



## **TfaC's Mobile Health Clinic – providing lifesaving health care for vulnerable women and girls in Lilongwe, Malawi**

*Report by Heather Knight, Head of Grants, Theatre for a Change*

### **Project Background**

With support from a generous donation by the Mercury Phoenix Trust, we provide essential sexual and reproductive health care and advice for female sex workers and sexually exploited children in Lilongwe. Despite recent economic improvements, Malawi is still struggling – in 2019 the International Monetary Fund per capita statistics placed Malawi as the fourth poorest country in the world, and the current combination of flooding and drought, has resulted in a situation of widespread food insecurity.

As a result, the team are seeing more and more women entering sex work, desperate to make money to keep themselves and their children alive. Many of the women and girls the Mobile Health Clinic reaches feel unable to access any formal health services, due to a combination of poverty, stigmatisation and fear. By taking the service directly to the bars and brothels, and reaching out with a staff team, who themselves include former sex workers, we support a highly vulnerable population, many of whom are HIV positive, and who suffer regularly from sexual violence and abuse.

### **Grant Activities**

This report covers activity from January to December 2019. The Mobile Health Clinic is staffed by a qualified nurse, trained HIV counsellors and a community facilitator, and operated both during the day and evening, rotating between over 25 hot spot areas and brothels. Each week the Clinic:

- Provided HIV Testing and Counselling and STI screening to women, girls and male clients. If patients were HIV negative, they were encouraged to practice safe sex and test for HIV every three months. If they were HIV positive, they were referred to government hospitals. The clinic also provided treatment for a range of STIs and other minor conditions;
- Distributed male and female condoms and lubricants to women, girls and male clients;



- Conducted condom demonstration workshops that ensure female sex workers and girls know how to correctly use male and female condoms;
- Conducted workshops on condom negotiation for women in sex work;
- Provided family planning services including the provision of depo-provera (injection), contraceptive pills and condoms; and
- Procured drugs and supplies in order to provide quality integrated health services. The clinic also received free HIV test kits, male and female condoms and contraceptives from the Malawi Government through its partnership with the Ministry of Health.



*The Mobile Health Clinic team prepare to head out in the van*

## **Project Results**

Over the last twelve months, the grant from the Mercury Phoenix Trust enabled the MHC to exceed its targets, engaging with its highest number of women and girls to date, and delivering a record number of life-saving interventions.

The increased reach and impact this year were due to the generous donation from the Mercury Phoenix Trust, additional in-kind support from the Malawian Ministry of Health, and the on-going hard work and determination of the Malawian team to reach as many people as possible.



Outputs	Jan - Dec 2019	Apr 2017 – Mar 2018
Visits to communities	84	89
Different 'hotspot' areas visited	25	25
Female sex workers/sexually exploited girls reached per month (average)	299	256
Total number of participants reached per month (average)	501	426
Male condoms distributed	612,819	252,517
Female condoms distributed	11,275	3,537
Participants screened for sexually transmitted infections	3,006 (1,826 women and 1,180 men)	3,638 (2,246 women and 1,392 men)
Participants treated for sexually transmitted infections	382 (352 women and 30 men)	363 (331 women and 32 men)
Participants tested for HIV	2,370 (961 women and 1,409 men)	1,606 (622 women and 984 men)
Number of participants found to be HIV positive	76 (3%) (51 women and 25 men)	110 (7%) (78 women and 32 men)
Number of women provided with family planning services	464 women	735 women
Number of referrals to additional SRH services	149 (132 women and 17 men)	212 (191 women and 21 men)

As a result of our growing partnership with the Ministry of Health, the MHC now has access to an ongoing, sustainable and greatly increased supply of free male and female condoms, allowing a rise in MHC condom distribution to beneficiaries of 143% in comparison to the previous grant year. This gave women in sex work additional protection through provision of a reliable and free source of contraceptives throughout the year. Although it is difficult to evidence a direct link, this increased provision in conjunction with the MHC's ongoing condom



demonstration workshops may have contributed to the significant reduction in positive HIV test results (from 7% to 3%).

In addition, the MHC now has access to an increased number of free HIV test kits from the Ministry of Health, and with increased funds in 2019, was able to cover expenses for government trained HIV counsellors to attend MHC sessions more frequently. This meant the MHC was able to dramatically increase the number of HIV tests it can perform (an increase of 48% in comparison to the previous grant year), so more people were able to find out and monitor their HIV status and access the necessary counselling and support if the results were positive.

The increased access to condoms may explain the reduction in take up of alternative family planning services associated referral. There were slightly fewer visits this year due to the ongoing political demonstrations within Lilongwe – during these times the clinic was unable to carry out outreach due to safety concerns. However, this didn't stop the team reaching more people than ever before.

### Voices of the Women Supported by the MHC



*Women who have benefited from the MHC.*

I am 24 years old. I now know my HIV status through testing with TfaC's MHC counsellors due to the good rapport which has helped me build trust in the counsellors, as there is confidentiality during testing sessions. During these sessions clients gets psychoeducation on the need of good adherence on medication like ARVs. Those who defaulted are referred back to the hospital for support and care. All the services are accessed at one location - this makes us feel respected and honoured. TfaC's MHC providers should continue their good work.

*(MHC beneficiary)*

I am a 30-year-old female residing at Mwanje Bar. TfaC's MHC services have helped me through behaviour change on issues like safe sex and condom use (both male and female [condoms]). I have been attending condom [demonstration]sessions. At first, I was failing to use a female condom. Now I can use [them] correctly and I am able to negotiate with my partner to use a female condom. On the last day MHC visited, I accessed condoms and family planning methods. TfaC's MHC should continue visiting us frequently. *(MHC beneficiary)*





I am 32-year-old female and I reside at Mtandire Resthouse and Bar. I am happy with TfaC's MHC services because every six weeks I get a box of 164 condoms [and] lubricants. I also have access to family planning, HIV counselling and testing, and medical treatment for other diseases. In addition to that all services are free, [unlike] other institutions that do not have enough medical supplies, and the services are easily accessed. TfaC services have assisted me to live a healthier life through the support that I am getting.  
*(MHC beneficiary)*



*A woman supported by the MHC.*

I am 27 years old. I am happy for the MHC services that they provide to us. The nurse refers us to [the] big hospital for assessment and care when needs arise. I am happy because I am capable of protecting myself from unintended pregnancy because dual protection is there, condoms and family planning methods are readily available during every visit. I thank TfaC for the good work.  
*(MHC beneficiary)*



*A woman is provided with HTC services.*