

Zathu

By Girl Effect

Winner for
Best Breakthrough Creative



DEMAND CREATION CHALLENGE

CHAMPIONING INNOVATION IN
HIV PREVENTION COMMUNICATION



Source: [The Times Group](#)

HIV disproportionately impacts adolescent girls in Malawi, and gender segregation is a driving factor. For fear of their safety, girls as young as 11 are often told to keep a distance from boys outside of their families, and platonic friendships are discouraged. One result of this divide is that by the time a girl is 15, she will be eight times more likely to be living with HIV than a boy of the same age. Combining media, creativity, and gender expertise, Girl Effect's newest youth brand, Zathu, was launched in 2017 to help tackle the structural and negative social drivers that reinforce gender inequality. Created in collaboration with PEPFAR DREAMS, Zathu's mission is to unite boys and girls and, in turn, reduce HIV diagnosis among adolescent girls and young women.

Born out of Malawian culture, Zathu uses the power of music and storytelling to close the gender gap. It is made up of six fictional characters whose stories show them tackling challenging topics around growing up – friendships between girls and boys, finding the confidence for self-expression, harmful stereotypes, and sexual and reproductive health (SRH).

Zathu helps girls to be seen, to be heard, and to achieve. As well as music, Zathu is made up of a mix of channels, including a twice weekly 30-minute radio drama and a talk show featuring real-life stories and advice from the "Gogo." Meaning aunt in Chichewa, the "Gogo" provides practical advice for young people about, for example, where to get tested for HIV. The Zathu band also performs live at schools, youth clubs, and in public spaces. In its first year, Zathu performed at 25 roadshows across Malawi.

The characters consist of both boys and girls because Girl Effect's formative research revealed that a proliferation of international aid programmes and behaviour change campaigns targeting only girls was having "unintentional negative consequences, leading the community to feel the imbalance of attention away from boys and threatening to worsen the perception of a girl's role in her community."

Using qualitative and quantitative techniques, Girl Effect examined the issues that affect young Malawians at the individual, societal, and environmental level.

Zathu Reach

2.6 M Regular Consumers

4.4 M Music Consumers

2.3 M Radio Consumers

300 Youth Clubs

Ambassador Deborah Birx, the United States Global AIDS coordinator, said:

"Adolescent girls are the population facing the greatest increase in HIV infection in Malawi. It is only by tackling the root causes of why this is happening we will make a long-lasting and demonstrable impact to the spread of the disease. Zathu, made for and by the young people of Malawi, is an innovation that has the potential to create real impact and amplify the crucial work other DREAMS partners are delivering on the ground.

This is why we're so excited to be partnering with Girl Effect as part of the DREAMS public/private partnership. Encouraging relationships that are based on friendship between girls and boys, rather than sexuality, is a genuinely groundbreaking approach to tackling the risks facing adolescent girls. A groundbreaking approach not just for Malawi, but the region as a whole."

Through its initial research, Girl Effect was able to create holistic behaviour change messaging that helps youth in Malawi to tackle sensitive issues through the power of friendship.

By helping to close the gender divide, Zathu has the potential to deliver something much bigger than the sum of its parts. By improving the perceived value of girls – by girls themselves and those around her – it can have a knock-on impact on far wider health and poverty indicators. For example, by informing girls and giving them confidence, they will better understand why their well being is important, seek help, and be more likely to visit a clinic. By reaching mass audiences and combating the social norms that lead to further spread of HIV/AIDS, Zathu amplifies the work of DREAMS partners by driving demand to health services through a variety of channels.

Less than a year since Zathu's launch, the results have been remarkable. Among those surveyed, 93 percent of girls and 89 percent of boys report that Zathu has helped improve their friendships with the opposite sex.

Moreover, the brand has reached more than 2.6 million regular consumers in the first six months. Zathu's digital platforms have been engaged 1.02 million times, and the campaign received more than 2,500 text messages from the audience in the past year. In terms of health impact, new HIV diagnoses have declined in nearly all DREAMS intervention districts in Malawi since 2016.

Girl Effect continues to track Zathu data and use it to improve upon its programming. Insights are also shared with programme partners and service providers to help them better understand the needs of the youth in Malawi. Looking forward, Zathu plans to grow regular radio consumption among its current audience, adding print products for consumers and supporting development of self-guided clubs that spread Zathu's message.

Links:

[Zathu Campaign Video](#)
[PEPFAR DREAMS](#)



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