



**LINKING SERVICES:  
REACHING THE COMMUNITY AND SERVICE PROVIDERS**

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**A**s outlined throughout this report, there is a binding link between HIV and nutrition. It is for this reason that it is imperative that organisations working in the domains of HIV and nutrition assist and support each other to address HIV and nutrition together in order to ensure optimal treatment and care for people affected by HIV. Programmes focusing on nutrition should take into account that a proportion of their malnourished target population is HIV positive and vice versa; HIV service providers will always find a proportion of their clients having nutritional problems. Integration of HIV/AIDS and nutrition care is of utmost importance and can help decrease morbidity and mortality.

### **✦ HIV services in Malawi**

HIV services are becoming more widely available in Malawi as outlined in the previous section on adults and ART. However, it still remains that only 8% of those accessing ART are children (Annexe 5) and the MOH has now set a 10% minimum goal to improve paediatric access. The number of HIV counseling and testing sites has greatly increased and reports showed an exponential increase in the number of HIV tests performed.<sup>53</sup> With the revision of the national ART guidelines (April 2006), ART for children has been included. Also, by decentralising services for children to district level, more HIV positive children will have access. A new paediatric HIV clinic has recently been set up in the grounds of Lilongwe Central Hospital which will undoubtedly increase access for children in urban Lilongwe.

### **✦ HIV awareness in the NRU**

Given the high prevalence of HIV amongst malnourished children, it is pertinent that health education in the NRU should also cover HIV prevention and awareness topics. As most malnourished children spend on average 3 weeks in the NRU, the NRU is an ideal setting to build up a relationship with mothers and give health education.

Discussion of HIV-related topics in group sessions can help to decrease stigma amongst caregivers and communities. The ACF International Network has developed, through a collaborative process between different partners including the MOH, the Nutrition Education Resource Kit for Malawi. This kit is a manual for health care workers to prepare and conduct health education. The ACF International Network prepared the layout for the English version, and also translated this manual into Chichewa. The manual, funded by the EU and UNICEF, includes topics on HIV, nutrition for PLWHA and HIV testing. MOH now has ownership of this manual, which was distributed to all NRU and is also being used by CBOs.

### **✦ Positive Living**

Positive living consists of healthy lifestyles aiming at physical, social, mental and spiritual wellbeing. Positive living has shown to have a potential to delay the onset of HIV related illnesses in people infected with HIV. The ACF International Network worked in collaboration with Save the Children (UMOYO network), Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and other organisations on a Positive Living manual. This was based on a manual entitled Positive Health from South Africa and adapted to suit the needs of Malawi. It contains a specific module on nutrition and HIV.

A training of trainers in positive living was facilitated in partnership with CRS and Save the Children. Following this training, CBO's in the various regions were trained and copies of the manual have been printed and distributed during trainings and to partners<sup>54</sup>. There were three training sessions held by the ACF International Network, one in each region, and a total of eighteen CBOs were trained by the ACF International Network in the skills required to educate and inform HIV infected clients about

the importance of nutrition. We believe that this will result in many more people in the communities having access to direct nutritional and educational counseling adapted to the Malawian context. This is a crucial step for people living with HIV and AIDS to obtain a healthy diet. Follow up visits to the CBOs trained in positive living has taken place and assistance has been provided in organising and facilitating their own trainings.

### ✦ **Linking services: developing a Referral Manual**

A Referral Manual was compiled from information from a survey conducted by the ACF International Network at the end of 2004 to gather detailed information about HIV care providers. This manual contains details of approximately 554 HIV organisations working around the NRU that the ACF International Network is supporting and others that responded to a request to participate in the gathering of information. A number of essential services have been listed in the document, including HCT, PMTCT, and home based care services. Services have been grouped per district, to enable NRU to look up services in their catchment areas. Information includes address, contact details and type of services. The manual was revised and updated with accurate information in 2005. Future updating will be needed, and is the responsibility of the MOH, as the owner of the manual. The Referral Manual has been distributed to the NRU across the country. HCT sites in the vicinity of each NRU, have also received a copy. To sustain the use of the manual, monthly visits of the integrated nutrition and HIV team have been made to support on the management of malnutrition, care for children affected by HIV and appropriate referral. As many NRU have a high staff turnover, continuing information and training on HIV issues and the use of the referral network is a necessity.

### ✦ **Community level**

Community Based Organisations (CBO) and national NGOs are doing an enormous job by giving information and education and by providing a wide range of care and support services to people living with and affected by HIV. The ACF International Network is implementing a food security, health and nutrition programme in three Traditional Authorities in Kasungu district. Recognising the importance of integrated programming, the ACF International Network has been working since February 2007 in collaboration with the Malawi AIDS Counseling and Resource Organization (MACRO). MACRO joins the ACF International Network team when going into the field for public health and nutrition talks, to offer HIV testing and counseling to the communities. The ACF International Network provided transport and organised public health and nutrition talks, while MACRO provided HCT. Coordination between the organisations proved to be crucial in order to collaborate effectively and to make optimal use of limited resources, including manpower, time and transport.

### ✦ **Clinic level**

A tool kit developed by the Ministry of Health, the ACF International Network and other stakeholders for Nutrition support and counseling for PLWHA and taking ART has been printed and distributed for piloting. The kit consists of a set of flip charts and a manual (nutrition counseling for people living with HIV and AIDS taking ART). After piloting the kit, it was found it needs revision; the ACF International Network continues to give input on this.

### ✦ **Cotrimoxazole**

Cotrimoxazole preventive therapy (CPT) has proven an effective intervention to decrease morbidity and mortality in HIV-infected individuals. Although CPT is available at the majority of the ART sites, the ACF International Network feels it is pertinent that CPT becomes available in all NRU. In this way initiation of CPT does not have to be delayed until the time of referral to an ART clinic, and children can benefit from CPT immediately after an HIV test shows they are HIV-infected or exposed if they meet other criteria for its use.

The ACF International Network contributed to the development of a national policy on CPT and advocated for CPT to become available to malnourished children in the NRU. The ACF International Network continued to play, as a member of the national CPT Taskforce, a role in the development of a national policy on CPT and the systems to roll out the service, which have recently been approved by the MOH. MOH is currently in the process of procuring cotrimoxazole for CPT and it is hoped that CPT will soon be available to all HIV affected patients who can benefit, including malnourished children.