

Namwera AIDS Coordinating Committee (NACC) P/Bag 52 Namwera

Tel: (265) 01 586 006/005/161 Fax: (265) 01 586 006 E-mail: aidsnamwera@yahoo.com

BACKGROUND OF NACC

Namwera AIDS Coordinating Committee (NACC) is a registered non-profit making local NGO established On 13th November, 1996, through the collaborative effort of Save the Children Federation, Mangochi District Assembly, Mangochi District Health, District Social Welfare Office and other sectors, held a meeting in Namwera. The meeting was held to present basic facts of HIV and AIDS to community members of Namwera. During the meeting, officials from DHO informed the community members which included traditional leaders, religious leaders, vendors, youth and various sections of the society that according to the statistics at Mangochi district health showed that Namwera had third highest HIV prevalence rates in the district. The other places with higher prevalence rates than Namwera were Mangochi Boma and Monkey bay. The then group village head Balakasi who is now traditional authority Bwana Nyambi, suggested that as a community they should establish a committee to sensitize the community of the dangers of HIV and AIDS. That suggestion on 13th November 1996, led to the formation of Namwera AIDS Coordinating Committee (NACC). Members were elected into various offices to look at the activities of the new committee. The new committee so formed provided for various groups to cater for specific needs. The youth had their own group to look at youth affairs, behavioural change section looked at issues to do with culture and behavior change, OVC looked at needs to children and orphans and care givers looked at the care and support.

Save the Children Federation through their program Community Based Options for Protection and Empowerment (COPE), initially assisted NACC with technical support in form of information. COPE project was only able to provide the technical assistance for 8 months after which NACC had to stand on its own without even technical support from elsewhere.

The initial work of NACC involved going around villages and mobilizing community support and sensitizing communities. The committee also developed a constitution and approached the district assembly for registration. From the humble beginning of just

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working as a grouping of a few volunteers, NACC managed to get assistance from traditional leaders and several organizations who assisted with moral, material and financial support. For instance, Save the Children through Umoyo Network provided a video and motor bike for the organization. Corio Amego from Italy provided assistance for construction of the first block of offices. Seacost Foundation provided assistance for construction of the vocational skills center. From just the \$8,000 that American Embassy provided, NACC with support from traditional leaders constructed additional block and opened up vocational skills center for tailoring and computer skills. The former President Dr. Bakili Muluzi provided about K300,000.00 during the time he was officially opening NACC offices.

NACC's scale up phase witnessed several partners funding NACC to go beyond the communities of Namwera trading center. Organizations like Family Health International (FHI), National Aids Commission (NAC), Firelight Foundation, Pact Malawi and other partners assisted NACC to additional Districts of Mangochi, Machinga and Zomba.

The leadership and members determination has been manifested in the way they have overcome some challenges. For instance, there was a time NACC convened a meeting with community members to share messages on prevention. During the meeting NACC introduced the idea of using condoms for prevention and the community members walked away in protestation. According to them discussing about condom use was going out of cultural context. NACC was still determined and of late community members have come to agree with NACC that condoms have to be accepted as preventative measures. It is this same spirit that has seen NACC working hand in hand with initiators as partners. Herbalists and traditional healers are also among some stakeholders that NACC is working with and that relationship with traditional leaders has led to successful results on how HIV and AIDS message is being disseminated and utilized.

INTRODUCTION

NACC is based in Mangochi, Machinga and Zomba districts which are in the southern region of Malawi. NACC has over the years primarily targeted the communities within these Districts because of the high risk behaviours in the area that are contributing in the transmission of HIV. The region includes several border towns that facilitate inter border trade as people move to and from Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa.

Unfortunately many do not travel with their partners and are tempted to engage in risky sexual practices. Cultural practices and beliefs also play a role in HIV transmission. Due to limited health facilities, people go to herbalists who have little or no HIV knowledge for treatment. Initiators who are responsible for male circumcision do not have adequate HIV knowledge and use a single razor blade for several boys and men who need circumcision.

Issue of support also feature highly in these areas. People, who have HIV/AIDS suffer from long illness and as a result, family resources including time, are drained to care for the sick. Subsequently, the children are left stranded with nothing to eat and no one to look after them. The children are likely to lose their identity and family bond, drop out of school, fall victims of malnutrition-related diseases, marry prematurely and have unexpected pregnancies.

Orphans face different challenges based on their age, gender and HIV status. Orphaned girls are favoured more than boys because the girls can do much of the domestic work. Boys are considered to be burdens with nothing to contribute to the family. The HIV+ OVC may be discriminated against and sidelined by the community. Due to misconceptions that some people have in the community, HIV+ OVC are taken as children that should not waste time to go to school because they are waiting to die. Older OVC have a difficult time because they must fend for themselves and care for their siblings.

All these issues call for developmental interventions. NACC has over the years provided these interventions to the communities around Namwera and the interventions have proved useful. Over and above that, interventions in HIV and AIDS that NACC has provided are in line with Millennium Development Goal number 6 which among other things call for halting and reversal of spread of HIV and AIDS and also achieving universal access to treatment for HIV and AIDS patients in need. This again is supported by Malawi Growth and Development strategy that supports interventions in HIV and AIDS as one way of enhancing development.

UNIQUENESS OF NACC

NACC as an organisation that has grown from being a committee from the community has the following two unique features:-

- (i) **Meaningful community participation:** NACC believes in meaningful engagement of community members to participate in issues affecting them. Most of the interventions that NACC has done have been planned and implemented with community members. Community members participate at all stages of the intervention and volunteers form the core of NACC. NACC promotes the spirit of meaningful community participation as an effective way of facilitating development and ensuring sustainability.
- (ii) **Good use of resources:** NACC has demonstrated that it uses resources efficiently and effectively. Over the years NACC has managed to do more with the little resources that its partners have assisted it with. For instance, with as little as \$7,000.00 NACC managed to construct a building that is still standing up to now. Further NACC was ranked by PACT as one low risk partner. NACC believes in serving the communities and lives the values of transparency and accountability as key ingredients when facilitating development

Programs that NACC is implementing

- Early Childhood development (ECD)
- Education Care and support
- Vocation training
- Palliative care
- Food and Nutrition
- Household economic strengthening
- Advocacy
- Prevention