



FIGO

International Federation of
Gynecology and Obstetrics

the Global Voice for Women's Health

**Achieving a catalytic
transformative change
for Africa:**

Doctors as advocates for
improving access to safe
abortion care



“We must be bold and powerful in improving access to safe abortion and contraception to bring down maternal mortality in Africa. Let’s make a pact – no baby steps, we need a catalytic, transformative change for Africa.”

Dr Anne Kihara, FIGO President,
October 2023 – October 2025



ECSACOG-FIGO Community of Practice meeting, October 2022, Rwanda

FIGO’s Advocating for Safe Abortion Project

The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics’ (FIGO) Advocating for Safe Abortion Project works with member societies of obstetricians and gynaecologists (OBGYNs) at the international, regional and national levels to improve access to safe, quality abortion services. In 2022, we expanded our network to collaborate with 30 national member societies of OBGYNs across Africa.

Together we

- Advocate for women and girls’ sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) globally, joining forces with our partners on impactful campaigns
- Develop national member societies of OBGYNs’ advocacy and communications skills
- We enhance the institutional strength of national societies to help them become leaders on SRHR and deliver plans that facilitate access to safe abortion care in their countries

“FIGO is a key alliance of human rights defenders who are invested in improving the health outcomes for women and girls worldwide.

FIGO’s clinical evidence and the first-hand insights of its OBGYNs members has greatly informed the development of human rights standards related to sexual reproductive rights. This includes enabling better accountability from governments to remove barriers and obstacles faced by women/girls to access their sexual and reproductive health services and rights.

FIGO’s expertise is ever more vital, particularly as we see the harm unleashed by abortion-related stigma against both health care workers that provide this much-needed care, and women/girls that require this time-sensitive essential health care.

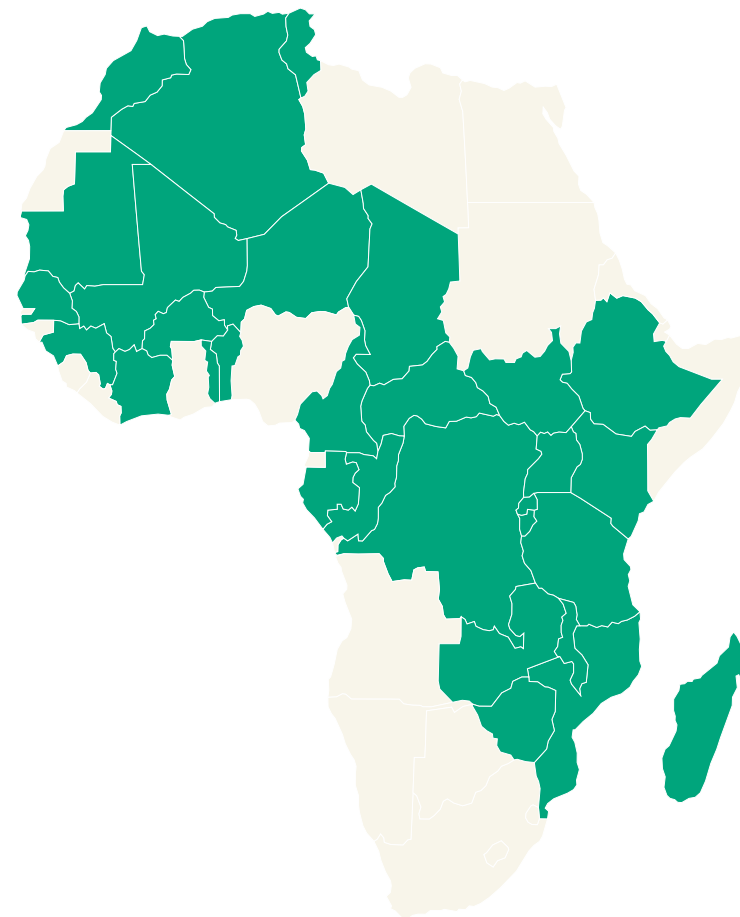
We value and are inspired by FIGO’s never-ending dedication to advocating for the sexual and reproductive rights and health care of women and girls.”

Guadalupe Marengo, Head of Global Human Rights Defenders Programme, Amnesty International



SAGO-FIGO Community of Practice meeting, June, 2023, Burkina Faso

FIGO supports Communities of Practice across Africa



FIGO works with ECSACOG and SAGO Communities of Practice to improve access to safe and quality abortion care and to reduce unsafe abortions – a leading cause of preventable maternal mortality and morbidity.

Communities of Practice

In 2022, FIGO launched two sub-regional Communities of Practice in partnership with the East, Central and Southern African College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ECSACOG) and the Société Africaine de Gynécologie Obstétrique (SAGO).

The ECSACOG-FIGO Community of Practice comprises 10 national member societies of OBGYNs and the SAGO-FIGO Community of Practice comprises 20 national member societies of OBGYNs.

Our Communities of Practice enable OBGYNs to share, learn and motivate each other, taking ideas back to their own societies to inform and implement.



ECSACOG-FIGO members from South Sudan and Kenya at Community of Practice meeting, Rwanda, October 2022



Professor Bellington Vwalika, Secretary General ECSACOG, ECSACOG-FIGO meeting in Ethiopia, March 2023

“The ECSACOG-FIGO partnership is a relationship to build important momentum to address preventable causes of maternal mortality and morbidity in our African region.

OBGYNs and health professionals have long been at the forefront of the fight against preventable maternal mortality and morbidity, we have done this by sharing our first-hand insights and evidence to demonstrate this issue is not just a public health concern but a preventable social injustice that demands urgent focus.

Our ECSACOG-FIGO partnership is committed to fostering innovative solutions, amplifying our advocacy to strengthen health systems to better respond to the needs and entitlements of women and girls, which includes their right to access safe abortion care.”

Professor Bellington Vwalika, Secretary General, ECSACOG

ECSACOG-FIGO Community of Practice

The ECSACOG-FIGO Community of Practice, had its first meeting in October 2022, and identified key areas that it would aim to harness its expertise to deliver progression on.

Thematic priorities

- Strengthening task-sharing and self-care/self-managed abortion
- Address abortion-related stigma and ‘conscientious objection’ through value clarification and attitude transformation of OBGYNs, health care professionals and key stakeholders
- Medical curricula – embedding competency-based education and assessment to deliver comprehensive abortion care and family planning
- Prevent burn-out and enhance wellbeing among OBGYNs
- Livingstone Safe Abortion Care charter – champions a pan-Africa movement of health care workers to strengthen access to abortion care



“Competency based curricula is the key to unlocking the full potential of the next generation of OBGYNs, as champions of providing person-centred health care. Health care workers need the right skills – but also the right knowledge and attitude to provide sexual and reproductive health.”

Dr Annetee Nakimuli, President ESCACOG



Dr Jane Munzo

“Who cares for the carer? As health-care providers of abortion care, we not only face threats, intimidation and violence simply for delivering our responsibility to provide essential health care required by women and girls. We also work in settings that have insufficient resources – lack of medical supplies and equipment, shortages in health care workers – specifically those willing to provide safe abortion care and SRHR services. Some of us also work in settings of humanitarian hardship due to conflict and natural disasters, this only exacerbates the stress we endure.

To prevent burn-out among abortion care providers, the ESCACOG-FIGO Community of Practice has prioritised strengthening the wellbeing of OBGYN members in each of the ten focus countries.”

Dr Jane Munzo, ESCACOG-FIGO Community of Practice member, Tanzania

“FIGO’s first-hand insights and clinical evidence have been critical for advancing the health and human rights of women and girls globally. Our Working Group has been inspired by FIGO’s dedication to addressing barriers which impede access to reproductive health care, this includes safe abortion care. FIGO has not shied away from tackling the lack of regulation of ‘conscientious objection’ among health care providers. We have relied on FIGO’s invaluable position statements and the perspectives of its members to examine the discriminatory impact of non-regulation on women and girls and to make recommendations to governments.

We stand as allies with FIGO and look forward to continuing our collaboration to ensure that women and girls across the world have the right to make their own reproductive choices, with health care providers standing by them, to achieve the highest standards of health and wellbeing as a human right.”

Melissa Upreti, Member and former Chair of the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council



Melissa Upreti (top right), with OBGYNs, on FIGO’s webinar “What is the impact of ‘Conscientious Objection’ on women/girls’ rights to access safe abortion services”



ECSACOG-FIGO COP meeting, Ethiopia, March 2023

East Central and Southern Africa national member societies of OBGYNs

- Ethiopian Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
- Kenya Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society
- Association of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Malawi
- Mozambican Association of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
- Rwanda Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
- Association of Gynecologists and Obstetricians of South Sudan
- Association of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians of Tanzania
- Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Uganda
- Zambia Association of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians
- Zimbabwe Society of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists



Dr Anne Kihara, FIGO President October 2023-October 2025, at SAGO-FIGO Community of Practice, December 2022, Mali

SAGO-FIGO Community of Practice

The SAGO-FIGO Community of Practice had its first meeting in August 2022 which began with a focus on strengthening the leadership capacity of its member societies and executive, with a training on leadership at the individual and society levels.

The Community of Practice has then gone on to focus on training OBGYN members on different aspects of advocacy for safe abortion, drawing strongly on the experiences of the five societies already involved in FIGO Advocating for Safe Abortion Project.

Current priorities include the creation and strengthening of advocacy strategies relevant to each country context that Community of Practice members can take forwards to further drive advocacy for safe abortion across the region, as well as development of further opportunities for direct peer-to-peer learning and mentoring within the region.



SAGO-FIGO Community of Practice members, December 2022, Mali

“The collaboration between FIGO and the Société Africaine de Gynécologie et (SAGO) has made it possible, in a very short time, to significantly strengthen the capacities of scientific societies in member countries in the field of leadership and the sharing of good practices. At a time when health problems require the pooling of efforts, this partnership is of paramount importance for SAGO.”

Professor Abdoulaye Sepou, Président de la SAGO



Dr Nathalie Ambounda, SAGO-FIGO Community of Practice member from Gabon (right hand side) at meeting in Mali, December 2022

“After returning from the first Community of Practice meeting in Abidjan, we organised a meeting with the Minister of Health and the Director General of Health. The aim was to discuss the advancement of safe abortion. One month later, the abortion law was revised to include the notion of distress. This law was discussed in parliament and has been disseminated in the government. So, as of now, a person who wishes to have an abortion can request this solely on the basis of distress. She can then legally be provided the health care. Policies, guidelines and information, education and communication to facilitate the safe abortion procedure are currently being developed.”

Dr Nathalie Ambounda, SAGO-FIGO Community of Practice member, Gabon

National OBGYN societies involved in the SAGO-FIGO Community of Practice

- Societé Algérienne de Gynécologie-Obstétrique
- Collège National des Gynécologues Obstétriciens du Bénin
- Société de Gynécologues et Obstétriciens du Burkina
- Association de Gynécologie Obstetrique du Burundi
- Société Gynécologues-Obstétriciens du Cameroun
- Société Centrafricaine de Gynécologie-Obstétrique
- Association Tchadienne de Gynécologie-Obstétrique
- Société Congolaise des Gynécologues Obstétriciens
- Société Congolaise de Gynécologie et d’Obstétrique
- Société Guinéenne de Gynécologie-Obstétrique
- Société Gabonaise de Gynécologie Obstétrique et de la Reproduction
- Societe de Gynecologie et d’Obstetrique de Cote d’Ivoire
- Collège Malgache des Gynécologues – Obstétriciens
- Société Malienne de Gynécologie Obstétrique
- Association Mauritanienne des Gynécologues Obstétriciens
- Société Royale Marocaine de Gynécologie Obstétrique
- Societé de Gynécologie et Obstétrique du Niger
- Société des Gynécologues-Obstétriciens du Togo
- Association Sénégalaise de Gynécologie-Obstétrique
- Société Tunisienne de Gynécologie et d’Obstétrique



Dr. Lydie Nzengomona, with fellow OBGYNs at the SAGO-FIGO Community of Practice meeting, December 2022, Mali

“I express my gratitude towards FIGO for changing my perspective on abortion. I have been able to realise the gravity of the issue through attending FIGO workshops. When I returned to Congo-Brazzaville, my colleagues and I shared the knowledge I had gained with high-profile politicians.”

Dr. Lydie Nzengomona, SAGO-FIGO Community of Practice member, Congo-Brazzaville

The Livingstone Safe Abortion Care Charter

The Livingstone Safe Abortion Care Charter, which was initially discussed by national member societies of OBGYNs from East, Central and Southern Africa (working in collaboration with FIGO to deliver FIGO's Advocating for Safe Abortion Project), has been quick to gain support and momentum from national member societies of OBGYNs from across the African continent.

2023 marks the 20th anniversary of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) supported by the African Union's campaign 'Maputo for All.' The campaign highlights women and girls' legal right to access a safe abortion, and has been discussed by African OBGYN member societies as a regional advocacy opportunity to continue to influence decision-makers and advance the commitments made under the Livingstone Charter.

The Livingstone Safe Abortion Care Charter reaffirms the commitment of African Obstetric and Gynaecological societies, to strengthen access to safe abortion care for women and girls. Each national member OBGYN society signing has committed to leverage their clinical expertise and resources to address the scale of unsafe abortion in the African region to meet the needs and entitlements of women and girls.



OBGYNs from East, Central and Southern African OBGYN societies launch the Livingstone Safe Abortion Care Charter, January 2023, Zambia



Dr Swebby Macha, President of ZAGO and ECSACOG-FIGO Community of Practice Member

“We need to keep our eyes on the ball, once we lose sight of a good cause we could end up rebounding on abortion. The Livingstone Safe Abortion Care charter will set the way forward.”

Dr Swebby Macha, President, Zambian Association of Gynaecologists & Obstetricians (ZAGO)

About FIGO

FIGO is the world's only alliance of national societies of obstetrics and gynaecology. Our mission is to improve women and girls' health and wellbeing, reduce disparities in health care and advance the practice of obstetrics and gynaecology worldwide.

As part of our work, FIGO leads on a global programme of activities with a particular focus on sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and South East Asia. Our projects support national societies to grow, strengthen and advocate to make a positive impact on the lives of women and girls. We put clinical knowledge, experience and evidence at the heart of our initiatives and we believe in the power of our diverse community to bring about real change.

FIGO projects: sexual and reproductive health

FIGO's programmatic work creates enabling environments within which health systems function and health care professionals are empowered to meet the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of women and girls. We work together with national societies of obstetrics and gynaecology and partners to influence decision-makers and accelerate uptake of evidence-based recommendations to improve the health and wellbeing of women and girls. As an international federation with a track-record of delivering results, we generate evidence and facilitate the replication of successes across the globe.

Our focus areas include:

- Family planning
- Antenatal, intrapartum and postnatal care
- Safe abortion care
- Education and empowerment on SRHR
- Addressing harmful practices that impact on women and girls' SRHR
- Prevention of cervical cancer

Resources



International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics – publishing articles on all aspects of basic and clinical research in the fields of obstetrics and gynaecology and related subjects, with emphasis on matters of worldwide interest



Statements – sharing the global voice for women's health



Events – mobilising FIGO's OBGYN power base



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