

# AN OVERVIEW OF MSM PROGRAMS IN MALAWI

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CENTRE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLE

*PROMOTING DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATION*

# BACKGROUND ON MSM ISSUES IN MALAWI

- The Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP) is a human rights organisation established to address the needs and challenges of minority groups, such as gays, bisexuals, and men who have sex with men (MSM) in Malawi.
- Malawi has a generalized HIV epidemic with an estimated population prevalence of 12%.
- CEDEP, in collaboration with the Open Society Institute and the Sexual Health and Rights Project, USA, Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, USA, Center for Public Health and Human Rights, USA and Open Society Institute of Southern Africa (OSISA), RSA, recently conducted a study of 201 men who have sex with men (MSM) to evaluate the HIV risk status of MSM in Malawi.

# MSM BACKGROUND

- The study suggested that MSM are also at risk for HIV infection, and that these epidemics may be propagated by a lack of targeted prevention programming and social marginalization. Results analysis revealed an HIV prevalence of 21.4 % (43/201), with 95.3% unaware of their HIV status (41/43).
- Despite this revelation of high HIV prevalence among MSM there is no national HIV and AIDS programming targeting them either by the government or any other key stake holder.

# MSM Background information

- Though MSM are included in the Malawi's National HIV and AIDS policy as one of the vulnerable groups to be targeted with HIV and AIDS related programs, the 2005-2009 Malawi National HIV and AIDS Action Framework (NAF) does not specifically mention MSM.
- CEDEP programs are implemented from this background and is the only organisation providing GBT programs in Malawi

# CEDEP Programs

- Sexual health program
  - The program aims at ensuring that the MSM community is provided with relevant health information and have access to appropriate barrier methods
    - The program involves men's sexual health workshops
    - Peer education
    - Barrier method (distribution of condoms and lubricants)

# CEDEP Programs conti....

- Resource centre
- CEDEP has a resource centre within its office premises to enable its members to access literature on human rights, sexual health and social welfare.
- Bring to life
- The aim of the program is to provide safe space for GBT community to meet and discuss issues affecting their lives. The programme involves watching movies followed by discussion of thematic areas, discussions arising from topical issues, games men's netball team and social events.

# CEDEP Programs conti...

## ■ Research

- Research is one of the core programme areas of CEDEP. It forms the basis for CEDEP's advocacy programme.
- Evaluation of the HIV Prevalence, Determinants of HIV Infection, and Human Rights Contexts of men who have sex with men (MSM) in Malawi .
- Knowledge, attitude and Practices of LGBT community in Malawi,

# CEDEP programs conti...

## ■ **Advocacy**

- CEDEP advocacy program involved research dissemination, targeted meetings, media sensitization, networking, and production and distribution of IEC materials.
- The programme's aim is to lobby and advocate for the inclusion of LGBT people in the Malawi's national HIV prevention plan, advocate for effective health policies and funding LGBT HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services, challenge stigma and discrimination against LGBT people and advocate for policy reforms to promote their human rights and access to health services.

# Achievements

- 250 MSM and Gay people has been sensitized on HIV/AIDS and STIs since last year.
- 20 peer educators have been trained
- MSM people are able to access free lubrication for the first time in History.
- Visibility of GBT people through social activities. Members are able to visit CEDEP office and attend program activities freely without any fear.
- Safe space created where MSM community are able to meet and discuss issues affecting their lives.

# Achievements conti..

- Data on HIV prevalence, determinants of HIV infection, and Human Rights Contexts of men who have sex with men (MSM) available for Malawi.
- Dissemination of the MSM HIV prevalence study at national and international conferences.
- Publication of the research findings with reputable international online journal.

# Challenges

- The sexual health program is expensive to run and do not reach MSM at national level due to lack of funding.
- There is a need to scale up the health workshops in order to reach more gay men.
- Lubrication is very hard to acquire in large amount and we have to get it from South Africa which is also proving to be expensive.
- *Knowledge gap*
  - Many MSMs are ignorant of their risk to HIV transmission because there has been no national HIV/AIDS programmes targeting MSM.
- *Legal*
  - Criminalization of homosexuality under the penal code (max. sentence of 14 years IHL). This prevent some LGBT individuals to participate in the activities.
- *Lack of MSM-friendly health services*
  - Public health service providers are not yet sensitized on specific health needs of GBT community.

THANK YOU