

TITLE: IMPROVING INFORMATION DISEMINATION AND ACCESSIBILITY TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

MESSAGE Recommendations to HIV/AIDS stakeholders to make information accessible to persons with disabilities

Executive Summary

The study on Effective HIV/AIDS and Reproductive Health Information for persons with disabilities (PWDs) revealed that there was need to improve the methods, which are used for disseminating HIV/AIDS information to PWDs.

For this to be improved, we recommend that stakeholders in HIV/AIDS be sensitized on how to make information available and accessible to PWDs, organize meetings and orient them on disability issues and the mode of disseminating the HIV/AIDS information according to types of disabilities.

Reviewing policies of National Aids Commission and HIV/Aids stakeholders will assist in making information accessible to PWDs. Consequently, making information on HIV/AIDS accessible to PWDs will make them live positively and know the effect of HIV/AIDS on their wellbeing. The information will easily flow despite the type of disability.

Training peer educators to be role models will encourage others, and also remove the negative attitude and discrimination. Increasing awareness on both PWDs and non-disabled is very important. This will assist change the mindset of both persons with disabilities and stakeholders. It will also reduce the misconceptions towards PWDs. Encouraging formation of Disabled Persons' Organizations will increase awareness.

PWDs should know and demand their right to health, which includes the right to HIV/AIDS information. Disabled Persons' Organizations should collaborate with HIV/AIDS stakeholders so as to access easily information and materials.

Introduction

Malawi is considered to be one of the most affected countries in the world by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Government in conjunction with the international donor community and Non-Governmental Organizations are working hard to inform, educate and influence behavioral change of Malawians

It is well established that some PWDs need to use alternative forms of communication other than the mainstream ones. These are sign language, Braille, Signs, Symbols, pictures or computers with speech and Braille facilities.

However, those stakeholders who disseminate vital life changing information have not adopted methods of information about HIV/AIDS pandemic. A study conducted on the Living Conditions of Persons Living with Activity Limitations, 2004 indicated that 4.2% of the population of Malawi has a disability. This shows that at least 460,000 people in Malawi have a disability. Yet we feel that many of these people are denied access to

information on HIV/AIDS because society has failed to meet their specific needs as PWDs.

For stakeholders to make information accessible, there is need to orient them in disability issues. This can be done by meeting with them and discuss ways in which the gaps of disseminating the information can be filled, and orientating them on types of disabilities and the modes of making information accessible to them. This can be done by showing them samples of information in Braille and large print, and sensitizing them on the need to learn sign language for easy communicate with hearing impaired persons, especially for confidentiality

Reviewing HIV/AIDS policies will assist in breaking the barriers, which make the information less accessible. There is need to review the National Aids Commission and stakeholders' policies to see if they are accessible. This will make them consider the minority group (PWDs), who are denied access to information of HIV/AIDS to be included in their policies.

Making information available in accessible language will save lives of PWDs. They will also be able to live positively and know the effects of HIV/AIDS. They will know the preventive measures of the deadly disease, and ensure that information is accessible to all types of disabilities. The information will reach everybody.

There is need to train peer educators. This is really important because it will break the negative attitude from both persons with disabilities and non-disabled. If both the disabled and non-disabled were trained together they may make good peer educators. When you train a hearing-impaired peer educator. He/she will assist to disseminate the message to fellow hearing impaired more easily than the non-disabled.

The need to increase awareness on accessibility of HIV/AIDS information is important. For this to be a success we should remove the negative attitude and beliefs first. Some of the beliefs are that PWDs do not have HIV/AIDS because they do not indulge in sexual activities. We need to organize awareness meetings with the chiefs and community. Take disabled peer educators as role models to encourage the fellow disabled persons who look down on themselves. Encourage the community to include persons with disabilities in their community based organizations and share information.

PWDs should be sanitised to know and demand for their rights. The rights include access to HIV/AIDS information, including how it is contracted, prevented, as well as how to live positively if infected. This can be done by encouraging Disabled Persons' Organizations to participate in HIV/AIDS programmes, have partnerships with other stakeholders for them to access HIV/AIDS information and materials easily. It should be emphasised that if a PWD is infected with HV/AIDS, like any other human being, he/she is entitled to the enjoyment of all human rights.