



Malawi Launches First National HIV-AIDS Policy



Photo: MANASO

Members of Parliament and Malawi President Muluzi attend the launch of the country's first national policy on HIV-AIDS.

USAID is the leading international aid agency dedicated specifically to combating HIV/AIDS in Malawi, where 15% of adults are infected with the virus. The policy process confronted the stigma and secrecy around HIV/AIDS in Africa by engaging the public in dialogue and addressing contentious issues. The goal is to unify different points of view on combating the disease, and help Malawi benefit from efforts which have succeeded in other countries. Without a national policy, efforts to address HIV-AIDS lack legal backing or unifying guidelines.

After an initial review of research, an HIV-AIDS policy steering committee opened discussions. Radio talk shows were used to reach the general public since about 60% of adults in Malawi are illiterate. Discussions brought together representatives of influential groups, ranging from members of parliament and faith-based organizations, to youth leaders and traditional birth attendants. The new HIV/AIDS Policy includes guidance on prevention of the disease, and care and support of those infected, as well as highlights human rights that are critical for combating HIV/AIDS, such as a woman's right to protection against marital rape.

Now, the Malawi National AIDS Commission is committed to annually collecting national data on HIV/AIDS, assisted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. USAID funds have made possible twelve voluntary counseling and testing sites in Malawi, and will support the government in increasing the number of sites, especially in rural areas, within the next few years.

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