

Communities winning against high viral load in Dande.

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Community systems strengthening has the greatest potential of empowering people living with HIV (PLHIV) by having programs and activities that are person-centred. Nonetheless, community systems, can only be as strong as the tie that binds them to health institutions for technical backstopping rather than running as parallel structures.

Ward 4 of Kapiripiri village, deep in the rural Dande area of Mt Darwin district is served by Kamutsenzere clinic. The village shines for being a community of PLHIV that provides a successful hybrid DSD model – a combined outreach and community ART Refill Group (CARG). The ward has now achieved zero high viral load, zero AIDS deaths, zero defaulter and zero cervical cancer cases in the 2022– 2023 annual year for all members in CARGs.

This feat has not been achieved without obstacles, chief among them being long distances to facilities. Situated 15 km north-west of Kamutsenzere clinic, Ward 4 does not have a clinic for itself despite the Ministry of Health and Child Care policy that every ward should have a primary health facility. People travel for many kilometers to get treatment and for years there were reported cases of defaulting due to long distances. The cost of travel to the clinic is a huge barrier. Viral load was also high due to a combination of poor livelihoods and poor adherence. The Ward reported cases of home deliveries, gender-based violence, child marriages and HIV transmission among newly born children. And this particular ward, in-between other wards was forgotten. Lived testimonies reveal that some of PLHIV in this Ward died in the past trying to walk to the health facilities, including to Karanda Hospital to get their ART refill or receive treatment. Faced by adversity, PLHIV organized themselves with the leadership of Sarah Chimoto, the ZNNP+ Ward Chairperson, and District Executive Committee member, who initiated the formation of 12 CARGs in Ward 4 with a total of 160 PLHIV. She engaged Kamutsenzere clinic to start doing outreach ART distribution at Kapiripiri Primary school, central to Ward 4. In the first year, they conducted community dialogues and sensitization workshops on health, health hazards and risks, GBV, substance abuse among others.



ZNNP+ team interviewing community member during the event. Mt Darwin, Zimbabwe. ©ZNNP+, 2023



Community members hold-up placards that read Zero Deaths, Zero high viral loads, Zero Cervical cancer, Zero new infections, Zero Defaulters as they celebrate wins in the fight against AHD. Mt Darwin, Zimbabwe. © ZNNP+, 2023.

Appreciation also goes to World Vision for funding the transportation of ART and health staff from Karanda Hospital to Kamutsenzere for easy access to PLHIV. ZIM-TTECH also played a key role in the formation of CARGs, and funding of outreach ART distribution. ZNNP+ District and Provincial office provided technical support and guidance. National AIDS Council, in particular DAC Katsande of Mt



Some of the community members gathered during a pre-planning meeting ahead of the event to celebrate their milestones in curbing AHD. Mt Darwin, Zimbabwe. ©ZNNP+, 2023

Darwin provided necessary material and technical support.

Today the Ward stands strong as a symbol of resilience demonstrating how PLHIV have endured medication and achieved zero high viral load, zero cervical cancer, zero defaulter, zero new infections, zero STIs in their ward and CARGs. The people feel and look strong, and the system of ART distribution is intact with all quality, validity, and relevance. DSD models have improved disclosure, adherence, and health awareness in Mt Darwin.

Working with dedicated partners, the aforementioned stands out as real and practical community-heroes and heroines. More partners are genuinely needed in addressing problems on

HIV, including from the non-traditional health partners such as World vision who collaborated from a child-sensitive perspective. The story of Kapiriri can never be sweeter than realising that the health facilities, as allies in community systems strengthening have measured up in assisting communities to plan and execute innovations in ART distribution. We thank you!!

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