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Evaluation of the “One Community” program in Malawi

Project SOAR

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Evaluation of the “One Community” Program in Malawi

The Government of Malawi has set as priorities the identification of undiagnosed cases of HIV, the expansion of access to HIV care and treatment, and the achievement of high levels of adherence to antiretroviral treatment (ART), particularly among at-risk populations. “One Community” is the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID’s) flagship community-based response to Malawi’s HIV epidemic. The primary objective of One Community is to support the government’s efforts to reduce new infections and to mitigate the impact of HIV among orphans and vulnerable children, out-of-school adolescent girls and young women, and other at-risk populations in eight districts in the southern region of Malawi—a region where HIV testing rates are low (44 percent) and HIV prevalence is the highest in the country (12.8 percent).

Project SOAR is conducting a rigorous evaluation of One Community in five of the eight program districts. The results from this evaluation will be used to inform Malawi’s support strategies for

Research Partners: Population Council and University of Malawi College of Medicine

Location: Blantyre, Chikwawa, Mangochi, Mulanje, and Phalombe districts

Study Duration: 2017–2019

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Evaluation results will be used to inform the Malawian government’s and PEPFAR’s program and policy agendas for HIV prevention, care, and treatment.

at-risk populations, improve the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) Malawi programming, and inform the national Malawian and global PEPFAR policy agendas for HIV prevention, care, and treatment. These findings will be particularly relevant given that Malawi has a generalized HIV epidemic and that One Community targets high-risk populations and areas.

Our Research

Project SOAR is using a cluster stepped-wedge randomized design to evaluate One Community. In this design, clusters are randomized to when they initiate the intervention, rather than being randomized to the program or no program (controls). Repeated cross-sectional surveys are being conducted at different points of program scale-up. The study is designed to measure the change in key outcomes for each targeted population over-time, which may be attributable

One Community

One Community is a five year initiative (2015–2020) implemented by John’s Hopkins University Center for Communications Program (JHU-CCP), with Plan International and Project HOPE. It has three interwoven intermediate results: 1) increased utilization of HIV prevention, care, and treatment services, and improved linkages to services at the community level; 2) adoption of HIV-risk reduction behaviors; and 3) increased capacity of community-level organizations and service delivery partners to implement high quality HIV prevention, care, and treatment services.

to One Community. Qualitative research is also being conducted to provide a more nuanced understanding of the impact of One Community on targeted populations and to understand how program participants perceive the program.

We are aiming to recruit a total sample of 2,070 participants to be interviewed at each cross-sectional survey round. The at-risk populations that are the focus of the evaluation include:

- Orphans and vulnerable children aged 0–17 years and their caregivers.
- Out-of-school adolescent girls and young women aged 15–24 years.
- Other vulnerable populations such as those involved in the fishing sector, estate workers and market vendors.

The primary outcome domains of the evaluation are:

- Use of HIV prevention, health, and other social services.
- Adoption of key HIV risk reduction sexual behaviors.
- Indicators of health and well-being.
- Support for positive gender norms.

Research Utilization

The key audiences for this study are government decision-makers, HIV service and program providers, donors, and the communities themselves. We will promote research utilization through active outreach to these groups at the start of the study, and periodically throughout. An advisory group of relevant stakeholders has been formed. We will hold data interpretation workshops to discuss and interpret study findings, and disseminate final results locally and internationally. A local dissemination event led by the University of Malawi, College of Medicine will be held at the end of the study to discuss results and their implications for programs, policies, and future research. Further, as information from the cross-sectional surveys is collected, feedback will be provided to JHU-CCP and USAID regarding the reach of One Community and whether the program is influencing use of services, attitudes, and behaviors among the targeted populations.