**Background**

Nearly half of Mozambique’s population is under the age of 25. Young women and adolescent girls—40 percent of whom are married by age 18¹—tend to bear children early² and most do not use contraception. According to the most recent Demographic and Health Survey in Mozambique, conducted in 2011, their use of contraceptives has been very limited and has declined in recent years. Studies have shown that a lack of knowledge around the range of contraceptive methods offered, especially myths and misconceptions about particular methods, encourage young people’s aversion to contraceptives.

**mCenas! Project**

Coupled with the declining use of contraceptives in Mozambique has been a surge in the use of mobile phones, particularly among youth. Pathfinder International and Dimagi, Inc., through the mCenas! (mobile scenes) Project, capitalized on the popularity of mobile phones to implement a comprehensive text message-based program targeting youth (aged 15-24) with educational messages about sexual and reproductive health (SRH) with a focus on contraception. Although more than 20 mHealth interventions have been launched in Mozambique, mCenas! was the first to initiate an mHealth intervention in the country focused on both youth and contraception.

Young people were also linked to a youth-friendly hotline run by the Ministry of Health where they could call in and ask questions about contraception. Pathfinder International enrolled more than 2,500 young people in the project.

**E2A: Assessing the Effects of mCenas!**

E2A’s assessment of mCenas! addresses the dearth of evidence linking the use of SMS messages to improved SRH outcomes. As a project with a mandate that includes filling pervasive evidence gaps and a technical focus on family planning and reproductive health service delivery, E2A’s assessment is especially important.

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² Instituto Nacional de Estatística, INDICADORES PARA A CÚPULA MUNDIAL DA CRIANÇA MOCAMBIQUE Indicador, Demographic and Health Survey (Maputo, Mozambique, 2011).
health services for youth, E2A conducted a study to generate evidence on whether mCenas! was acceptable and had an impact on the knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy of male and female youth related to contraception in Mozambique. The study engaged 880 youth aged 18-24 from mCenas! who were with and without children.

**Methodology**

**Study Design**

Using a pretest-posttest design, the study documented the effects of using SMS by examining changes in knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy surrounding contraception between baseline and endline surveys. Each survey question was based on the mCenas! SMS messages that participants received. Participant questionnaires consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions.

In each of the two study districts, activistas (youth linked to a community-based organization) recruited youth for the intervention and study. To be eligible for the study, the participant had to: 1) be aged 18-24 years at the time of enrollment; 2) own a mobile phone; 3) have literacy skills in Portuguese; and 4) have the knowledge and ability to send and receive text messages.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected through two approaches: face-to-face interviews and SMS messages. A local research organization conducted the baseline and endline face-to-face interviews. The SMS messages were sent automatically through the SMS platform to study participants who consented to take part in the interviews. Trained interviewers conducted the baseline face-to-face interviews during enrollment events. Using standardized, pre-coded questionnaires, the interviewers gathered information that measured changes in knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy related to contraceptive use. After three months of SMS messaging from the mCenas! intervention (two months of stories, one month of informational messages), the study participants were contacted to schedule endline interviews. Endline questionnaires were administered to the same respondents who were interviewed at baseline.

In addition to the face-to-face interviews, data were also collected through mobile phones, with the use of CommConnect, a SMS software platform. At both baseline and endline, the following questions were asked of all participants through SMS: (i) Is the participant currently sexually active? (ii) Is the participant currently using contraception? (iii) Which method is the participant currently using? (iv) If the participant mentions condom, how frequently is condom used? (v) Does the participant intend to use a contraceptive method in the future (within the next 12 months)?

As a method of retention, participants had four opportunities to be entered into a lottery for airtime.

**Endline results, expected in November 2014, will assess the changes in knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy of youth related to contraception.**

**Preliminary Findings**

- **Youth enjoyed mCenas!** Several participants expressed great interest in the stories, and said that they had shared messages with friends and family.

- **Youth gained knowledge about sexual and reproductive health.** A male participant expressed how grateful he was for the information from mCenas!; he said that he learned his wife could use contraceptives while breastfeeding their new baby.

- **Youth are willing to pay for mCenas!** Many youth said they would be willing to pay (if needed) to continue receiving mCenas! messages. However, that does not necessarily mean they can afford the cost.

- **Youth want mCenas! to continue.** Several participants said they want mCenas! to continue because the information is both very helpful and important.