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Identifying Challenges and Taking Action – The Phil Harvey Innovation Award Winners



By: [Michelle Schaner](#), DKT International

When Innocent Grant was just 18 years old, he started school to become a doctor. As part of his education, he was sent to his home region in Southern Tanzania to do fieldwork in rural clinics. It was in these remote, under-resourced clinics that Grant says he first became aware of the perils women face in seeking access to safe abortion.

“I had a patient lose their life,” Grant said. “It gave me so many sad moments. Access to safe abortion is a right - it’s a human right to be promoted. Many women go through silent infections and we only detect things later ...if we deny women access to safe abortion we are putting them in a position where they access unsafe abortions and it will never end,” he said.

It is not uncommon for a young doctor like Innocent to witness suffering as part of his medical training, but what makes Grant unique is that he took action.

After graduation, he sought out an organization called [Young and Alive](#) in Tanzania - a youth-led organization working to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights in Tanzania. He now serves as the head of programs at Young and Alive and started [Contraceptive Conversations](#) - a Facebook page and digital forum that integrates pleasure-based, sex-positive discussions and conversations for Tanzanian youth.

“Whenever you integrate sex-positive discussions, (young people) start sharing their stories and sharing their ideas,” he said. “We realized there is a big value in promoting sex-positive conversations.”

Grant is one of three winners of the \$10,000 Phil Harvey Innovation Award at this year’s International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP). Phil Harvey passed away this past year at the age of 83. Harvey was a serial entrepreneur who founded three of the world’s most impactful sexual and reproductive healthcare organizations: PSI, MSI and DKT International. The three winners for this year’s inaugural award were chosen because they embody Harvey’s legacy of entrepreneurialism and impact. Grant, along with his fellow winners, [Laura Ramos Tomás](#) and [Tushar Singh Bodwal](#), will use the \$10,000 award to further develop their projects in their respective countries, Brazil and India, receiving technical support for two years as they complete their projects.

The ideas that sparked these award-winning projects are technology-based, they share a desire to unleash conversations around sex and sexuality, and were seeded by those who developed them years before they began. This was how [Ana Autoestima](#) (Ana Self-Esteem), a virtual, pleasure-focused, sexuality education messaging service came to life in Brazil. Ana, a virtual character, is the brain-child of Laura Ramos Tomás, founder of the sexuality education non-profit organization [Tabu Tabu](#).

Tomas founded Tabu Tabu in 2020 after years of working and volunteering in SRHR organizations in Central and South America. Ana’s existence, she said, was a process of co-creation with fifteen local women in Rio’s favelas, (shanty towns) communities in the northern periphery of Rio de Janeiro where Tomás has worked for the past three years. Ana is a friend, Tomas said, that women can contact to join a WhatsApp group where they can share information about sex and sexuality that is developed with a great deal of intention to be shame, stigma and taboo-free, and safe.

The adult women Tomás works with are part of conversation circles she began in the favelas, which provide a space to talk about the women’s sex lives in a new way, focusing on their pleasure, their choices, their needs..

“(The conversations) are pleasure-based and puts them first – puts their needs first,” she said. “It’s about what it means to be a woman and be a sexual being and it speaks to them so much more than leading with ‘you don’t want to get pregnant’.”

In India, Tushar Singh Bodwal began his career working as a district officer with the Indian government and, like Innocent Grant in Tanzania, was sent to a rural village in Punjab where he worked on projects related to education. He was tasked with developing health education campaigns for both men and women about menstrual hygiene. It was through this experience, he said, that he became sensitized to the stigma women face related to their bodies.

“When you increase conversations around (menstrual hygiene) and encourage them to have this conversation with their mothers, this becomes a new norm. Male members become sensitized...it was a beautiful step towards sensitizing communities as a whole and building an empathetic lens,” he said.

After two years working with the government, Bodwal went to work for [The Good Business Lab](#), a non-profit labor organization that uses rigorous research methods to find common ground between worker wellbeing and business interests. It was through his work at The Good Business Lab that Bodwal became interested in gig-economy workers and formulated an idea - Why not partner with companies to provide gig-economy workers, many of whom are women, with an onboarding platform where they access information about their health and wellness?

Bodwal will work with two gig-platform owners, Urban Company and Awign, to start an awareness-building project, accessible through the companies’ apps, to create onboarding training materials for these gig-economy platforms on issues such as sexual harassment, sexuality, and contraception.

“We want to identify potential areas where women would drop out,” Bodwal said. “Are there more complaints being filed? ... There is no training on prevention of sexual harassment, no training on gender sensitization, no intent to increase participation for women or others, so we are designing a unique SHR program that empowers women gig workers and want to know whether it helps increase their retention and care in the industry.”

The money awarded through the Phil Harvey Innovation Award will also fund an evaluation examining how The Good Business Lab’s program with gig economy workers affects SRHR-related knowledge, attitudes, behavior, and overall well-being.

The three winners of the Phil Harvey Innovation Award have worked to identify SRHR challenges in their communities and are taking action to build sustainable solutions. It was Phil Harvey's dream to help every person access quality, affordable family planning services and sexual health information and it is young entrepreneurs like Grant, Tomás, and Bodwal that help make this dream a reality.

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