

MY HER VOICE FUND JOURNEY

A collection of stories from outgoing HER Voice Fund Ambassadors in Cameroon, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi and Tanzania



MY JOURNEY AS THE HER VOICE FUND AMBASSADOR FOR CAMEROON

By Sirri Cynthia Wakuna



My name is Sirri Cynthia Wakuna, and I am the outgoing HER Voice Fund Ambassador to Cameroon.

This role has been an incredibly meaningful and transformative chapter of my journey as a youth advocate. This experience has not only allowed me to represent the voices of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) but also to contribute to a vision that champions their rights, leadership, and well-being.

Through my time as an ambassador, I've witnessed

firsthand the power of meaningful youth engagement and how the voices, perspectives, and potential of AGYW can shape the narrative of the HIV response. The HER Voice Fund has demonstrated that when young women are empowered, resourced, and heard, they rise and they lead.

One of the most profound aspects of this experience has been seeing young women grow in confidence and take up space, supported by the tireless efforts of grantee organisations. These organisations have

created safe, empowering platforms where AGYW can share their stories, develop leadership skills, and hold institutions accountable for respecting their rights and promoting their health.

As a HER Voice Fund Ambassador, I had the privilege of mentoring AGYW, supporting them through challenges such as low self-esteem, gender-based violence, conflict-related risks, and limited access to economic opportunities.

"I utilised my platform to amplify their voices in national and community forums, ensuring their concerns were incorporated into key policy discussions."

I also collaborated with stakeholders to co-design programs addressing AGYW's health and empowerment needs, with a strong focus on gender justice, SRHR, and HIV awareness.

This journey deepened my appreciation for the transformative power of girls' education and highlighted the systemic barriers young women face in Cameroon, especially

amid conflict and inequality. Most importantly, I witnessed the extraordinary resilience and leadership potential of young women when allowed to rise. My role helped me grow as both a leader and learner, reaffirming my commitment to youth advocacy and inclusive development.

Personally and professionally, I've gained invaluable skills, including strategic advocacy,

community engagement, mentoring, and program design. Most importantly, I've learned that advocacy is not just about speaking up; it's about creating space for others to speak, lead, and thrive.



Through the Fund, AGYW have benefited from mentorship and leadership development, which has helped them build confidence, skills, and a strong sense of identity. Education and vocational training opportunities have opened doors for personal growth and economic independence.

The Fund has also supported advocacy initiatives focused on advancing girls' rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), giving young women the tools to speak up and influence change. Perhaps most importantly, the HER Voice Fund has fostered a strong,

supportive community that defends, uplifts, and invests in the potential of every girl. This environment has enabled many to rise as leaders, create change in their communities, and inspire others to believe in their worth and power.

As I transition out of this role, I am immensely proud to have been part of a movement that is making a tangible, lasting difference in the lives of young women and girls in Cameroon and across Africa. I remain committed to the HER Voice Fund's mission and look forward to continuing this work in new

"The HER Voice Fund has changed the lives of so many AGYW across Cameroon by providing critical support in areas that foster empowerment and leadership."

ways, ensuring that all girls, in all their diversity, are empowered to dream, lead, and transform their communities.

MY JOURNEY AS THE HER VOICE FUND AMBASSADOR FOR ESWATINI

By Simphiwe Manhica



My name is Simphiwe Manhica, and I am the outgoing HER Voice Fund Ambassador for Eswatini.

This has been one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life. It's deepened my understanding of advocacy and the rights of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), and it has connected me with an inspiring community of changemakers across the continent. I've taken part in policy discussions, led

community outreach initiatives, and used storytelling to highlight the challenges girls and young women face, ranging from lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services to gender-based violence.

My passion for gender equality and empowering young people has always driven my work. When I first heard about the HER Voice Fund, an initiative directly supporting AGYW on issues related to HIV, sexual health, and rights, I instantly felt

like I needed to be a part of it, in some way, somehow. This was a platform where I could lend my voice and make a difference for my community.

From the beginning, I received tools and training that sharpened my advocacy, leadership, and communication skills. The workshops were eye-opening and empowering. They covered everything, from influencing policy and public speaking to grassroots mobilisation.

"I was trained to speak not just for myself but for countless young women whose voices are often ignored."



As an ambassador, my primary role was to raise awareness and advocate for change within communities, particularly when it challenged cultural norms. I organised dialogues and workshops with AGYW, community leaders, healthcare workers, and policymakers to discuss the importance of inclusive health services, HIV prevention, and the need for

girls' voices in decision-making. I also led campaigns—both online and offline—to challenge harmful norms, promote access to SRHR information, and advocate for youth-friendly services. These campaigns also raised awareness about youth-friendly services, HIV prevention, and the elimination of period poverty.

I facilitated dialogues between AGYW and policymakers, including MPs, traditional leaders, and religious figures, to influence policies and improve services. These conversations weren't always easy, but they were necessary, and over time, I saw real change happening.

Of course, there were moments of resistance, limited resources, and emotional fatigue.

"But every time I felt like giving up, I remembered the stories of the girls and young women I'd met, their strength, resilience, and dreams kept me going."



Through this journey, I've seen changes in myself and in the young women I work with. More AGYW are aware of their rights, communities are more open to discussing SRHR, and decision-makers are listening more. I've grown into a more confident, resilient, articulate, and strategic leader.

My work strengthened advocacy networks and built partnerships with grassroots groups and

health organisations. I've been recognised with various certificates and invitations, such as those from ICASA and the TB Women Academy, as well as national events like the Umhlanga Reed Dance. I've also contributed to submissions to Parliament on the Marriage Bill 2022.

This experience has deepened my understanding of activism, improved my leadership skills,

and reaffirmed my commitment to social justice. More than anything, it's shown me the power of collective action and what happens when young voices are truly valued and heard.

I'm proud of how far I've come, and it makes me happy to see many other young girls following the same path.

MY JOURNEY AS THE HER VOICE FUND AMBASSADOR FOR LESOTHO

By Nthabeleng Ntsekalle



My name is Nthabeleng Ntsekalle, and I am the outgoing HER Voice Fund Ambassador for Lesotho.

When I first joined the HER Voice Fund in 2018, I had expectations that I think exceeded what I had imagined. It was refreshing to see and be involved in an initiative that truly trusted and invested in the empowerment of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in HIV and sexual, reproductive health responses.

"HER Voice Fund showed me what community girls could become when equipped with the right tools, mentorship, and intentional support."



Starting wasn't easy. We were a small group of young women eager to lead, influence, and learn, but we faced pushback. Society wasn't ready for women in leadership, especially not young ones. But with the support of my host organisation, LENASO, and the unwavering mentorship of its Executive Director, I gained access to spaces I once thought were beyond my reach.

Through the HER Voice Fund, I grew personally and professionally. I developed leadership and public speaking skills, financial literacy, strategic thinking, and high-level representation experience. I went from uncertain beginnings to speaking at national platforms and international think tanks on HIV commodities like PrEP. I was involved in strategic policy development, community campaigns, and advocacy efforts that championed menstrual hygiene, GBV prevention,

inclusive health services, and education for AGYW. I've been a voice for young mothers, LGBTIQ youth, young people living with disabilities, and rural girls, ensuring that no one is left behind.

As a result of our work, AGYW across Lesotho began returning to school, participating in policy dialogues, reporting gender-based violence, and confidently seeking health services. Parents are communicating better with their daughters. Community leaders are rethinking cultural norms. Most importantly, AGYW now feel seen, heard, and supported.

"The role of Ambassador wasn't always glamorous; it was tough, emotionally demanding, and often overwhelming. It's a lot of hard work. Many years of hard work, but I look back on it as the most rewarding experience."



It shaped me into a confident and resilient young leader who could stand in any room and speak truth to power. There were moments of doubt, resistance, and debate, but I persisted because I knew I was carrying the voices of those who could not speak for themselves.

The HER Voice Fund didn't just give me a title; instead, it gave me a purpose. It made me a beacon of hope for countless AGYW and gave me lifelong networks, allies, and opportunities. While my official term has ended, the legacy of this role lives on in me and in the young women who now lead change in their communities because someone once believed in us. I am proud to be a part of that legacy.



MY JOURNEY AS THE HER VOICE FUND AMBASSADOR FOR MALAWI

By Grace Ngulube



My name is Grace Ngulube, and I am the outgoing HER Voice Fund Ambassador for Malawi.

It has been an incredibly rewarding and transformative journey not only for me as a young woman leader, but also for the many girls and young women whose lives have been touched by the fund. From the start, HVF has enabled me to advocate for adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), ensuring their voices are heard and their realities are represented in decision-making spaces.

“Serving as an ambassador has given me a front-row seat to the impact that strategic funding and youth-led advocacy can have in our communities.”

Through this role, I have worked closely with grantee organisations, supporting them to strengthen their proposals, navigate the grant process, and meaningfully engage in national dialogues. I’ve also participated in regional and global

conversations that amplify the lived experiences of girls in Malawi, influencing policies and programming at higher levels.

One of the most fulfilling parts of my journey has been mentoring and building the capacity of other young women

to become SRHR champions in their communities. Whether it’s facilitating capacity-building sessions, guiding young leaders on advocacy, or participating in community consultations, I’ve seen the power of collective action led by young people.

“HER Voice Fund to me is a platform for empowerment, visibility, and transformation.”

When girls are trusted and supported, they bring innovative and context-specific solutions to the table. I've also learned that partnerships between young people and adult allies are key when we are included as equals in planning and decision-making processes, we shift the narrative from tokenism to true inclusion.



In Malawi, the HER Voice Fund has opened doors for AGYW to meaningfully participate in the Global Fund and other national processes. It has helped create safe spaces for girls to speak up on issues like HIV, gender-based violence, and lack of access to SRHR services. It has also strengthened the capacity of grassroots organisations to engage in advocacy and hold systems accountable. As a

result, we're seeing more girls in leadership, more representation in national dialogues, and increased confidence among AGYW to claim their rights.

Representing HVF in Malawi has been both an honour and a responsibility. It has pushed me to grow as a leader, a mentor, and an advocate. It has also reminded me why I do this work: because every girl deserves the chance to be seen, heard, and

supported. I carry the voices of many girls with me, and I remain committed to ensuring that our stories drive change not just in Malawi but across the region.

As I transition, I remain grateful for the sisterhood, solidarity, and support that HER Voice Fund has brought into my life. And I remain hopeful because when girls rise, we all rise.

MY JOURNEY AS THE HER VOICE FUND AMBASSADOR FOR TANZANIA

By Dr. Hortencia Nuhu, MD, MScPH Candidate.



My name is Dr. Hortencia Nuhu, and I am the outgoing HER Voice Fund Ambassador in Tanzania.

When I reflect on my experience, I am reminded of the faces, stories, and dreams of countless girls and young women who, against all odds, continue to rise. This experience has not only been a chapter of deep advocacy and empowerment but a transformative journey that has reshaped my personal and professional trajectory.

Joining the HER Voice Fund (HVF) was more than a professional opportunity; it was a calling. As a public health enthusiast and a passionate advocate for gender equity, I was already immersed in work that centred around health education, reproductive rights, and community mobilisation. However, HVF brought an entirely new dimension to my work. It amplified my reach and gave structure and support to ideas I had long wanted to execute but lacked the resources to implement.

Being an Ambassador is a role I hold with pride and reverence. It comes with the responsibility of representing not only the Fund but also the girls whose stories we carry.

“Every time I sit in a policy forum, meet with local leaders, or speak at a youth event, I am reminded that I carry with me the hopes and dreams of those who often go unheard.”

It's the resilience of the girls I serve that continues to inspire me. It's their courage that constantly reminds me of why this work is so important.

As an Ambassador, I've had access to regional training, global platforms, and ongoing mentorship. However, perhaps the most valuable gift has been the community and fellowship of young advocates across Africa, who are each making bold strides in their respective countries. Our work together has led to the formation of a tapestry of resistance, resilience, and revolution.

One of the most enriching aspects of my journey with the HER Voice Fund has been the opportunity to work closely with grantees and our Country Lead. This collaboration has shaped my experience in powerful ways and reinforced the spirit of collective action that HER Voice promotes.



The grantees I've interacted with across Tanzania are some of the most passionate, innovative, and dedicated organisations I've had the privilege to work with. They come from diverse backgrounds, including urban and rural areas, different ethnic and linguistic groups, and various educational levels; each brings unique insights into the challenges girls

and young women face in their communities.

Through this platform, I have led several community outreach initiatives, sensitising young people on issues around sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), menstrual hygiene, and gender-based violence. By organising

workshops, school talks, and open forums, I have reached and impacted hundreds of adolescents, empowering them with knowledge, confidence, and a safe space to express themselves.

As an Ambassador, I've had the chance to mentor, support, and learn from these grantees.

"I've seen how even the smallest grants, when placed in the right hands, can produce incredible outcomes".

Through capacity-building sessions, field visits, and knowledge-sharing platforms, we've created a strong network of support where we uplift one another. Many of the grantees have gone on to expand their work, build partnerships, and train other young leaders in their communities.

Our Country Lead has been a pivotal part of this

journey, offering guidance, encouragement, and structure to the work we do. They took time to listen, gave constructive feedback, and helped us navigate both opportunities and challenges. Whether it was during planning meetings, proposal reviews, reporting processes, or community engagements, their presence was always affirming. They

made sure that our work was not only aligned with national goals but also responsive to real needs on the ground. Their support extended beyond just programmatic oversight; they were a mentor, a connector, and often a motivator during the difficult moments when the work felt overwhelming.

“One of the most profound lessons I’ve learned is that change is not imported; it is cultivated.”

The HER Voice Fund’s impact in Tanzania is wide and deep. It has reached young women where they are with the resources they need. Our youth-led and youth-centred advocacy enabled us to reach many adolescent girls and young women in diverse settings, including schools, informal settlements, and rural communities. We created safe spaces for dialogue, learning, and leadership, ensuring communities are integral to finding solutions. From distributing dignity kits and

menstrual hygiene supplies to hosting town hall forums on gender-based violence, the Fund impacted so many lives.

The HER Voice Fund is more than a funding mechanism; it is a movement. It is a testament to what happens when we trust young people, invest in their leadership, and centre their voices in the fight for justice and equality. Girls who once sat silently in the back of classrooms are now leading community campaigns. Young

women who were unsure of their rights are now educating their peers on these issues.

As I continue on this journey, I carry with me the lessons, the laughter, the tears, and the unwavering hope that every girl, regardless of where she is born, deserves the chance to lead, to learn, and to live free from violence and discrimination. To every girl in Tanzania and beyond: Your voice matters. Your story matters. And your future is worth fighting for.

