Introduction

- Global Gag Rule (GGR): prohibits foreign NGOs from using U.S. family planning funds to provide, refer, or advocate for abortions or abortion law liberalization
- 2017: President Trump expanded the GGR from family planning funds ($600M) to all U.S. global health assistance ($12B)
- 2021: President Biden revoked the GGR and committed "to support women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights in the U.S. as well as globally"

Objective

To analyze how the expanded GGR impacted Malawi's SRHR landscape, when it was in effect and since its revocation.

Malawi’s SRH Budget

- 70% U.S.
- 30% Other Funders

Results

- The GGR stalled the passage of a more progressive abortion law, which would have legalized abortion in cases of rape, incest, child rape, and fetal malformation
  - "When President Trump came into power, the [Malawi] government stopped championing the enactment of said Bill... we couldn’t make any breakthrough. Following the revocation of the GGR, there is now great momentum on the need to enact that law."
- The GGR reinforced socially conservative and stigmatizing attitudes towards abortion in Malawi
  - "...the GGR cemented the resistance that was already there and authenticated the thinking of many using it to say, ‘You see, the United States of America does not want this. It means that these things that you are introducing are wrong for this society.’ And the situation has not stabilized until today, because though America has removed [the GGR]... people are saying, ‘Why did they allow this?’ So, though in [the U.S.], it is not an issue anymore, here it remains an issue."
- The U.S. weakens Malawi’s national sovereignty by holding economic and social power over Malawi and repeatedly imposing the GGR
  - "The U.S. is a big donor to our country, therefore if it had a very strong policy on promotion of abortion and other stuff, I think it would really also speak volumes in terms of policy direction in Malawi. But unfortunately, with that lacking... [The GGR] impacted hugely on us in terms of policy direction."
  - "Malawi receives a good chunk of its funding from the U.S. government. The whole reason Parliament was reluctant to [fast-track] the [Termination of Pregnancy Bill] was because... it would have angered the American government. They were afraid of the freezing of support and aid. So, [the GGR] entirely had a huge impact on the lawmaking process in Malawi."
  - "Because we depend on aid, we are completely captured, hence at times we have no voice. We are considered as beggars, so [the U.S.] can impose anything... When they do meetings in U.N. they call every country a sovereign state, but when it comes to issues like these ones, when they want to penalize you, they will use aid... to cripple the social protection systems of the country."

Methods

- 17 virtual in-depth interviews:
  - Current and past recipients of U.S. global health assistance
  - Civil society organizations with expertise in SRHR
  - Purposive and snowball sampling
  - Fòs Feminista’s prior contacts
  - ForeignAssistance.gov
  - Interviewees’ suggestions

- Thematic analysis in MAXQDA

Implications

- U.S. damages Malawi’s national sovereignty by enforcing the GGR
- Impacts endure after revocation
- Recommend permanent repeal by Congress (Global HER Act)
- Future research in other countries reliant on U.S. foreign assistance

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