead-up to the Walk-a-Thon, the team organized a mental health awareness booth at AKHD, where a psychologist and the AKHST doctors and nurses trained in mental health first aid offered practical strategies for maintaining well-being. Over 200 hospital visitors, staff, and community members engaged with the booth's activities, which included education on the connection between mental and physical health, as well as meditation, breathwork, and self-reflection activities. Additionally, a CME session was held for 94 AKHST physicians, focusing on recognizing mental health challenges such as burnout, depression, and anxiety. Physicians were also trained to reduce stigma around mental health-seeking behaviours, an essential step toward improving patient engagement with mental health services. The CHOICE Tanzania team also hosted a virtual wellness session attended by 40 participants, covering topics such as burnout, mental health stigma, work-life balance, and customer care. Finally, AKHST physicians extended the project's reach by leading mental health conversations on the radio and social media platforms, reinforcing the message that accessible mental health support is available within Tanzanian communities and continuing the fight against stigma.

Gender Equality

Scholarly Work

Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) Tanzania is a lawyer-run non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Dar es Salaam, dedicated to promoting gender equality and improving access to justice for women and girls, particularly survivors of violence (36). Established in 1995, WiLDAF Tanzania provides legal support and advocacy to advance women's rights, including the provision of free legal aid to survivors of GBV and

support to survivors in accessing healthcare and social welfare services. In collaboration with WiLDAF Tanzania, the CHOICE Tanzania Think Tank is conducting a research study examining the experiences of female GBV survivors from lower-income neighbourhoods in Dar es Salaam as they approach WiLDAF for free legal services and support.

While Tanzania has undertaken initiatives to establish programs for the response to and prevention of GBV, there remain significant deficiencies in service quality, survivor-centric care, and the collection and investigation of evidence (37). Despite the creation of national structures such as One Stop Centres, Gender and Children's Desks, and legal aid services, persistent challenges, including underfunding, detrimental survivor-blaming attitudes among service providers, corruption within the justice system, and inadequate infrastructure, which encompasses the absence of private spaces for reporting, shortages of trained personnel, limited access to shelters, and inadequately equipped facilities—considerably undermine their effectiveness (37). Consequently, GBV services are frequently inaccessible, inconsistent, and unresponsive to the needs of survivors, thereby constraining the outreach and efficacy of response and prevention initiatives across various sectors (37). Accordingly, the objective of this research, which has obtained approval following a formal research ethics review, is to illuminate how the current legal framework in Tanzania inadequately supports GBV survivors and to furnish concrete data that may be utilized by the healthcare and civil society sectors to advocate for the establishment of survivor-centered policies and the allocation of services.

Capacity Building

The scarcity of resources for care and support, compounded by harmful social norms, stigma, and fear of discrimination, has contributed to the very low rate of GBV case reporting in Tanzania (38). Stigma from health care providers, parents, and communities, often labelling adolescent girls and young women as promiscuous, creates powerful barriers that discourage survivors from seeking GBV services (38). Fear of mandatory HIV testing, low self-esteem, lack of social support, and concerns about confidentiality further prevent survivors, especially AGYW, from accessing health care and legal assistance (38). As survivors are discouraged from reporting the violence they experience and seeking help, they are left vulnerable to worsened health, economic, and social consequences (38). To respond to these challenges in GBV survivor care and case management, the CHOICE Tanzania team partnered with the Tanzanian Ministry of Health to design and implement a specialized training program on GBV case management for healthcare professionals (39). A total of 23 health care workers from across the AKHST network were trained to provide comprehensive support to survivors of GBV and violence against children (VAC). The training enhanced healthcare workers' knowledge of GBV, VAC, family planning, reproductive health rights, and the relevant policy frameworks. Participants also strengthened essential interpersonal communication skills critical for delivering sensitive and survivor-centred care. In addition to improving their ability to manage forensic samples and provide psychosocial support, the training covered key topics such as GBV and VAC prevention, life skills for prevention, the importance of a multisectoral approach, effective data collection and reporting, procedures for reporting GBV and VAC cases, and strategies for supportive supervision and data-driven decision-making. Overall, the program played a vital role in building the capacity of health facilities to deliver informed, sensitive, and effective responses to GBV and VAC.

Community Engagement & Education

In response to findings that climate change, compounded by Tanzanian gender norms, significantly increases women's vulnerability to GBV and mental health challenges, the CHOICE Tanzania project team organized a panel discussion exploring the intersections of climate change, mental health, and GBV, and their disproportionate impact on Tanzanian women and girls. Held on International Women's Day 2024, the event brought together representatives from key CSOs working in the areas of gender, women's health, and climate change at AKHD (40). Distinguished speakers, including Ms. Imelda Urio, Human Rights and Gender Consultant at WiLDAF Tanzania, Ms. Catherine Kasimbazi, Head of Knowledge, Research, and Analysis at the Tanzania Gender Networking Platform (TGNP), Dr. Muzdalifat Abeid, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynecologist at AKHD, and Ms. Maria Matui, National Coordinator of the Gender and Climate Change Tanzania Coalition (GCCTC), shared their expertise and insights. The panel emphasized the urgent need to address the mental health impacts of GBV and gender discrimination within the broader context of the global climate crisis.

The 16 Days of Activism against GBV is an annual international campaign that was launched in 1991 to advocate for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls (VAWG) (41). To commemorate the

2024 iteration of the campaign, the CHOICE Tanzania team organized an event at AKHD to spread awareness and inspire a commitment to take a stand against GBV within the community. This event was led by healthcare professionals trained in GBV and violence against children (VAC) case management. The initiative included a competition to determine the best dressed in orange, as orange represents a future free from violence against women and girls and featured a banner highlighting GBV statistics, women and girls' rights, and prevention strategies, as well as a pledge wall to support pledges against GBV. Overall, this event served as a valuable opportunity to raise awareness about the existing GBV and VAC team at AKHST.

Climate Change

Scholarly Work

In response to the limited literature base investigating climate change and Tanzania healthcare sector practices, the CHOICE Tanzania project team led a novel study to investigate the climate change knowledge, attitudes, and practices of Tanzanian HCWs. The study's research abstract was selected for presentation at Tanzania's National Institute for Medical Research's 32nd Annual Joint Scientific Conference and at The University of Dodoma's 1st Scientific Conference on Health and has been published in the Tanzania Journal of Health Research (42). Given that Tanzania is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change, increasing healthcare providers' awareness of climate change can allow them to better educate their patients on how to protect themselves from climate change-related health hazards (43). Therefore, the benefit of this research is that it has begun to raise awareness among healthcare professionals about the harm climate change has to their health and that of their patients.

At the 8th National Climate Change Symposium and Expo in October 2024, a member of the CHOICE Tanzania Think Tank presented research he conducted with Climate Action Network Tanzania on climate change-induced loss and damage in coastal communities in Tanga, Pwani, and Dar es Salaam (44). This study highlighted growing awareness among communities about the impacts on subsistence farming and fisheries, including sea-level rise, salinizing farmland, deeper fishing grounds due to warming seas, and extreme weather damaging crops and infrastructure. Ecological systems like mangroves and coral reefs are disappearing at an alarming rate, further harming livelihoods. Despite these challenges, no formal compensation mechanisms exist, with affected communities relying solely on communal contributions and village bank loans for temporary relief, demonstrating the urgent need for stronger climate justice efforts, equitable compensation mechanisms, and sustained investment in community resilience.

Community Engagement & Education

In recognition of the critical role that collective action across all sectors, including healthcare, plays in addressing climate change, the CHOICE Tanzania Project organized several educational and hands-on activities for World Environment Day 2024 to raise community awareness on the current state of our planet and the power of our actions in either exacerbating or mitigating environmental degradation at AKHD. Interactive trivia games and an art competition allowed both hospital visitors and HCWs to engage with environmental issues, testing their knowledge and creatively expressing their perspectives on the global climate crisis. The highlight of the event was a collaboration between the CHOICE Tanzania Project, Aga Khan University, and AKHST to inaugurate AKHST's first-ever MicroForest at AKHD (45). Microforests, through enhancing biodiversity and increasing carbon sequestration, offer significant climate change mitigation benefits, particularly in large urban centers like Dar es Salaam, where they help reduce rising temperatures (45). The CHOICE Tanzania team also hosted a CME seminar focused on the link between climate change and health. This session provided physicians across Dar es Salaam with vital insights into how climate change directly and indirectly impacts patient health, as well as practical advice on how to protect patients from climate-related health risks. In the week leading up to World Environment Day, the team also facilitated another lecture for Aga Khan University's medical students, interns, residents, and physicians. The goal of this CME was to raise awareness about AKHST's Net Zero Emissions commitment and promote Green Healthcare, an environmentally sustainable approach to healthcare, as an effective strategy for climate change adaptation and mitigation (46). The session aimed to inspire environmental stewardship both within the institution and among AKHST's frontline staff. Finally, the Women Action Towards Economic Development (WATED), a member of the Coalition for Gender and

Climate Change Tanzania Coalition (GCCTC), invited the CHOICE Tanzania Project to present at their Feminist School of Climate Change and Leadership Event (47). The presentation, titled “Mental Health, Gender Equality, and Climate Change: Tanzania Context Focusing on Sustainable Development Goals,” highlighted the important intersection of these issues, underscoring the need for integrated approaches to climate action.

Conclusion

The CHOICE Tanzania Think Tank, established by the CHOICE Tanzania Project in 2023, has proven its ability to advocate for progress and provide evidence-based guidance for sustainable development efforts. Comprising experts from public health, academia, environmental science, civil society, and healthcare, the CHOICE Tanzania Think Tank has championed local solutions tailored to Tanzania’s unique context. The CHOICE Tanzania Project’s work in 2024 has demonstrated significant achievements towards improving the understanding of mental health, gender inequity, and climate change issues in Tanzania and spearheading efforts to address them. Building on this momentum, the CHOICE Tanzania Project team will continue developing and exemplifying best practices that will not only further the HHSDGs but also position Tanzania as a leader in sustainable development solutions within East Africa.

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