

MAKING ACCESS REAL

Advancing access to sexual and
reproductive rights

Center for the Development of People
(CEDEP)





Title: Advancing access to sexual and reproductive rights

Name of Organisation: Center for the Development of People (CEDEP)

Country: Malawi

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Who are we?

Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP) is a registered human rights organization under the Trustees Incorporation Act of 1962. CEDEP was registered in 2006. Its core functions are to address the needs and challenges of the LGBTI community whose rights are often neglected - through advocacy and lobbying; promoting human rights and good health through civic education, training, capacity building, networking, and research; and providing support services for the improvement of the welfare of LGBTI communities in accordance with their rights and needs.

What was the issue?

The Penal code through sections 137A, 153 and 156 criminalises same sex relationships in Malawi, creating an environment that is hostile and non-affirming. HIV efforts in Malawi did not acknowledge or provide for the HIV prevention needs of LGBTI communities. In 2008, we studied 200 MSM in the city of Blantyre. 21 % tested positive and 95 percent did not previously know their status. The men also reported low and inconsistent condom use, little knowledge about how to protect themselves from HIV, and a reluctance to reveal their sexual orientation to healthcare staff for fear of discrimination. Further investigations revealed a lack of access to physical barriers such as condoms, lubricants and dental dams and no information, materials or campaigns targeting LGBTI communities with HIV prevention messages.

What was the change we wanted to see?

We wanted greater acknowledgement of the specific needs of the LGBTI communities in the Malawian response to HIV, resulting in increased access to accurate information and the appropriate tools for HIV prevention.

What did we do?

We formed a network and built partnerships so that LGBTI communities could speak with one voice.

We gathered our own evidence on the HIV prevalence rate among LGBTI people.

We used the media, such as newspaper articles, to highlight the issues of HIV and LGBTI people in Malawi.

We documented and disseminated case studies on our experiences and challenges to policy makers.

We facilitated workshops for health service providers using a newly developed manual on HIV treatment and Care to LGBTI communities.

We developed a Key Population health services directory.

We produced HIV information, education and communication materials and disseminated this information to LGBTI communities.

We used peer educators to reach out to our community.

We lobbied the National AIDS Commission to include issues of LGBTI in the National Strategic Plan.

What did we achieve?

Greater access for LGBTI communities to accurate information on HIV prevention, treatment and health services LGBTI communities through the Key Population Health services directory.

A strong network with a clear advocacy agenda to address the problems facing LGBTI communities.

Strong collaboration between CEDEP and the Malawi Human Rights Commission to document violation of the rights of LGBTI people and to follow up the cases for redress.

Strong collaboration between CEDEP and the Malawi Police Service where the Police Victim Support unit and criminal investigation departments are being oriented on LGBTI human rights issues.

Production and dissemination of annual LGBTI human rights violation reports.

Acceptance of two recommendations by the Malawi Government for the first time during the Universal periodic review at the UN in Geneva. These were firstly to address violence against LGBTI people and to ensure that perpetrators of violence are brought to book; and secondly to make sure that LGBTI people have access to friendly health services.

The introduction of a moratorium by the Malawi Government against the arrest of LGBTI consenting adults.

For a limited period, we were able to increase the availability of condoms, lubricants and dental dams in selected health centres. This is an ongoing advocacy issue. Increased number of MSM accessing testing services in 2016.

The inclusion of MSM issues in the National AIDS Strategic plan 2016 to 2020.

The inclusion of LGBTI issues in the Malawi National Human Rights Strategic Plan 2016-2020 with specific reference to addressing violations, discrimination, policy and legal reforms.

Key lessons

Research

Building an evidence base to engage with policy makers is critical. We could provide some evidence but there are still gaps and we need to push the research agenda to include lesbian and transgender communities.

Solidarity

Coming together as LGBTI organisations increased our collective voice in calling for greater access to HIV prevention programmes.

Advocacy

Progress is slow and advocacy has to be sustained. The existing stigma and discrimination by health service providers due to religion, public opinion and culture continues to be a barrier despite the advocacy achievements. More work needs to be done to address attitudes of the public and healthcare services providers and institutions. We need to put constant pressure to ensure uninterrupted supplies of prevention materials accessible to LGBTI communities.

Ownership

In the absence of government plans and programmes to address the LGBTI community it was essential for us to provide services, but at the same time keep our advocacy focused on the need for the state to provide such services.

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