

# STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

Blantyre Site Microbicide Research  
Experience

MTN Annual Meeting, 2008

Bonus Makanani

# INTRODUCTION

- Population drawn from urban and peri-urban areas
- All married or in a stable relationship
- Mostly primary education-read/write
- The male partner-head of the household  
-decision maker, provider of all needs
- Women economically disadvantaged

# COMMUNITY DYNAMICS

- Cultural norms-dictate male “supremacy”
  - decisions made by “wider family”
  - accentuate gender imbalance
- ▶ Potential for possible troublesome conflict
  
- Traditional community structures
  - headed by traditional leaders
  - well organized and respected
- ▶ Useful for conflict resolution

# EXPERIENCES and ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Language for effective communication
  - research concepts difficult to explain or translate: microbicides, protocol, placebo, randomisation, research versus care
- Unfamiliarity with the research process
  - ▶ CAB-community educators work together
  - ▶ Participant-community educator meetings
  - ▶ Support Groups eg Friends of CoM-JHP, Influential women's group

# EXPERIENCES and ACCOMPLISHMENTS II

- Media publicity-favourable/unfavourable
- Undue political influence
- ▶ Proactive, timely addressing of microbicides issues
- ▶ establish favourable working relationship with the media
- ▶ Engage stakeholders, keep them informed of developments in microbicides research

# CAB INVOLVEMENT

- Established in 1999, wide representation, drawn from Blantyre community. Meets every 2 months during which it is updated on progress of various studies
- Has allowed establishment of trust between the community and researchers and increased receptivity to participation
- Has contributed to protocol development and implementation, retention solutions
- Mouthpiece for the community in addressing their needs and concerns

# LESSONS LEARNED

- Healthy working relationship with the community imperative to microbicide research success
- Support groups provide community-derived solutions to problems encountered when undertaking microbicide research
- Engage participants regarding solutions to retention issues
- Various stakeholders essential to successful implementation of microbicide research activities

# CONCLUSION

- Important to promote an amicable partnership between communities and researchers in order to undertake successful and ethically sound microbicides research