Dear Pathfinders,

I’m proud to be a Pathfinder and to stand by women around the world as a trusted partner for sexual and reproductive health and rights. From an early age, I held this topic near to my heart. I saw firsthand how reproductive health really was a matter of life or death.

I was born into the semi-nomadic communities of the Meru and Maasai in Kenya. When I was around nine years old, we lived in a village that was three hours from the nearest hospital. A dirt path leading to the hospital cut through bushy hills and past two rivers that would often swell, making it a treacherous affair to access the hospital when it rained. We welcomed exhausted pregnant women walking to the hospital to deliver and stay the night in our home when the darkness fell. On many occasions, the women would go into labor in the wee hours of the morning. I remember my mom would send us out to play soon after sunrise and the next thing you know, there's a high-pitched cry, ‘waaah!’ and mom would say, “come and say hi to the baby!”

My mother delivered many babies. She was not trained, but had children of her own. One night, this woman came very late. I expected the same routine, but instead that morning my mom instructed me to go get my uncle. She seemed extremely worried and shaken. They placed the mother in a wooden wheelbarrow and set off for the hospital with a trail of blood behind them. She was barely alive when they got to the hospital. That incident scared my mom. From then on, she insisted on escorting any woman to the hospital who stopped by no matter how late it was.

The memories of that day, still vivid to me, inspired me on my path. As I grew, I promised myself that I would go to school, and make sure I have medical devices to help my mom so she would not be scared anymore. Slowly, I came to realize that it was not only about the science and the devices. I could see the relationship between traditions and taboos related to sexual and reproductive health and their effects.

I am a social and behavioral scientist. I value research and believe in evidence-based programming. But there is a gap between interventions that research has shown to be effective and their delivery to communities and translation into practice, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. At Pathfinder, we are working to bridge that gap with projects like Beyond Bias.

Young people often face obstacles in accessing family planning services because of providers’ preconceived ideas and opinions. Beyond Bias seeks to ensure that young people have access to empathetic, non-judgmental, quality family planning services and a full range of contraceptive methods, regardless of marital status and parity.

While we are still in the early stages of the project, I am excited about it! Beyond Bias seeks to ensure that young people have access to empathetic, nonjudgmental, quality family planning services.

While we are still in the early stages of the project, I am excited about it! It combines traditional research and human-centered design to bridge the gap between evidence and the contextual realities on the ground. Beyond Bias could change provider behaviors and empower young people to make more informed decisions about their own reproductive health.

We must continue to invest in this type of programming. Pathfinder projects, like Beyond Bias, are how we will support women and young people to break through barriers and forge their own paths to a healthier future.

Sincerely,

Lydia Murithi
Beyond Bias Project Director
In the late 1980s, Rosalida had two pregnancies, one right after the other. “Like twins,” she says. The lack of spacing took an immediate toll.

Her husband, Evans, worked on a nearby island, leaving Rosalida alone with the children in their grass-thatched house. A baby in each arm, Rosalida couldn’t go to the market. She couldn’t work. She could barely leave the house.

“We had a big problem,” recalls Evans. Fearing another pregnancy would plunge the family deeper into poverty, the couple sought information about family planning. Unfortunately, the truth was hard to find.

Neighbors and members of Evans’s large traditional family threatened Rosalida—if you use family planning, you’ll face consequences. Your future children will be disabled. Your husband will take another wife, who will give him the children you won’t. To Evans, over late-night bottles of beer, neighbors ranted—Why don’t you behave like a man? Maybe it’s the wife that’s controlling you now.

Your wife will become a prostitute. Without a lot of children to take care of, she’ll have nothing to do during the day but sleep with men.

As a Pathfinder supporter, you know these kinds of baseless beliefs restrict millions of women from deciding when and whether to have children. Thankfully, Rosalida broke free from the myths. With her husband’s support, she found a doctor who could give her facts—and the contraceptive pills she wanted.

“We made the decision together,” says Rosalida. And for decades, the couple spaced their pregnancies in secret. Now, they’re telling everyone.

A Model Family Speaks Out

Rosalida and Evans are actively involved in a Pathfinder project that’s revolutionizing the ways they live, work, and transform their community.

Trained by Pathfinder, Rosalida counsels neighbors about their reproductive rights. Evans speaks to groups of local fishermen, breaking down misconceptions and urging their support for women and girls. Both share their personal story.

“We are a model household.” Evans says, “People copy us. They see we started very low, but we’re really coming up. We take our children to school. We pay school fees. We work together as a family.” He calls this “the Pathfinder way.”

“Less children means I am free to work,” says Rosalida. Rosalida farms, sells fish at the market, and shares knowledge that can save the lives of women and children. She’s become an influential leader in her church and local government.

This is the better future she wants for the next generations of Kenyans, starting with her own daughters.

“Pathfinder went to the school to teach the children,” says Rosalida. The couple’s youngest children, Alice and Mercy, were there. “They learned the benefits of family planning,” says Rosalida. “They became free.”
“What is going on with you?” Mario believed his daughter was hiding something. Marcia quickly moved about the kitchen, nervously trying to make a face. She was afraid to talk to her parents, so she had to learn at school. She belongs to the largest generation of young people, coming of age at a unique moment in her country’s history. Mozambique is home to nearly 18 million people under the age of 18. Nearly one in every two girls in Mozambique is married before her 18th birthday, before she can give meaningful consent. While her health, education, and human rights are threatened—how can she protect her future? Mozambique is at a crossroads. The time is now to invest in girls like Marcia. Together, we can reap a triple dividend of benefits— for today’s adolescents, tomorrow’s adults, and the next generation. For Marcia, and many brave girls like her, there is a clear path:

- Become an advocate
- Get trained by Pathfinder
- Counsel classmates
- Condoms to health care providers
- Hold nothing back

Marcia knows many girls don’t learn at home. “They are afraid to talk to their parents, so they have to learn at school. We have a duty to help!”

She wants to be a force for change in the world. With the support of her father—and Pathfinder partners like you—that’s exactly what Marcia has become. Her dad yelled. “Ah, Marcia!”

“Papa,” Marcia said, “I want to become an activist.”

As one of the few African nations to decriminalize abortion and homosexuality, Mozambique is on par to become a future-looking leader for the continent. Pathfinder is proud to stand with courageous local advocates and policymakers who drive progress for health and human rights in Mozambique and beyond.

And our work is not done. Millions of girls are being left behind.

“Child marriages, pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections….”

Mozambique is home to 5 million people under the age of 15. Nearly half the entire population is young, like Marcia. She belongs to the largest generation of young people, coming of age at a unique moment in our country’s history.

“Own your power. What girls can do with a little support.”

“Defending the human rights of girls”

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Will you help Marcia be a force for change in Mozambique? With your steadfast support, Mario propels his daughter down a path that will transform their country. Thank you for standing by her side.

“Watch this video to learn more about how Marcia is standing by the side of girls in Mozambique teaching them about safe sex and contraception.”

Meet Marcia, a girl who dares

“I fight, so she goes far, because I see that my daughter is standing by the side of girls in Mozambique teaching them about safe sex and contraception.”

“I know I can decide how, when, and with whom to make a family. Many people do not know what I know. It’s an honor to have this knowledge. Helping others, I feel the urge to learn more, and so the knowledge grows.”

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“One of my classmates came to talk to me in my house. She brought her pregnancy test. ‘Marcia, I am afraid,’ she said. ‘Is this test positive or negative?’ She didn’t want the result to be positive.”

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Sophie belongs to the most progressive and generous generation in history. No one told her about Pathfinder. She found us herself.

Sophie Crone is a senior at Tulane University, more driven than ever. When she's not working hard to earn her business degree, she engages coworkers, many of them conservative, in conversations about reproductive rights.

"We have seen some progress in the US, with regard to gender equality...despite these social issues improving, sexual and reproductive health rights are being threatened." Sophie believes it's important to hear new perspectives and to share her own belief that everyone is entitled to control their own body and their own life. This conviction led her to Pathfinder.

"What's happening in the world—Pathfinder’s work is very relevant."

Sophie is not your average college student. She also works for her family’s foundation, started by her grandfather to support health and medical research. One day, she will run it.

Sophie says it’s “complete luck” she was born so fortunate. And she speaks strongly about the deep sense of responsibility she feels for creating a better world.

"I see this as an opportunity to make a difference,” she pledges. Sophie describes her research to find the right organization for her foundation’s investments.

On CharityNavigator.org, the most popular resource for evaluating charities in the United States, she searched the directory—nearly 10,000 charities strong—for one that stood above the rest.

"We are so happy she found us.

Sophie chose Pathfinder because of three things: the impact of our work, the high percentage of donations that go directly to our programs, and because she knows lives are at stake.

"Here in the United States, we have to fight for better policies, but in too many countries, women don’t even have access to services, it’s not even an option,” she says.

Just 21 years old, her senior year of college ahead of her, Sophie is focused on ending preventable deaths half a world away.

"People my age, we sometimes forget that there are issues much bigger than us,” she says.

Like you, Sophie wants to be a part of something bigger, a movement to stand beside women as they find the power to improve their health and their lives. That’s what makes her a Pathfinder.
Evidence shows that if we support and empower a woman or girl to make choices that will improve her own future, she will, in turn, improve the lives of her family and community. That means we are one step closer to a better future for everyone.

But we know she cannot do it alone.

Her spouse, her parents, her relatives, her village elders, her religious leaders, and her government officials can all help.

You can, too.

Join our #ByHerSide campaign. Learn more at: pathfinder.org/ByHerSide.