



FELLOWSHIP SUMMARY REPORT

MARCH 2015 TO MARCH 2016

ADVOCACY FOR MORE HIV PREVENTION OPTIONS FOR YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS

REPORT SUBMITTED TO:

AVAC TEAM

ON

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FELLOWS NAME: MAUREEN LUBA
HOST SUPERVISOR: DR ELARD ALULMANDO
HOST ORGANISATION: DREAM PROGRAM
HOST COUNTRY: MALAWI

INTRODUCTION

It has increasingly been recognized in Malawi that irrespective of the massive programmes being implemented by Government and major stakeholders designed to achieve an HIV free generation, there are still a number of outstanding challenges that ought to be addressed in order to achieve.

The process of creating an HIV free generation, due to its complex and competitive nature and insatiable demands for resource , invariably excludes a certain sector of the population (young women and girls) from taking full advantage and benefits of those existing efforts. This category of people is vulnerable to risk and typically lack appropriate prevention options that empowers them to take control over their sexual health.

There is therefore need for deliberate efforts targeting this particular group of people in order achieve the intended goals set forth in the National HIV Strategic Plan.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Young women and girls are continuously being subjected to prevalent social, legal and economic disadvantages which puts them at risk of contracting HIV. This is besides their other biologic vulnerabilities to HIV. In Malawi, just like in many African countries, Women and girls are often times exposed to Gender based violence and inequalities which include vulnerability to rape, sex with older men, unequal access to education and economic opportunities. Women lack control over their sexual and reproductive health and are usually not able to negotiate for safe sex. Worst still unlike men women have got limited HIV prevention options available for them. Because of these various vulnerabilities unlike men, women are more likely to acquire HIV at an earlier age and this has resulted in high prevalence and incidence rate among women as compared to that of men. On the other hand, in Malawi there is no legal framework for HIV programming for minority groups like sex workers. As a result sex workers have got very limited access to HIV prevention interventions. In light of the above challenges the fellowship project therefore aimed at addressing the challenges by influencing policy makers to explore new HIV prevention options for women and include them in the existing policies and programming.

The project therefore aimed at achieving the following outcomes;

- Incorporation of new HIV prevention strategies like PrEP and microbicides (depending on the results of the ASPIRE trial) into the current existing policies and guidelines
- Enhancing the capacity of the civil society to advocate for new HIV prevention options for young women and sex workers

- Increased awareness among policy makers, development partners and the civil society on the different Biomedical HIV prevention options such as Microbicides and PrEP
- Developing a draft plan on what will happen once the ASPIRE trial results are out

GAOLS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the project was to increase access to HIV prevention options for young women and girls.

In order to achieve the above stated goal the following objectives were developed;

- ✚ Influence policy makers to Integrate new HIV prevention options like microbicides and PrEP into the existing policies and guidelines on HIV prevention by December 2015
- ✚ Facilitate the development of a response plan for the ASPIRE trial results by the policy makers and other relevant stakeholder by January 2016
- ✚ Enhance the capacity of the civil society and the media to advocate for new HIV prevention options by mid June 2015

ACTIVITES IMPLEMENTED

There were a number of activities that were implemented in order to achieve the above goal and objectives and these were as follows;

- I conducted 2 workshops with the civil society representatives from different Organizations working on HIV issues in Malawi. The workshops were conducted in collaboration with SAT Malawi, John Hopkins and the UNC project. The workshops were aimed at updating CSOs on the ASPIRE trial which was being conducted in 4 countries including Malawi.
- I also conducted workshops with ward councilors and the media from Lilongwe and Blantyre to inform them about the ASPIRE trial as well as the results of the trail.
- I also did 3 radio programs in collaboration with Journaids and UNC project. The programs aimed at creating awareness of the ASPIRE trial for the general public. During the program listeners were given a chance to ask questions about the trial and these were addressed accordingly
- I was also actively involved in the Global fund and PEPFAR COP development processes. My participation in all these processes aimed at making sure HIV prevention for young women and girls was given a priority
- I also conducted community dialogue sessions with sex workers, women and young girls. The dialogue sessions were aimed at achieving 2 things 1) creating awareness of the ASPIRE trial 2) generation information on HIV prevention issues affecting young

women and girls which was later used to develop HIV prevention advocacy messages for young women and girls.

ACHIEVEMENTS MADE SO FAR

Whereas the above interventions were independent, they were all mutually reinforcing thereby contributing to the overall goal of the project which was increasing access to HIV prevention options for young women and girls. Through the above interventions I managed to achieve the following results

- Increased the awareness of the ASPIRE trial as well as the results among different stakeholders like Civil Society Organizations, the media, policy makers, young women and girls and key populations like the sex workers
- Increased interaction between Clinical researchers and stakeholders like Civil Society organizations, women and key populations, the media and policy makers.
- For the first time through the project I also managed to engage ward councilors on Biomedical HIV prevention issues which was not done previously by any other stakeholder.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The plan is to continue with the advocacy work around HIV prevention for women. Using the connections made over the fellowship period with different forums both locally and internationally I will use my presence in those forums to continue advocating for HIV prevention options for young women and girls. Currently am also in the process of mobilizing a group of young women to form a forum where they can discuss prevention issues affecting their live. The aim is to empower them to be able to demand prevention services that best suits their needs.

CHALLENGES

Just like in any other project, challenges are always inevitable when it comes to implementation. During implementation of the project, there were a number of challenges that were faced as follows;

- ❖ Lack of understanding of the project by some members of staff within my host organization
- ❖ Push back from some targeted stakeholders
- ❖ Limited time to implement some activities
- ❖ Resistance by government towards some HIV prevention interventions like PrEP

LESSONS LEARNT

The following lessons were learnt during implementation of the project;

- Full Involvement of intended beneficiaries is key to the success of any advocacy initiative
- Advocacy is more efficient if supported by evidence/number
- Knowing your allies is key when planning your advocacy initiative
- Any advocacy initiative can be subjected to push back/ back lash by targeted stakeholders, but this should never be a hindering factor, persistence pays

RECOMMENDATIONS

For others who are doing or planning to do similar work, I would recommend the following

- First of all you need to develop passion for the work that you are planning to do and it is the passion that will drive your work.
- Know your allies, who is on your side and who is not
- Stay focused on your goals
- If you planning to involve the media make sure they are involved from the on-set of your project and not towards the end.

MATERIAL DEVELOPED/CREATED

During implementation of the project I created the following materials

- ❖ Policy brief
- ❖ Op-ed on VMMC
- ❖ Documentary of the project
- ❖ Radio programs on ASPIRE

(I will forward the final version in due course)