ONE WORLD ACTION
FOR A JUST AND EQUAL WORLD

Making a Difference

Citizen's and their organisations and networks contributing to change
OWA PPA 2008-9: Case study 32

Title of Case Study:	Establishment of a Parliamentary Committee on HIV/AIDS in Malawi

1. PPA partner name	One World Action
2. Countries highlighted in case study	Malawi

Establishment of a Parliamentary Committee on HIV/AIDS in Malawi

Malawi has one of the highest national HIV prevalence rates in the world. Close to 1 million Malawians are infected with HIV of whom more than half are women. Young women are three times more likely to be infected than their male peers.

Over the past three years, with support from One World Action through its Programme Partnership Agreement with DFID, MANET+, the Malawi Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) has been working to strengthen the capacity of women and girls living with and affected by HIV/AIDS to influence policies, laws and programmes that protect and promote their rights.

It is through the work emerging by this successful partnership, that a parliamentary committee on HIV and AIDS has been established. This represents a tremendous step forward towards the development of a more sensitive political climate, one which is better able to deliver programmes that

make real changes in women's everyday life. Ida Jere, a woman coming from the Salima District, after participating to one of these programmes, declared:

> "This training is very important … and I wish I knew this before. I could not have contracted HIV. From now on, I will not accept imposed decisions from my husband regarding sex because now I know that I also have a right to safe sex without being forced by anybody. I will concentrate on my studies since I now know that I have the right to education and information."

The need / How and why

The Government of Malawi had a Parliamentary Committee on Health which used to deal also with HIV and AIDS issues. Nonetheless, recognising that HIV/AIDS is more than just a health concern but something that affets the individual's social and economic status as much, MANET+ began to advocate for the establishment of a separate parliamentarian body.

MANET+ identified the need to ensure that HIV and AIDS issues were given adequate and prominent attention at the highest leadership level possible. One of the key issues behind this was the realisation of the lack of legislation protecting people living with HIV. When MANET+ scrutinised the draft bill on HIV and AIDS, they realised that many issues, such as HIV criminalisation, mandatory testing for pregnant women and disclosure of HIV positive status, needed informed decisions in order to both formulate an adequate and effective law and to allocate fairly the resources for the HIV national response.

To begin with, several meeting were scheduled with MPs who were members of the Parliamentary Committee on Health. This initially informal process led to a more comprehensive programme that saw Members of Parliament leaving with a representative from MANET+ to go on familiarisation visits to other African countries. After these visits, consultation continued linked to capacity building activities for the parliamentarians, in particular on the topics of Leadership and Governance, HIV Testing and Counselling, and Peer Education.

Unfortunately, the whole process has not been always so straightforward as both limited financial resources and the limited availability and commitment by some committee's members, made more difficult to convene necessary meetings.

The Committee

At the time of its establishment in 2008 the Committee had 19 members - fourteen men and five women. The significance of this achievement was highlighted by the fact that on the day the bill was tabled in the National

Assembly, members on both the government and opposition sides applauded the bill and unanimously voted for it.

FACTS AND STATS

- Land-locked Malawi is home to over 13 million people, 40% of whom live below the poverty line

- In 2006/07, DFID provided aid to Malawi totaling £70 million, the main DFID's challenges in Malawi are HIV and AIDS, Health and Education.

- Between Oct 2006 and June 2009, through One World Action's DFID-funded Programme Partnership Agreement, MANET+ received funds for their lobbying, advocacy and awareness raising activities

- In 2005 the number of annual deaths due to HIV and AIDS was 86,592.

- Since 2004 support has helped the country reduce the deaths of under-5s by more than 10%