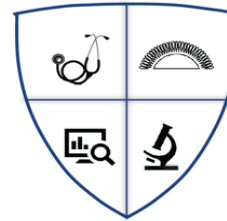




JOHNS HOPKINS  
RESEARCH PROJECT



# *The community we serve and early lessons from MTN-035*

# DESIRE

Developing and Evaluating Short-acting  
Innovations for Rectal Use

Linly Seyama, MSc, RN  
MTN Annual Meeting  
10 February 2020

# Presentation Outline

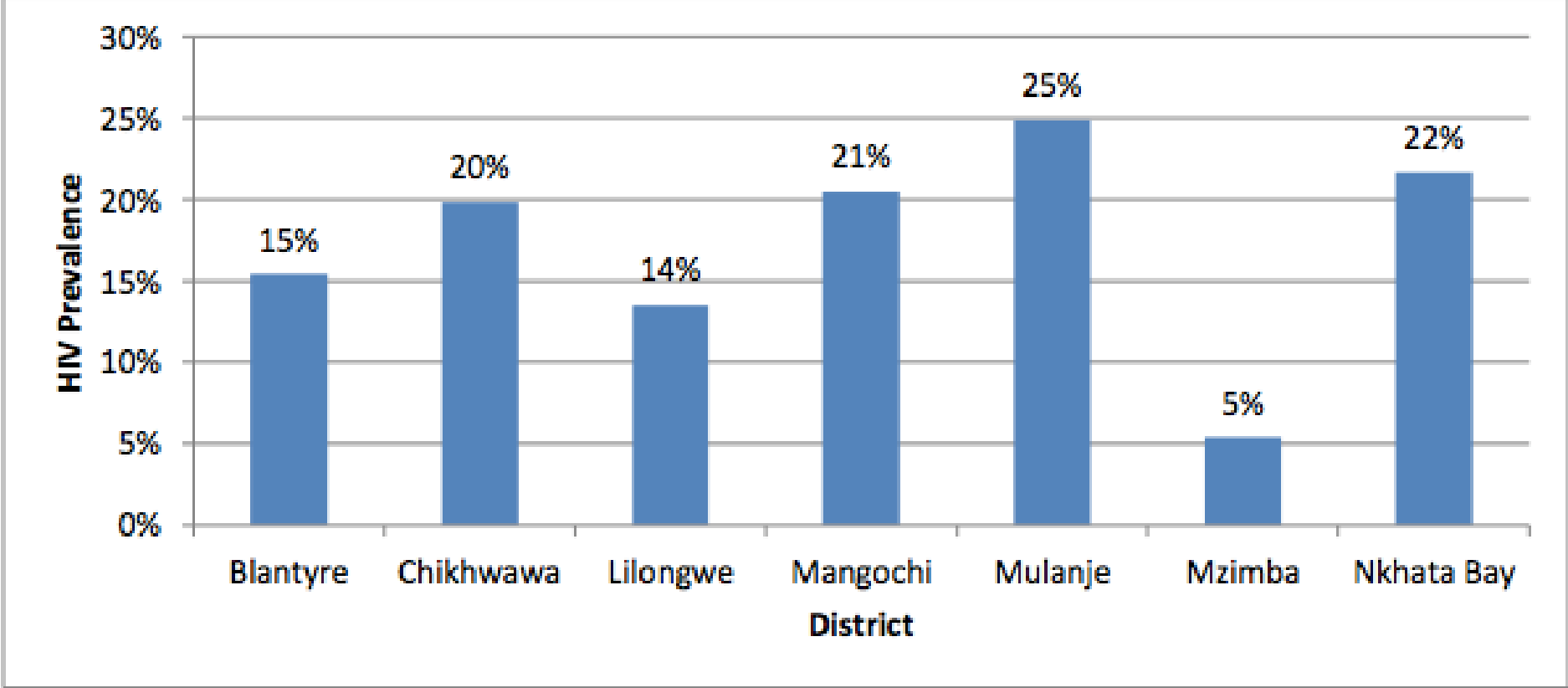
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- The Community we serve
- MSM life in Malawi
- Early Lessons From MTN 035
- The way forward

# The community we serve

- Local vernacular: *Mathanyula*
- 1.8% of adult men ages 20 to 39 years are estimated to be MSM (*Kapanda et al. Healthcare providers' attitudes towards care for men who have sex with men (MSM) in Malawi, 2019 BMC Health Services Research*).
- Nearly 1 in 5 MSM in Malawi are living with HIV
  - At least 2x rate in the general male population
  - 30-45 % do not know their HIV+ status

**Figure 3: Estimated prevalence of HIV among MSM in selected districts in Malawi (2013-2014)**



[http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/country/documents/MWI\\_narrative\\_report\\_2015.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/country/documents/MWI_narrative_report_2015.pdf)

# The community we serve

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- Same-sex relationships illegal and not accepted in Malawi (can be criminalized) → silence and stigma
- Most Malawians are Christians or Muslims
  - Denial that MSM exist, MSM are unnatural/wrong

# 2010: First openly gay couple attracted a lot of media, legal, religious, social discourse



In 2010, the late Judge Nyakwawa Usiwasiwa sentenced the first admitted gay couple—Tiwonge Chimbalanga and Steven Monjeza—to the maximum jail sentence.

*Tiwonge Chimbalanga and Steven Monjeza during one of their court appearances Malawi*

# The community we serve

- Some progress made since 2010: MSM now recognized as key population by Malawi's National AIDS Commission
- USAID Linkages programme → DIC (drop-in centres) for MSM and transgender persons
- Mobile, dynamic population
  - Changing residence, employment, phone numbers, relationships

# MSM life in Malawi

- Many MSM must live a double life to avoid internal and external stigma:
  - Married and maintain household with wife and children, while engaging in same sex in secrecy
  - Some openly express themselves
- Social networks are interconnected
- Sex for money is common, a reality for survival



# MSM life in Malawi

- Hostile environment increases MSM vulnerability to violence, stigma, discrimination, suppressing their ability to access health care services
- Unmet health care needs: Health providers are untrained and not sensitized to MSM needs:
  - No assessment for rectal STIs
  - Contributes to poor health seeking behavior among MSM due to stigma and being judged
- Nonetheless, there are small pockets of willingness to serve MSM among some HCW

# Early lessons from MTN-035

- Literacy level heavily affects time for baseline CASI.
- Lubricant alone is misunderstood as best protection rather than the condom+lubricant
- Bisexual men with wives – how to hide products in the home or carry them to social meetups
- Confidentiality/privacy of clinic location, clients (change agents?)

# Early lessons from MTN-035

- Pros/cons of word-of-mouth referrals
- Need to be cautious with language about the product and who target potential participant is for the study.
  - Those with recent RAI experience
  - Receptive partners
  - How to communicate screen failure due to no/low RAI to avoid mis-reporting
    - Solution: Participant-driven decision-making

# Early lessons from MTN-035

- Conducting this study in an MSM-friendly environment and involving/partnering with existing organizations working with MSM is essential for the success of the study
- In our case, CEDEP (Center for the Development of People, a local human rights organization)

# Way forward...

- Weekly discussions on managing case by case
- Maintain the spirit of teamwork with CEDEP staff
- Individual counselling remains key for participants

# MTN Blantyre team



Celebrating MTN-035  
activation with cupcakes



Award for fastest recruitment  
into HPTN-075 (first MSM study at the site)

# Acknowledgements

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- Stakeholders - CEDEP
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