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15th June, 2006

#### 55 YEAR OLD MAN COMMENDS DOOR TO DOOR VCT:

The 55 year old man from Dyedyeleke Village in Traditional Authority Kaunda in Mchinji district has commended the Malawi Diffusion and Ideation Change Project (MDICP) for providing door to door Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) services to the people in the area.

He made the commendation during counselling session held under the mango tree 100 meters away from his dilapidated grass thatched house.

The counselling session commenced at 10:30 in the morning 40 minutes after a group of professional VCT counsellors recruited by MDICP arrived in the village by the 22 seater HIACE Minibus.

The client, name withheld for confidentiality sake is black in complexion, approximately 5 feet tall and is married with children and grand children. He has long uncombed hair, red eyes, has a beard and enjoys smoking tobacco and drinking local brewed beer during his leisure time. "I smoke 12 cigarettes per day", he said.

He told this counsellor that doctors advised him to stop smoking 10 years ago but he is failing to stop. "As a result, I end up coughing especially at night," he said. The client showed me black spots in his hands which he said have come as a result of smoking chingambwe frequently.

Commenting on the door to door VCT Services, he said the idea has come at the appropriate time saying people have now realized the importance of testing blood for HIV for them to know about their HIV serostatus.

"We shun VCT services at the hospital because we are not assured about confidentiality of the HIV test results," said he, adding if one is tested at his home, nobody can recognise whether one's test results have shown positive or negative. He further said, testing people in their homes saves time and transport costs to a travel to VCT sites.

The client who is also supporting an orphan who lost her mother when she was only a month old asked this counsellor why the services are only targeted for few individuals other than every household. "Does it mean that those people you are passing by cannot contract HIV the virus that causes AIDS?" he asked.

This counsellor told him everything about the research and was convinced. He said: "People have been asking me to tell them why MDICP team bypasses their houses. I will now be able to provide them with information relevant to this research," he added.

The client also asked this counsellor to test his granddaughter who he said has been falling sick now and again since she was born.

In response, the counsellor advised this man to go to the hospital and meet the doctor for further advice about his request.

This man also asked this counsellor why HIV test results are not documented as evidence/proof especially when one is tested HIV negative. "If the test shows I am positive, how can the doctor believe that I am indeed HIV positive?" he asked.

The man tested for HIV and assured the counsellor that he will stop smoking and put into practice all necessary preventive methods to avoid contracting the virus.

He also commended MDICP for providing painkillers to respondents who are sick. END

16th June, 2006

#### FREQUENT DEATHS WORRIES CHIEF

Village headman Nsomba has expressed concern over frequent deaths of people in his area and surroundings due to AIDS. The Chief expressed disappointment that productive young men and women are dying now and again with the presence of HIV the virus that causes AIDS.

He made the remarks to a group of counsellors recruited by MDICP who went to the village to conduct door to door counselling and testing services.

"Sorry gentlemen and ladies, I am late because I went to the funeral in the neighboring village," said the chief. He said, "people these days, are dying as if they are on competition." The chief, who is in late 60 yrs recalls that before AIDS was discovered in the country people were dying in small numbers compared to the past two decades. "We have lost a lot of our children and grand children to AIDS. Yesterday we had a funeral in this village and today there is another funeral in the adjacent," he complained.

The chief observed that high death rate can be mitigated if people learn about HIV serostatus. He said if one knows whether he is positive or negative, chances of preventing him/herself from contracting or infecting other people are very high.

He commended MDICP for bringing VCT services directly to people's door steps. He further complained that frequent deaths of parents to AIDS has contributed to increase in the number of orphans in the area and the country as a whole.

Latest reports by the National AIDS Commission indicates that Malawi has over one million HIV infected people. Out of this number over 170,000 HIV infected people are in need of free ARVs.

Currently, only 40,000 HIV infected people are on free ARVS registered in 123 government and private hospitals and clinics. The report further shows that the country loses in between 50,000 to 70,000 people to AIDS. "Only 10 to 12 percent of the estimated population of 12 million tested for HIV and know their HIV serostatus," says the report. END

26th June 2006

#### TESTING FOR HIV WASTE OF TIME

Testing blood to know whether you have HIV the virus that causes AIDS is a waste of time. These remarks were made by a certain woman from Enekesi Village, in Traditional Authority Kaunda in Mchinji district. She said this to discourage her colleague not to be tested for HIV when counselling was in progress behind the clients house. "We have the hospital where we can go to test blood and get genuine results," she said.

The woman who is in her early fifties further said the test that VCT counsellors are using in the research study are false. "These people cannot give correct results," she added. The woman observed that testing for HIV without providing economic and social support to those who will test positive is similar as not to be tested at all.

On the contrary another woman 20 meters away said she is ready to test her blood to know her HIV serostatus. "If these counsellors ask me to be test my blood for HIV, I will accept without delay," she said. She said: "It is better to know whether you contracted the virus or not other than to be ignorant."

Before she finished talking, a young man in his late twenties chipped in, "I have already tested zome boo," meaning I have tested HIV negative. He confessed that he will stop chasing women's skirts. "Now I will concentrate on drinking beer other than engaging in sexual intercourse with prostitutes," said the young man. END

20<sup>th</sup> June, 2006

#### WOMAN EXCHANGE CONDOMS FOR LABOUR

A young woman from Delesi village in Traditional Authority Kaunda in Mchinji district has a tendency of asking children to do piece work at her garden or home in exchange for condoms. A group of 10 children comprised of seven boys and three girls from this village said this at Libelito school ground when they were preparing to play football.

"Guys tomorrow we must go to madam [name withheld] to ask her to give us a piece of work to perform in exchange for condoms", said the leader of the group who seemed to be the oldest.

"That woman has more condoms which she collects from the hospital," said one boy.

Another chipped in, we need a new ball for this one is old.

These children fill the condoms with air and at its base they wrap it with plastic papers and finally then with ropes.

From their conversation, the child seems to have adequate information on the use of condoms. "You know condoms are used by men to protect themselves from contracting AIDS during sexual intercourse or chigololo", said another.

These children which ranges from 7 to 10 years also have information about signs of an AIDS patient. "AIDS patients are thin and they do not walk because they are always on bed," another one said.

One of the boys accused one of the girls not more than 10 yrs of engaging in sexual intercourse with another boy from the same village. "You will be infected with AIDS," leader of the group warned. The boy said the girl and the boy were caught doing the sexual act in the garden 200 meters from the girl's house. END

22/06/06

#### TELL US THE TRUTH ABOUT AIDS

People from Lazzalo village in Traditional Authority Kaunda Wednesday asked VCT counsellors to tell them the truth about AIDS during the sensitisation meeting. Among other things the people wanted to know the first who was tested HIV positive in the world and Malawi. "We hear that human beings contracted HIV from Monkeys. When was that and who was the first person to be tested HIV positive?" asked a young man in late twenties.

Another man in early thirties also asked the relevant question. What about here in Malawi, when was the first AIDS case discovered and where? Can you tell us the name of the first Malawian to be HIV positive?

Between man and woman, who contracted the virus from the Monkey and infect another? a third man asked.

The people who attended the meeting further asked the counsellors to explain in detail what makes the HIV to change its form in the body of some AIDS patients on ARV treatment. "We would like to know why is it taking long for researchers to discover drugs that can completely cure AIDS", added another man.

The people further asked the counsellors to clarify rumors circulating in the village that HIV can be spread by deep kiss through saliva. "In 2004 you were testing us using oral swab method. Does it mean HIV is found in saliva? We hear from radio that HIV is commonly transmitted through infected blood through unprotected sex, tell us the truth," asked another man in his late thirties.

The people also asked the counsellors to explain the assistance the research team provide to these people who test HIV positive. Village headman Lazzalo asked the counsellors to

explain why people who offer to test their blood for HIV are not given documented results as evidence for them to access free ARVs government is providing to AIDS patients in the country.

The VCT counsellor answered the questions to the satisfaction of the people in the village.

“Now we have learnt the truth about HIV and AIDS. We are ready to get tested because there are free ARVs if we [are] HIV positive,” said a woman in her late thirties.

Unfortunately, this woman is not in the sample.

END

23/06/06

#### KNOWING YOUR HIV SEROSTATUS KEY TO BRIGHT FUTURE

People from Chikwe village in Traditional Authority Kaunda in Mchinji district Thursday told VCT counsellors recruited by MDICP that knowing your HIV serostatus is key to bright future. “If you know that you are HIV positive you start planning for your own future and that of your children,” said a man from the group estimated to be in mid thirties. He further said learning your HIV test removes [?] fear and anxiety. If you are HIV negative you plan how you can prevent yourself from contracting the virus. Similarly if you are HIV positive counsellor advise you methods on how you can protect your spouse or sex partner from contracting the HIV.”

At the meeting, people booed a woman who declared that she can commit suicide if tested HIV positive. “People who commit suicide after learning they are HIV positive are foolish and ignorant. There are plenty [of] people who are living positively with HIV,” said one man from the back of the crowd.

However, people cited stigma, discrimination and lack of adequate information about the pandemic as some of the contributing factors influencing HIV positive patients to commit suicide.

Chief Chikwe encouraged his subjects especially those taking part in the research to test their blood to know whether they are infected with the HIV virus or not. He said: “Accept to test your blood, to prepare and plan for the future of your children.”

END

26/06/06

Discordant HIV test results confuses women:

Discordant HIV test results have confused people, especially women in Kuwala Village in TA Kaunda in Mchinji District. The discordant test result raised a hot debate at a borehole Monday evening when women were busy drawing water for domestic chores. One of the women who was also a respondent [name withheld for confidentiality sake] asked her fellow friends whether they are aware that one of the couple can have HIV while another positive.

“My fellow women, have you ever heard that in a family a husband might be HIV positive while his wife negative or the opposite”, she asked.

The revelation influenced another woman in her late forties to ask another question instead of giving a possible answer. “How can that be possible for the two practice unprotected sex?” she asked.

Another lady brown in complexion chipped in to disagree with the woman who raised the issue. “This is a blue lie, I am educated but I have never heard about this information since I was born,” she said with confidence. “These people, so-called VCT counselors have come in our village just to feed us with misleading informations about AIDS,” she added while pointing a finger to three counselors who were busy presenting the questionnaires and consent forms to one of the supervisors on the football pitch in this village.

“They are taking advantage of our illiteracy such that they can say anything thinking that we can believe,” one said and they all laughed in different choruses.

At this point in time another counselor was passing by the borehole and they called him. “Brother, our friend here says in a family one can be HIV positive while another negative. Is this true? If so, what is the contributing factor to this development?”

In response the counselor assured the women that couple HIV test results are concordant positive, concordant negative, and discordant. “This is happening - it's not a lie. Currently researchers are working hard to come up with answers contributing to discordant results,” said the counselor.

The explanation ended the debate prematurely.

END

30/06/06

MAJORITY OF PEOPLE CONTINUE TO ASK QUESTIONS ON INCENTIVES:

Majority of people in almost all villages the VCT team has counselled and tested respondents have now and again asked questions on incentives.

The question on incentives is not only asked by respondents but also other people who are not taking part in the research when they meet VCT counsellors as they search for clients.

"I hear that you are testing people for HIV, what assistance do you give to those people whose results indicates that they are positive?", asked one lady from Kuwala village in Traditional Authority Kaunda in Mchinji District.

Almost all counsellors have been asked this question during counselling. The question on incentives provided to HIV positive people by MDICP has continuously been asked during sensitisation meetings held in many village recently. Although the VCT counsellors try their level best to answer the question, most people seem not to be satisfied with the answers because they used to receive gifts from government during the UDF regime.

"My friend, there is nothing for nothing these days. You give me Kw 500 and I will not hesitate to test my blood for HIV even if it means rejecting to hear the results", said a black tall man from Lazzalo village.

The dependency syndrome corrupted the minds of many people such that it has negatively affected the national rural development growth. During the one-party state of government, communities used to construct feeder roads on their own without expecting to receive anything from government.

When Malawi changed system of government from one party to democratic state of government the first party to win the election deceived people that government will be doing everything for them.

This government used to dish out money and other gifts to people thereby planting a corruptible seed in their minds that is failing to produce better fruits.

It is not a surprise to see that all small roads leading to communities are bushy because of dependency syndrome. "Nothing for nothing", this is a little of a song by one of the popular local musician Ben Michael.

END

04<sup>th</sup> July, 2006

**THEY ARE HEALTH WORKERS, NOT BLOOD SUCKERS NOR SATANISTS**

"They are health workers not blood suckers nor Satanists. Government has deployed them to this area to verify allegations that there are plenty HIV infected people in this area. Do not run away," said a man in his late twenties. The speaker made the remarks Tuesday to a group of almost 10 women who were busy cracking jokes 100 metres away from village headman Nyalubwe when she saw a minibus full of VCT team.

“When they ask you to test your blood for HIV do not refuse. They are the ears and eyes of government,” he said adding that shunning VCT services are over.”

Some women who were in the sample said, “We have already tested for HIV and we know ourselves. What we are!!”

One of the women said, “I am one percent zones boo [Chichewa: everything is fine],” they all laughed.

The man brown in complexion and almost five feet tall waved the VCT counselors a sign of total support for the work they are doing.

However, some women complained that their names are missing. “Some of us our names are missing from the list of respondents despite taking part in the 2004 research,” they complained.

END

#### Sakalamu PEOPLE SAY NO TO HIV TEST

“We don't want to see you in our village. For how many times should [we] warn you? We say not to HIV test,” said a young man to the MDICP scout Saturday morning.

“We are tired of you. Do no deceive yourself that you can convince us to test our blood for HIV. We don't want those nurses to draw our blood for sale. Leave immediately we don't want to see your face again. Enough is enough go,” chipped in his wife who by then was preparing breakfast for the family.

Saturday's visit is the third since the door to door counseling and testing by MDICP commenced on June 10, 2005.

Information I got from a reliable source from the adjacent village says these people have migrated to the new village from another difficult village called Nsomba where the majority of people refused the HIV test for reasons best known to themselves.

But what are the contributing factors to the HIV test refusals by the majority of people from the village? You may ask. “I do not want to know my status because if I am positive I may commit suicide,” said a young man in his mid thirties who is married to three wives, according to information obtained to his friend who was busy moulding bricks.

Being a new village another man said to the scout “I don't want to hear that I have AIDS because I may die soon and [leave] behind my wife, eight children and grainary full of maize I have harvested this year.”

“Who told you that people from Sakalamu have AIDS? We are all okay,” said a young woman in early twenties upon seeing a minibus carrying VCT group arrive in the village. She said adding, “We have heard you are blood suckers.”

Before these people left Nsomba for the new village, they agreed not to be tested by the MDICP VCT counselors because most of them are polygamists. Intersexual relationships between them is common according to information sourced from Enekesi village. However, only two were tested out of 10 respondent targeted. The rest refused.

END