

SCOPE HIV SUCCESS STORY

MALAWI



World Relief Staff providing an assessment exercise for Chigoneka Network.

USAID/World Relief: Photo by Harry Yohane, Male Champion Supervisor

NAME AND ROLE

Mr. Phiri (name changed to protect anonymity), an HIV-positive client

LOCATION

Lilongwe/TA Njewa, Malawi

SUMMARY

Influenced by his religious beliefs HIV-positive client stopped undergoing antiretroviral therapy. Through SCOPE HIV's *SASA! Faith* intervention, Mr. Phiri's concerns were addressed he resumed lifesaving treatment.

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SASA! FAITH INTERVENTION IMPROVES HIV POSITIVE CLIENTS' RETENTION TO CARE IN LILONGWE

In Malawi, religion is a major influencer of lifestyles and behaviors. Religious leaders often influence the way communities approach healthcare, and, in extreme cases, religious teachings have negatively impacted people's health. *SASA! Faith* is a program that helps train faith leaders to positively support those affected by the HIV pandemic by properly responding to their needs. Since there is a large Christian community in Malawi, *SASA! Faith* has proven critical in assisting Christian faith leaders' response to HIV needs within their communities. The recent story of Mr. Phiri (name changed to protect anonymity) highlights the importance of *SASA! Faith* initiative's faith leader training.

A FAITH LEADER'S INTERVENTION IMPACTS MANY LIVES

Mr. Phiri is a married member of the Christian community where he lives in the Lilongwe district of Malawi. He is HIV-positive and had been undergoing treatment through antiretroviral therapy. Recently, Mr. Phiri's wife grew concerned because she noticed he had stopped taking his medications. After hearing his pastor describe miraculous healings from HIV infection, he informed her that he had been convinced to stop all antiretroviral drugs.

Deeply worried, Mr. Phiri's wife contacted a *SASA! Faith* volunteer who connected the couple with a faith leader from a local faith network. Using messages from the Christian Bible, this faith leader convinced Mr. Phiri to continue his antiretroviral therapy regimen. As a result, Mr.

Phiri has resumed his medication and expresses his gratitude for the intervention. Without the intervention of the faith leader, Mr. Phiri's life could have been in danger.

This pastor's intervention helped bridge the gap between healthcare service providers and clients like Mr. Phiri. As far as Mr. Phiri's medical team knew, he was undergoing consistent antiretroviral therapy. These providers would not have been aware of his hesitancy and pause in taking his medicine without Mrs. Phiri's intervention and this faith leader. SCOPE HIV's *SASA! Faith* program helped this faith leader diffuse his misconceptions about faith healing.

SASA! FAITH NETWORKS IMPROVE RETENTION TO HIV CARE

The case of Mr. Phiri is just one example of the impact SCOPE HIV is making in Malawi. The *SASA! Faith* network comprises faith leaders from all religious institutions within the Village Development Committee. These leaders meet at least once every month to plan and execute *SASA! Faith* activities guide their faith leader peers on how faith in God or Allah can inform an understanding of the connection between gender-based violence and HIV. Leaders in the *SASA! Faith* network aim to prevent gender-based violence and the spread of HIV by raising awareness through platforms like social and religious gatherings in their communities.



A *SASA! Faith* assessment exercise where members are sharing their stories.

USAID/World Relief: Photo by Harry Yohane, Male Champion Supervisor

These leaders are also equipped to improve linkages between healthcare facilities and communities and receive capacity-building training. First, they are equipped with inter-agency skills to refer gender-based violence - and HIV-related cases to appropriate service providers. In addition, two faith leaders from each faith network have been trained to provide psychosocial support to survivors of gender-based violence.

This story is written by Macdonald Chimlaza, Gender and Child Protection Technical Officer and Elizabeth Cooper, SCOPE Communications Intern.