

Title: Youth Leadership Boosts Access to HIV Testing in Mbalachanda, Mzimba South, Malawi

Authors:

Mwamvani B¹, Chipungu E², Antonio Y³

¹ Malawi Network of AIDS Services Organization, ² Malawi Network of AIDS Services Organization, ³ Malawi Network of AIDS Services Organization

Background

Mbalachanda, a rural community in Mzimba faces challenges in ensuring young people access HIV information and services. Although health messages are available at the facility, many youths avoid visiting due to fear of stigma and low confidence. The absence of a dedicated youth-friendly space further limits opportunities for open discussion, peer support and access to services. To address these gaps, the Community Score Card (CSC) approach was introduced, providing a platform for dialogue between community members and health providers. During these sessions, youths identified lack of safe and supportive spaces as a key barrier. From January to March 2025, total of 23 adolescents had access to Sexual Reproductive Health Services whilst in the period of April to June 2025 a total 35 adolescents had access to sexual reproductive health services. Description: Motivated by these concerns, a proactive youth representative initiated peer mobilization efforts beginning in March 2025.

Objective

To improve access to HIV testing services among young people through youth-led mobilization and strengthened community engagement.

Methods

Following CSC dialogues, a youth representative initiated peer-led mobilization activities in March 2025. These included community outreach, peer education sessions and engagement during community meetings to promote HIV testing and awareness. The intervention also advocated for the establishment of a youth-friendly space within the health facility. Service uptake data were tracked from July to September 2025 to assess changes in HIV testing among youths.

Results

The intervention led to measurable improvements in service uptake and youth engagement:

- A total of 64 youths accessed HIV testing services between July and September 2025, representing a notable increase compared to previously low or undocumented uptake.

Conclusion

Youth-led mobilization, supported by social accountability mechanisms such as CSC, can significantly improve access to HIV testing services.

Disclosure of Interest: I declare that this work was conducted as part of routine community health programming, and no financial or personal relationships influenced the design, implementation or reporting of the study. Any support received was part of the routine program activities and aimed at strengthening community health service delivery, including HIV prevention and youth engagement initiatives.