

CASE STUDY

Media advocacy for microbicides in Malawi; drawing on lessons

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BACKGROUND

- ❑ Journalists Association Against AIDS (JournAIDS) is an advocacy and communication organization from Malawi.
 - ❑ JournAIDS in 2014 signed an agreement with the International Partnership on Microbicides (IPM) to embark on a project to raise awareness in the general public on microbicides.
 - ❑ The work of JournAIDS is built upon its work on HIV prevention.
 - ❑ Microbicides are an important technology which JournAIDS advocates and aligns with its strategic plan.
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THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

- ❑ The work on promoting microbicides fits directly with the 2015-2020 National HIV Prevention Strategy and 2015-2020 National HIV Strategic Plan.
 - ❑ The work also contributes to the 2011-2016 Health Sector Strategic Plan.
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MALAWI'S MEDIA LANDSCAPE

- ✘ Since 1994, when Malawi attained democratic rule, a boom in number of media houses has occurred.
- ✘ There are 34 radio stations, 7 TV stations and 20 print houses.
- ✘ There are two daily tabloids, Daily Times and The Nation.

CONSTRAINTS IN THE MEDIA

- ✘ Most media houses face financial constraints which tend to affect media coverage on health issues.
- ✘ Most stories in Malawian media are event driven, the investigative stories are not common due to financial constraints.
- ✘ Editors are not well engaged on capacity building, hence this also affects coverage.
- ✘ Malawian media has not embraced science reporting, some CSOs such as Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Trust have started advocating for science journalism.

INTERVENTIONS UNDERTAKEN

- ❑ JournAIDS organized and aired a series of radio programs.
- ❑ Conducted media training workshop
- ❑ A policy brief was produced
- ❑ Held round table discussions

THE CASE

- ❖ During implementation, a news story was published on an online publication *Maravi Post*, the news article carried a lot of misrepresentation of facts. The article was first tracked on line by IPM staff and reported it to JournAIDS. Efforts were made by JournAIDS and rewrote the whole news story.
- ❖ However it was problematic to reach the editor as he was not responsive to demands to retract the story and republish the edited version. The writer of the story admitted that the story was rushed.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT

- ❑ It is important to invest in capacity building of the media in any given context to improve communication on microbicides and related MPTs.
- ❑ There is a need to ensure that CSOs are engaged widely, including researchers, scientists, academia and media to promote public policy and awareness on microbicides.
- ❑ In Malawi the knowledge gap on microbicides is very wide such that CSOs, media and public domain are not conversant except for research institutions on MPTs such as microbicides

KEY LESSONS LEARNT

- ❑ Interest is growing among CSOs, media and other relevant stakeholders on microbicides, however due to limited capacity and scientific knowledge it is taking a long time to create better understanding.
 - ❑ Stakeholders can be well engaged if information resources are made available on their fingertips such as creating a national website to act as an information hub on MPTs such as microbicides.
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CONCLUSION

- ❑ Investing in MPTs such as microbicides to a country like Malawi should be an urgent priority in HIV prevention.
- ❑ All relevant stakeholders in the national HIV response should collaborate to promote microbicides and ensure that communities are also well targeted to dispel fears, myths and misconceptions on microbicides and any related trials to make the work effective.