



BLANTYRE PREVENTION STRATEGY (BPS): ENGAGING CITY COUNCILLORS TO ADDRESS SOCIAL AND STRUCTURAL DRIVERS OF HIV IN BLANTYRE CITY



BILL & MELINDA GATES foundation



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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

- Blantyre City records the highest number of people living with HIV in Malawi (NAC 2021).
- Despite the Government of Malawi's many innovative attempts to introduce new preventive interventions, Blantyre faces persistent new infection rates and high HIV prevalence
- Rural-urban migration, poverty, under-employment, and under-regulated industries such as bars are some of the major structural drivers for HIV transmission (Nutor et al., 2020; Muula, 2005)
- Elected city councillors can provide oversight of HIV programmes in their wards and can attempt to address the structural drivers of HIV. However, they are not optimally utilized.

Project aims:

- To identify opportunities and gaps for engaging elected councillors to address social and structural drivers of HIV in Blantyre City.
- To design and launch a Structural Risk Reduction Group (SRRG) comprised of elected councillors aimed to address the social and structural drivers of HIV in Blantyre City.

FINDINGS

Theme 1: Knowledge about HIV epidemic

- Elected councillors lacked comprehensive knowledge regarding HIV, including HIV prevalence in Blantyre.
- Participants reported low HIV sensitization in their communities.

"I can't say that I have enough information on HIV/AIDS, all I know is that things are not good." (Councillor 8)

"If you drive from Blantyre to Lilongwe, you will not see a billboard about HIV messaging or sensitization." (Councillor 4)

Theme 2: Councillor's current roles and involvement in HIV projects

- Councillors represent people in council matters
- Councillors initiate development projects in their wards
- They mobilize human and financial resources for development
- Involved in awareness creation & campaign in communities

"I am a community leader as my job description says, I am also a community mobiliser. My duty is to coordinate development projects in my Ward." (Councillor 2)

"If a message is taken to the community through us, it spreads faster because we already have ways of disseminating it." (Councillor 6)

Despite their important roles in developmental projects in their wards, councillors reported that they are hardly involved in health-related projects including HIV programmes.

Theme 3: Key social and structural drivers of HIV in Blantyre City

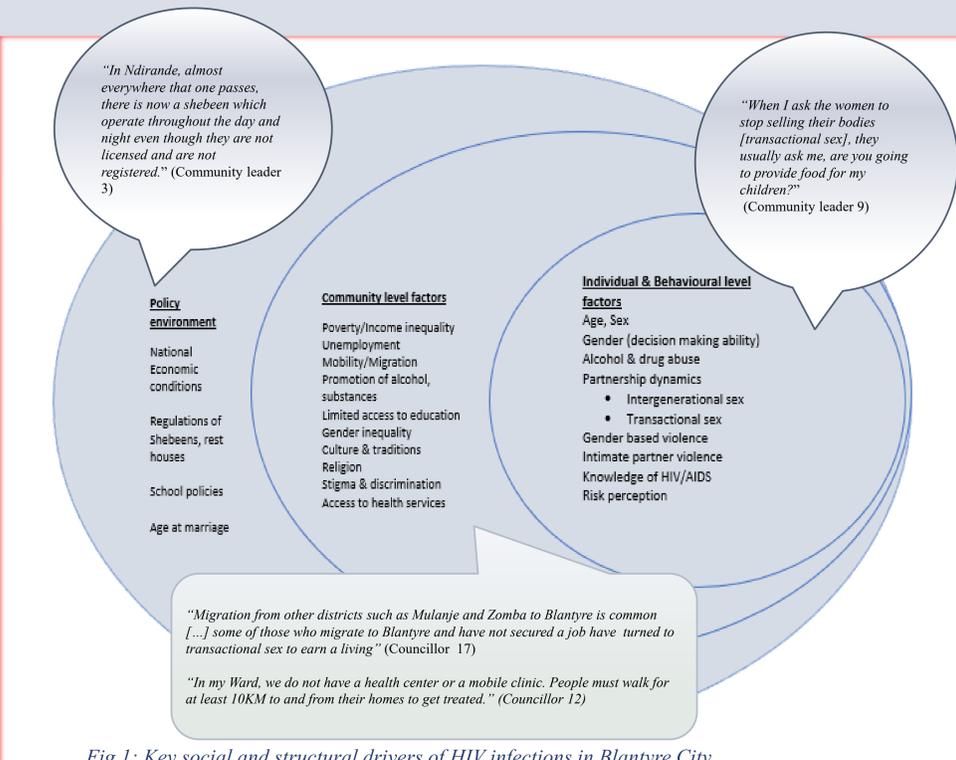


Fig 1: Key social and structural drivers of HIV infections in Blantyre City

METHODS

- Design & Setting:** A descriptive qualitative study conducted in Blantyre City, Malawi.
- Participants:** 59 purposively sampled participants (of which 23 were elected councillors from Blantyre City).
- Data were** collected between November and December 2021 & analyzed thematically



Fig. 2: Design and Launch of Structural Risk Reduction Group Comprised of Blantyre City Councillors

Theme 4: Opportunities for addressing HIV epidemic in Blantyre City

- Councillors have the potential to utilize community resources – dance groups, football and netball clubs, other non-health related projects e.g., infrastructure, to disseminate HIV preventive messaging
- Councillors can mobilize community resources to address structural drivers of HIV.
- Councillors can collaborate with other existing NGOs, CBOs and local structures to: **Identify** at risk populations, **create demand** for HIV services, **link** these populations to care and ensure **sustainability** of HIV preventive strategies.

CONCLUSIONS

- Blantyre City councillors are largely unfamiliar with the extent of the HIV epidemic in Blantyre.
- Despite this, councillors can easily identify structural drivers that are likely contributing to high HIV transmission rates in Blantyre.
- Stakeholders working on HIV/AIDS programming in Blantyre should invest more on capacity building councillors through trainings & provision of HIV/AIDS information to enable them initiate HIV risk reduction changes in their communities.

NEXT PLANS

- Design and launch of Structural Risk Reduction Group (see Fig 1) that will enable councillors to have discussions, enhance learnings about HIV prevention efforts
- Train councillors on HIV and AIDS epidemic in Blantyre, and build their capacity to identify and think innovatively about how to address structural drivers of HIV in their Wards
- Provide councillors with access to HIV information – e.g., through the prevention adaptive learning and management system (PALMS), a dashboard developed under BPS which brings together historically disconnected data sources, in a format tailored to give councillors ward-specific data.

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