

In Our Hands

LSHTM Film Screening and Introduction to Unitaid-PSI STAR Initiative

BACKGROUND

Despite concerted efforts towards UNAIDS “90-90-90” HIV testing, treatment and retention targets set for 2020, almost a third of people living with HIV still do not know their status.

Proactive distribution of free HIV self-testing kits is a new approach pioneered in Malawi and evaluated with multiple implementation-research projects under the Unitaid/PSI STAR Project 2015-17, and Initiative 2017-20. The Project Phase distributed 485,000 self-test kits in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe and catalysed rapid policy and regulatory development, with low and middle-income countries now able to access low-cost quality-assured HIVST kits with donor or government funds. The STAR Initiative includes ambitious scale-up and transition plans in the original three countries, plus South Africa, Swaziland and Lesotho.

Wellcome Trust-funded research primed this process, and has also funded “In Our Hands”, a Public Engagement Film showing in eight different locations on and around World AIDS Day 2017. Villagers were empowered to tell their stories from rural Malawi using participatory film-making.

This LSHTM screening includes preliminary presentations summarising the key findings and achievements under STAR and related projects, with Panel Discussions from LSHTM, PSI and WHO, followed by a Drinks Reception, with all welcome.

FILM SYNOPSIS

“The human is a difficult creature, and will wait to hit zero before going to hospital for a test.” Mrs Harrison, Community Worker & ‘Expert Client’, Chifunga, Malawi

Visiting a clinic for an HIV test is easy to put off. It may mean taking time off work, there is the chance of being recognised, and you must face the possibility of finding out you have HIV. Now imagine that in addition, your nearest health centre is a three hour walk away, the clinic queues are long and the waiting area is exposed for passers-by to see.

In Our Hands: A film about HIV self-testing from a community perspective

Poor access to HIV screening services costs lives: the people of Chifunga, Malawi, like many other rural, low resource settings, have experienced this first hand. In this 27 minute community-led documentary, village film-makers draw attention to key social, economic and psychological barriers that prevent people from going for an HIV test, and go on to ask what are the pros and cons of testing in the privacy of your own home.

Meet Frank, a loving father who has felt the tragic consequences of testing late - what drives him to speak out and tell his story? Find out why young Nsombe has been waiting to test for HIV for so long - does the ability to test himself, and in private, mean he will finally go through with it? And hear the inspiring stories of people who have not let a positive HIV status affect their health, happiness or ability to contribute fully to their community.

In Our Hands is a community-led documentary funded by Wellcome Trust. It is a collaboration between Global Health Film initiative, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM), Malawi-Liverpool-Wellcome Research Programme (MLW) and WHO, and produced by Millie Harvey.

MLW is part of the Unitaid/PSI Self-testing Africa (STAR) Initiative. STAR also includes Population Services International (PSI: Prime), LSHTM (Research Consortium Lead), UCL, LSTM, Country Institutes (MLW, CeSSHAR and ZAMBART) and WHO.