



YONECO VOICE

Monthly Newsletter

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Inside

YONECO Executive Director Welcomes New Interns

PAGE 9

Minister Commends YONECO for Effective Data Management and Analysis Systems

PAGE 13

YONECO Organizes Human Rights Education Session for Children in Rumphi.

PAGE 15

Contents

Executive Director’s Note.....	1
Creating a Democratic Future: YONECO Educates Youth on Democracy and Governance.....	5
YONECO Encourages Students to Limit Social Media Use for Academic Success.....	6
Authorities Engage YONECO to Educate Learners on Dangers of Drug and Substance Abuse.....	7
YONECO ED Welcomes New Interns.....	9
Role Models Inspire South Lunzu Primary School Learners.....	10
YONECO Facilitates a Session to Prepare Girl’s Transition to Secondary School.....	10
Intern Profile: Oprah Kanyumba.....	11
It’s Our Anniversary – but Should We be Celebrating?.....	12
Minister Commends YONECO for Effective Data Management and Analysis Systems.....	13
Collaborative Efforts Shine Bright in UNICEF-Funded Project for Cyclone Freddy Affected Communities.....	14
YONECO Organizes Human Rights Education Session for Children in Rumphi.....	15
‘Information is Critical in Eradicating Child Labour’ – Village Head Gowoka.....	16
YONECO and Chiyanjano Women’s Group Collaborate in Protecting Children.....	17
Empowering Learners to Prevent and Respond to SRGBV.....	18
YFM; Empowering Malawian Women through Community Connection.....	19
Empowering Young People Living with HIV with Comprehensive SRH Information.....	20

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- Governance and Human Rights.
- Media, Collaboration, Networking and Coordinating.
- Climate Change and Disaster Management.
- Institutional Management.
- Research and Documentation

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About Us

Our Vision

A self-reliant, healthy, empowered, resilient, responsible, and inclusive society that respects democratic values and principles.



Our Mission

We are committed to empowering the youth, women and children, promoting good health, human rights and democratic culture, adapting and mitigating the impact of climate change and conducting research for evidence-based programming and advocacy



Our values

Integrity
Teamwork
Confidentiality
Respect for human dignity
Transparency and Accountability



Executive Director's Note...



with MacBain Mkandawire

Dear Esteem Readers,

The month of November is associated with the prevention of abuse and violence. We start the month with the prevention of child abuse and the promotion of the rights of children. The 19 Days of Activism for Prevention of Violence Against Children starts today November 1, 2023 to November 19, 2023. This is a period when we continue to create awareness of the prevention of abuse and violence. This is an intensification component and we need to get more focused in this area.

Several reports from the Malawi Police Service, the Department of Social Welfare, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) indicate a continued prevalence of violence and abuse. The continued existence of child marriages is alarming, with an estimated rate of approximately 37%. Whether this is true or not is a story for another day but what is indisputable is the fact that the figure remains high. In addition to this, cases of defilement, child labour, online child sexual exploitation, and corporal punishment continue to be our greatest worries. This does not necessarily imply that children should not be disciplined. Creating the right values and moral development is the responsibility of all parents, guardians, and teachers. We need to acknowledge that rights go with responsibilities. We just need to be consistent at all levels. It should be emphasized that as we move with the prevention of abuse and violence, let's focus on Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which talks about the best interest of the child, and giving children protection and ensuring that they should remain in school.

On the same abuse, we have noted with great concern the rise of violence against women and girls by their male counterparts and vice versa. We will be launching the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) on 25 November 2023. One wonders why all this is still happening in this day and age. Several recent studies have shown that there is a relationship between economic issues and GBV. Men who lost their sources of income have either become violent as part of the failure to accept the challenge or have been abused for failure to provide for their families. Either way, the loss in income has a huge impact on GBV. Our plea therefore is not to only focus on creating awareness of GBV but also focus on various economic strategies to mitigate GBV at household and community levels. Empowering both men and women economically would be a great strategy for preventing and mitigating GBV. Men should be treated as allies to the management of violence against women and girls and this requires building rapport that fosters the processes.

It would be wrong if I do not talk about the right to development as enshrined in Section 30 of the constitution of the Republic of Malawi. The enjoyment of this right requires that the people of Malawi and duty bearers can respond and meet the demands of the citizens. This requires total commitment to ensuring that people are provided with the necessary mindset. However, recent developments show that right holders and duty bearers are no longer working to complement each other. Heartrendingly, communities are not demanding their rights while duty bearers do not care. In any democratic dispensation, people must focus on the attainment of their rights when things are not going as expected. In any democratic dispensation, citizens must prioritize the attainment of their rights when the state of affairs is not in line with the expected standards.

We wish you a happy November 2023

RESILIENT VOICES: EMPOWERING HOPE IN EDUCATION

By Gracium Mkonda

Chithonje

In this unwavering anthem, we sing,
Of hope's sturdy pillar, a voice unwavering
and true,
Confidence, unyielding, like a beacon's
gleam,
Inspiring women, youth, and children to
pursue.

Mighty winds tested its foundation's core,
On wings of lies, hatred took to flight,
Slandering voices in relentless uproar,
Yet hope, steadfast and resolute, withstood
the night.

The unyielding voice, its strength did soar,
In Chitipa and Rumphi, praises rise,
A guiding light, a beacon on the shore,
Leading learners to excellence, where
knowledge lies.

BEFIT, YONECO, and Malawi's Government
hand in hand,
A potent alliance, united and strong,
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Unlocking talents, a melody in lifelong song.





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Creating a Democratic Future: YONECO Educates Youth on Democracy and Governance

By Praise Chitsonga



Insert: Young people from Zomba who were reached with the governance and democracy education session posing with Tithandizane National Helpline Service officers.

Meaningful involvement of young people in governance issues is critical in maintaining democratic systems in a society. Malawi has a youthful population hence the need to fully tap into the potential which this group has and ensure that they are fully empowered with the requisite knowledge and skills to lead.

In response to this, YONECO officers from the Tithandizane Helpline Services conducted educational sessions with young people in Zomba district on governance and democracy. The primary objective of the sessions was to provide the youth with the necessary information to actively participate in actions that promote democracy and good governance in the country.

During this session, the officers unpacked the concepts of democracy and governance. The officers highlighted the far-reaching impacts

of democracy and good governance on society and they elucidated the vital role that young people are supposed to play in a bid to advance these principles.

The sessions are expected to contribute towards empowering young people to be actively involved in promoting and shaping the democratic and governance landscape of their society.

In total, the sessions reached 446 young people of which 229 were male and 217 were females. Mainly, the young people were reached in their youth clubs within their designated communities.

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YONECO Encourages Students to Limit Social Media Use for Academic Success

By Grant Dulla



Insert: Field Officers in Mangochi engaging with students from St. Monica Girls Secondary School

Students from St Monica Girls Secondary School vowed to remain committed to their studies after an engagement session with YONECO Social workers whose mission at the school was to discourage students from spending most of their time on social media.

Despite the numerous educational and economic opportunities that social media platforms provide, there are some challenges that emanate from misuse and their addictive nature. As such, YONECO has embarked on engaging young people in Mangochi where the influx of affordable smartphones in Mangochi has seen a good number of students owning one.

A number of secondary students have bemoaned their heavy presence on social media as one of the root causes of their poor academic performance. Most students have indicated that social media distracts them from concentrating on their studies. Most common social media platforms do not allow minors to own an account. Nevertheless, students often evade the age restrictions by providing false information when creating an account.

As such, there is a need to properly help students evade social media addiction which often leads to exhaustion, stress, depression, and anxiety among other things.

The session was attended by all students who are in Forms 1 to 4.

Authorities Engage YONECO to Educate Learners on Dangers of Drug and Substance Abuse

By Happiness Chanunkha



Insert: YONECO Field Officer for Zomba, engaging with the learners during the drug and substance abuse session at Matiti Primary School.

Zomba City, just like many parts of Malawi, faces a serious challenge with young people abusing drugs and other substances. Thus, in a bid to safeguard learners from the devastating health effects of these tendencies, school authorities at Matiti Primary School in Zomba engaged YONECO to educate learners about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

A total of 754 learners actively participated in the session. The students asked various moral and philosophical questions pertaining to drug and substance abuse. Further to this, the learners also responded to various questions that were posed to assess their level of knowledge on issues that concern drug and substance abuse.

Melida firmly believes that this initiative will be a catalyst for positive change. She envisions a future where the troubling issues of teenage pregnancies, STIs, and information gaps become mere relics of the past in her community. The MCGL-Pact and YONECO project have kindled a beacon of hope for Zilakoma's youth, illuminating a path to a brighter and healthier future.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the project for gracing our community with this invaluable opportunity. The impact of this initiative is palpable, and we anticipate that it will continue to reach and inspire many more adolescents in areas that have yet to experience its transformative effects. Together, we are shaping a future where our youth can thrive and realize their full potential.

"There are a lot of myths and misconceptions surrounding the issues of drug and substance abuse which also need to be addressed. For instance, in our engagement, we noted that some learners were made to believe that marijuana increases a person's Intelligence Quotient (IQ)," explained Happiness Chanunkha, YONECO's Chinamwali Youth Drop-in Centre Manager.

Among other key topics, YONECO social workers focused on strategies for resisting negative peer pressure, how drug and substance abuse causes mental health problems and other physical challenges, the impact of alcohol and drug addiction on academic performance, and the eventual socioeconomic problems.

The drug and substance abuse problem is aggravated by, among other factors, the easy access to marijuana and low-cost liquor which is being sold in shabeens that have sprung up in every corner of many localities.

Thus, it is important to teach young people about the physical and mental risks that are associated with the hazards of harmful use of alcohol and drugs. There is a need to ensure that the suppliers who are consciously turning minors into heavy consumers of such cut-rate alcohol have no underage customers.

"I humbly urge all law enforcement agencies to enforce the country's existing legal instruments to protect children from the harm the laws are observed so as to protect children from the harms that are triggered by abuse and addiction," explained Happiness Chanunkha.





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LET'S GROW WITH US

YONECO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR WELCOMES NEW INTERNS



The Executive Director posing with the new interns

In the month of October 2023, the Executive Director of YONECO, MacBain Mkandawire, extended a hearty welcome to new interns who joined the organization from the Malawi Institute of Journalism (MIJ) and Malawi Assemblies of God University (MAGU). The group comprised of communication and journalism students who were all attached to YONECO FM Radio Station (YFM).

YONECO strongly believe that creating a friendly and conducive work environment is imperative for hosting interns, as it promotes meaningful participation and learning.

Internships offer young people the opportunity to acquire practical experience in their preferred field, develop skills, and enhance their employability. By offering internship opportunities to young people, institutions help the youth to effortlessly transition from the classroom to the labor force.

In addition, an industrial attachment is a period when young people are equipped with essential skills and knowledge to excel in their designated careers.

Role Models Inspire South Lunzu Primary School Learners

By Enalla Msukwa



Insert: YONECO District Manager for Blantyre engaging with the learners.

On 19 September, 2023, we had an exciting role-modeling session with learners at South Lunzu Primary School in Blantyre. We organized the activity to inspire and motivate the learners by introducing them to successful individuals who can serve as their positive role models.

During the session, some accomplished individuals were invited to share their stories and experiences. The role models came from various fields, including education, health, entrepreneurship, and community development. The role models shared their life stories, stressing the challenges they faced and how they overcame them to achieve their goals.

The activity was highly interactive, allowing the students to ask questions and engage with the speakers. This provided valuable insights into the different paths they can take to achieve their dreams. The speakers also emphasized the importance of hard work, determination, and perseverance in achieving success.

YONECO organizes role-modeling sessions for primary and secondary school learners with the aim of inspiring them to dream big and believe in themselves. By presenting relatable role models, the session helped the learners understand that success is attainable regardless of their background or other circumstances. In addition to this, the activity also sought to address issues of gender stereotypes and promote the importance of equality and inclusion.

YONECO Facilitates a Session to Prepare Girl's Transition to Secondary School

By Grant Dulla



Insert: Mangochi Field Officer during the guidance and counselling session.

On 18th October 2023, YONECO conducted a guidance and counselling session for senior primary school learners at St Augustine 1 Primary School in Mangochi district. The purpose of the guidance and counselling sessions was to provide support and guidance to the Standard 8 learners as they prepared to transition from primary to secondary school.

The counsellors discussed various topics with the learners, including time management skills, study techniques, relationship issues, managing negative peer pressure, and coping with stress.

The activity also provided a platform for learners to raise questions and share concerns about the transition. The counsellors offered advice and encouragement, emphasizing the significance of setting objectives, seeking help when needed, and maintaining a positive attitude.

The students were also urged to look after their physical and emotional health by getting adequate rest, eating well, and participating in recreational activities.

Similar activities were also conducted in Zomba at Mponda Primary School, and at St Monica School in Mangochi district within the month of October, 2023.

Intern Profile

Oprah Kanyumba

Oprah Kanyumba is a 20-year-old student and currently, she is pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Development Studies at the Catholic University of Malawi. Oprah joined YONECO as a Programs Intern in October 2023 at YONECO District Office in Blantyre.

"As my internship with YONECO is swiftly unfolding, I am also recognizing the profound significance of hands-on experience in the realm of effective learning. The experience has been key in developing my capabilities and enhancing my practical understanding of the world of development," says Oprah.

As a Programme Intern, Oprah is involved in the implementation of various programmatic interventions under youth development, gender and women empowerment, governance and human rights child protection and development as well as climate change and disaster management activities.

"My association with YONECO has equipped me with a diverse skill set and has been transformative. I am now poised to achieve my career aspirations and make a positive impact on the communities I serve, thanks to the practical knowledge and experience I have gained from YONECO during this internship" added Oprah.



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It's Our Anniversary – but Should We be Celebrating?

Press Release by Dr. Joan Nyanyuki, Executive Director, African Child Policy Forum (ACPF)

In 2003, the newly-established African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) called on “Africans to recognise our responsibility to own our destiny and to collectively provide for the realisation of all rights to all our children.” Our founders believed that Africans could – and should – take responsibility for the rights and wellbeing of their own children.

When I joined ACPF as its Executive Director in 2020, I was well aware of its reputation as a respected and independent organisation. Our advice is sought – and heeded – by African Union and United Nations bodies. Our research, analysis and recommendations have been adopted into international treaties and national laws and policies. Our flagship reports, studies and conferences influence academics, international non-profits and grassroots civil society organisations.

I am particularly proud of our work with the AU Commission (AUC), the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), regional economic communities (RECs) and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Having a seat at those tables means we can give a voice to Africa’s children at the heart of the continent’s most influential institutions.

Since our first IPC in 2004 we have welcomed more than 12,000 participants to ACPF events including Heads of State, government ministers, UN, AU and ACERWC representatives and leading CSOs, experts and academics. Our ground-breaking Child-Friendliness and Girl-Friendliness Indices rate the performance of every African government and tracks their movement up or down the rankings. The Africa Report on Child Wellbeing is listed by the ACERWC as a reference in the drafting of Agenda 2040.

It’s not always been easy. As ACPF marks its 20th anniversary, I wonder – are African governments really serious about children’s rights and wellbeing? We tread a delicate line between supporting them to do the right thing and calling them out when they don’t. We’ve been accused both of being too friendly towards governments and too critical of them – which makes me think we’re probably getting it about right.

The past two decades have given us plenty of reasons for optimism. For example, African children can expect to live longer, healthier lives than at any point in the recent past. In the decade before the COVID pandemic, school attendance had improved across all age groups, and female genital mutilation (FGM) has declined by a quarter over the past two decades in those countries with national data.

Look harder, however, and a perfect storm of the climate emergency, post-pandemic economic crisis, increasing armed conflict and rising poverty rates has undermined some the limited progress of the past two decades. The work of ACPF and its civil society partners across Africa and beyond is needed more than ever.

We can no longer take it for granted that life for children in Africa is getting better, albeit far too slowly. I am greatly alarmed that the statistics for children impacted by infant and child mortality, malnutrition, poverty, child labour, armed conflict, climate change, physical and sexual abuse, and child trafficking are all either flat-lining or getting worse.

Yet as I reflect on ACPF’s first twenty years, and look forward to the next twenty, I remain optimistic. I refuse to accept these challenges are insurmountable or that we should simply shrug our shoulders and say that in Africa, that’s just the way it is.

Over the years, we have given a voice to children and young people and ensured their opinions are taken into account. We have established networks, movements and partnerships which bring together like-minded organisations and activists. We are proud of our work with numerous African civil society organisations, experts and scholars, without whose passion and relentless efforts, gains would not have been made.

With the right life chances, our young people can power a social, cultural and economic renaissance across Africa. All over the continent, children and young people are demanding to be heard. They are rising up against climate injustice, poverty, hunger and a host of other issues. Together with our partners, we will do everything we can to support them.

Minister Commends YONECO for Effective Data Management and Analysis Systems



The Minister of Health, Honourable Khumbize Kandodo Chiponda, applauded YONECO for its diligence in efficiently managing and analyzing data on numerous socioeconomic matters that the organization deals with.

The Minister stated that the data that YONECO has on disaster, violence, and mental health-related issues is sufficiently comprehensive to guide effective programming in addressing the various challenges.

The Minister made these remarks in her keynote address at a function that doubled as a national commemoration event for 2023 World Mental Health Day and a platinum celebration for Zomba Mental Hospital.

YONECO deals with issues of mental health at various levels through its toll-free helplines and disaster response interventions.





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YONECO Organises Human Rights Education Session for Children in Rumph

By Larah Mbewe



Insert: YONECO Field Officers in Rumph during the human rights education session for children at the Drop-in Centre in the district.

YONECO organized a two-day session on human rights at Rumph Youth Drop-in Centre that was aimed at educating children about the freedoms they have and their associated responsibilities.

The session was held on 27 and 28, October 2023, with a focus on dispelling a common misconception among some children that they solely possess rights without any corresponding obligations.

The session was lively, with various creative activities and group assignments. Among other things, some groups were tasked to list down the rights that children have, and others were assigned to pick from there and align each freedom with its associated responsibility. The responses from the children who participated in the session were great and provided an opportunity for the facilitators to fill the knowledge gaps that were identified.

One of the session facilitators, Larah Mbewe, explained that it is imperative to instill a sense of responsibility in children and teach them how to exercise their rights responsibly as they grow.

Human rights education sessions are among the key generic activities for young people that are conducted in YONECO Youth Drop-in Centre which the organization established in various districts across Malawi.

A total of 28 children from the vicinity of Rumph Youth Drop-in Centres attended the education session.

'Information is Critical in Eradicating Child Labour' – Village Head Gowoka

By Edward Nyirenda



Insert: YONECO Field Officers engaging some of the community members at Gowoka Village during the awareness session on child labour.

Rumphi is one of the districts in Malawi where hazardous child labour is widespread and the malpractice primarily stems from poverty, social-economic vulnerability, and limited access to decent job opportunities. However, one key factor perpetuating child labour in the district is the lack of information about child labour.

Child labour is a global challenge that is widespread in a number of informal sectors of Malawi's economy. The Employment Act of 2000 provides legal regulations governing child labour in Malawi. The statute sets the minimum age for admission of a child to employment at 14 years. The Act unequivocally prohibits children aged 14 to 18 from doing tasks in dangerous and unhealthy conditions that can result in harm, injury, or illness due to inadequate safety measures or poor working conditions.

Thus, recognizing the alarming prevalence of child labour cases, particularly forced labour in agriculture, YONECO conducted a community awareness meeting at Gowoka Village in Rumphi district. The meeting that was conducted on October 10, 2023, was aimed at providing comprehensive information about child labour.

Among other critical issues, the meeting focused on the adverse consequences of child labour on society and individuals, the legal implications, as well as awareness about the available reporting mechanisms. Additionally, the session also focused on helping community members to understand the difference between child labour and child work.

During the session, community members expressed their interest in standing up against child labour while appreciating the valuable information they had received, which they indicated would aid them in avoiding violations of children's rights.

In his remarks, Village Head Gowoka explained that information is crucial in ending child labor. The traditional leader explained that when people are knowledgeable, they become more inclined to refrain from engaging in such vices.

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YONECO and Chiyanjano Women's Group Collaborate in Protecting Children

By Enallah Msukwa



Insert: YONECO Blantyre field officers engaging with members of Chiyanjano Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) members in Soche township.

It is heartrending that children in Malawi continue facing various forms of abuse in their communities, schools and other spaces.

Despite a strong legal framework that has necessitated the imposition of harsh penalties on child abuse offenders, the number of reported cases continues to rise, indicating that the society in which children are growing up is not safe. Such vices particularly affect girls, thereby hindering them from realizing their full potential.

In the ongoing efforts to create a safe and supportive environment for children to grow and enjoy their rights, YONECO held a dialogue session with members of Chiyanjano Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) at Soche Township in Blantyre City.

Today's session was attended by a total of 16 members of the association, who will undergo various mentorship sessions on how they should contribute towards strengthening child protection activities in their areas.

Let's join hands in creating a better world for children.

Empowering Learners to Prevent and Respond to SRGBV

By Mary Chimenya



Insert: Mphande Primary School learners during the session.

YONECO reached 257 learners at Mphande Primary School in Mwanza with an information session on response and prevention of School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV).

The session was organized as part of YONECO's quest to contribute towards making schools safe for all learners. Thus, the session focused on empowering the learners with knowledge and information in a bid to ensure that they are able to report and prevent SRGBV within the school setting.

Among other areas of focus, the session looked at forms, causes, and the dangers of Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The session also covered the available reporting mechanisms and various GBV-related laws.

The session was strategically made relatable and interactive as a way of ensuring that the young people should gain comprehensive knowledge about SRGB.

Out of the total number of learners who attended the session, were 134 girls and 123 were boys.

YFM; Empowering Malawian Women through Community Connection

By Mbanandi Mahala



Insert: Some of the women who are patrons of the Amayi Yankhulani radio program during the Get-Together event.

In a heart-warming show of community spirit, YFM staff joined Amayi Yankhulani Get-together that was organized by the programme's audience on 21 October, 2023. The event demonstrated the strength of the women's empowerment movement at the grassroots level.

Women from various regions in Malawi, including Neno, Phalombe, Thyolo, Machinga, Zomba, Balaka, Lilongwe and Mangochi, gathered to connect, share stories, and support one another, all inspired by the message of Amayi Yankhulani.

The event also provided a chance for these women to connect with one of the program's sponsors, "Self Help Africa," which is involved in the Chitetezo Mbaula initiative. This interaction offered valuable insights and support for the women's personal and professional growth.

This event highlighted the significant impact of the radio program, where women actively participate in daily discussions through phone-ins and text messages on a wide range of topics. Among others, the radio programme covers topical issues on leadership, home management, health, and governance.

Empowering Young People Living with HIV with Comprehensive SRH Information

By Grant Dulla

Y PLUS

Insert: Y Plus group members during the comprehensive sexual reproductive health session in Mangochi

On October 21, 2023, YONECO extended its support to the Y Plus Group members, a community of young individuals living with HIV. During this event, the organization hosted a comprehensive session on sexual and reproductive health, focusing on several crucial aspects.

The session encompassed various discussions aimed at equipping people living with HIV with essential knowledge and strategies to care for themselves. Participants emphasized the significance of regular visits to healthcare providers specialized in HIV management. These professionals play a pivotal role in guiding individuals on the path to a successful, healthy life, despite the presence of the virus. Encouragement regarding the adherence to prescribed medications was a key takeaway from this segment.

Additionally, the participants delved into the topic of proper medication management. They emphasized the importance of following the prescribed procedures outlined by their healthcare practitioners. Ensuring that the medication regimen is adhered to diligently was stressed as a crucial aspect of maintaining one's health.

Furthermore, the session addressed the challenge of disclosing one's HIV status to others, including loved ones. The participants discussed three distinct disclosure methods: full disclosure, partial disclosure, and accidental disclosure. They acknowledged the difficulties faced by those in relationships, who often fear that revealing their HIV status might jeopardize their connection.

Towards the session's conclusion, YONECO facilitated a discussion on sexual and reproductive health. This segment highlighted the importance of using protection and provided guidance on the correct use of condoms to safeguard against sexually transmitted infections. As a tangible outcome, 13 packs of condoms were distributed among the participants, who expressed their enthusiasm and gratitude for being a part of this valuable session.

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