



Enhancing policy advocacy for STIs

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Background

- ❑ Journalists Association Against AIDS (JournAIDS) is a local media advocacy NGO working in reproductive health, HIV, Universal Health Coverage, climate and sustainable development, Covid-19 and pandemic prevention and preparedness
- ❑ The STI landscape analysis was conducted in Malawi at national level with a focus on policy framework scoping

Background...Cont'd

- ❑ JournAIDS secured a small grant from AVAC through its new STI program in August, 2023 to have a deeper understanding on the STI landscape in Malawi
- ❑ The analysis used a thorough desk review of policies, plans and guidelines and the Health Sector Strategic Plan (2022-2030), WHO Global Strategy on STIs and other sexual reproductive health policies
- ❑ This works aligns with JournAIDS 2022-2025 strategic plan

Goal

- ❑ Contribute towards enhancing use of evidence to inform policy making in the prevention of STIs and accelerate diagnostic research and development in relation to vaccines and other emerging new technologies.

Methods

- ❑ The landscape analysis basically used secondary data analysis
- ❑ A thorough policy landscape analysis on Malawi's major SRHR and HIV policies (Health Sector Strategic Plan 2022-2030, National SRHR Policy 2017-2022, HIV Strategic Plan 2020-2025, STI Management Guidelines, 2017, National Hepatitis Guidelines, June, 2023)
- ❑ Key informant interviews (KIIs)

The topline results

- ❑ Much effort has been concentrated into the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, neglecting other STI's that also facilitate transmission of the former.

Challenges in STI prevention include;

- Poor quality STI services
- STI treatment coverage at 41%
- Low HIV testing rates in STI clinics (49%)
- Significant number of STI patients access private sector facilities
- Adherence to national treatment guidelines questionable
- No reporting to national program (MOH, 2014)

The topline results.....Cont'd

- ❑ The 2015/16 MPHIA shows significant under diagnosis of STIs in Malawi: among HIV-positive males aged 15-64 years, 16% reported to have had a genital ulcer, 5% have had abnormal discharge from the penis, but only 6% had been diagnosed with an STI in the 12 months preceding the survey.
- ❑ Among HIV-positive females aged 15-64 years, 12% reported to have had a genital ulcer, 11% to have had abnormal discharge from the vagina, but only 7% had been diagnosed with an STI in the 12 months preceding the survey.
- ❑ The YFHS evaluation report (2014), found that young people's access to SRH services is enhanced by proximity and awareness

The topline results....Cont'd

- ❑ Program data has shown an increasing demand for STI services.
- ❑ In 2018 the recorded cases of STIs were 395,583, from 267,862 in 2016, an increase of 48%.
- ❑ The rate of HIV status ascertainment among STI clients increased from 69% in 2016 to approximately 87% in 2018, representing an 18% increase and nearly meeting the 90% target.
- ❑ HIV yield among STI clients halved between 2016 (6%) and 2018 (3%). Coverage of syphilis screening among antenatal women increased from 2016 (75%) to 2017 (84%), followed by a minimal decrease in 2018 (82%).

The key highlight

- ❑ STI programming was integrated neither into these HIV services nor into “its logical programmatic base[s] in sexual and reproductive health and rights.” Separate “vertical” health programs have resulted in lost opportunities for offering clients multiple services at a single visit.
- ❑ STI programs were not given high priority, and efforts to prevent HIV transmission were “largely managed through programs that [were] funded, implemented and evaluated independently of other STI control efforts.

The topline results....Cont'd

- ❑ The landscape analysis scanned for specific STI policies and found only one 2017 STI management guidelines that guide health workers to treat STIs
- ❑ There was no specific STI policy apart from the guidelines which have not been reviewed for 6 years
- ❑ The 2017-2022 sexual reproductive health policy mentions STIs with very scanty information and there is no inclusion of HPV, HSV, it mentions nothing about diagnostics
- ❑ There are new Hepatitis B and C management guidelines (June,2023)

The topline results....Cont'd

- ❑ The analysis found that people have to travel long distances in order to access services.
- ❑ There is dissatisfaction with the absence of SRH services offered closer to people.
- ❑ Access to various services is through the public, Banja La Mtsogolo (Marie Stopes), or private health facilities located on average within a distance of 1.5 to 5 kilometres.
- ❑ The health services sought include general medical conditions, STI and HIV testing and counselling, antiretroviral drugs (ARVs), cervical cancer screening, family planning, antenatal and postnatal care, and post-abortion care and referrals.

The topline results.....Cont'd

- ❑ The majority of STIs have no symptoms or have only mild symptoms. Data from Malawi shows that algorithms for the diagnosis and treatment can be effective. Urethral discharge and genital ulcer disease in men had cure rates of 87% - 99% and 68% - 98% respectively.
- ❑ Young people don't prefer public facilities (Health Centers) for STI services as they are very slow and they wait too long in queues.
- ❑ Banja La Mtsogolo (BLM) and the Family Planning Association of Malawi (FPAM) were better options owing to their confidentiality and youth-friendly service provision.

Conclusion

- ❑ Ending sexually transmitted infection epidemics in Malawi as public health concerns by 2030 will require a massive reduction in new infections, supported by efforts to vastly scale up primary prevention and increase access to screening for sexually transmitted infections, increase awareness of the public health impact of sexually transmitted infections, and secure adequate funding
- ❑ For now, more research and development is critical in tackling STIs in Malawi and develop new STI specific policies effectively implemented

Conclusion

- ❑ Malawi has been using a syndromic approach for STIs, while modern and accurate diagnostics that diagnose all STIs under one roof are not feasible in the country due limited resources
- ❑ If the country is to re-energize STIs work, there is a need of an investment case to bolster investments for STIs (Human resources for health, financing, diagnostics, vaccines, research and development, public awareness and policy coherence)
- ❑ STIs need more attention of policy and decision makers

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**Thank you
Zikomo!**