

Strengthening Community-Run HIV Services - Final Report, December 2024

We are delighted to share with you our Final Report on the second year of Temwa's Strengthening Community-Run HIV Services project. The project began its second and final year in November 2023 and has continued to build on the progress made in the previous year.

Project context and aims

Between 2019 and 2022, Temwa implemented a provider-initiated HIV testing and counselling (PITC) initiative across all five local health centres in Nkhata Bay North, enhancing access to HIV services for the 55,000 residents. This approach, endorsed by the World Health Organization, ensures that every clinic visitor is automatically offered an HIV test. Subsequently, a new project was launched in November 2022 to further decrease the region's high HIV prevalence rate by strengthening the health centres' capacity to provide HIV services. In its inaugural year, Temwa supported 18 outreach clinics in remote communities, alongside introducing an index testing system to trace contacts of individuals recently diagnosed with HIV. We also conducted awareness events to provide communities with accurate, destigmatized information about HIV.

Community Health Achievements

We are proud to report that, during the reporting period, the project has expanded awareness and access to HIV testing, as well as reduced stigma, through the following achievements:

Outcome 1: Increased adoption of HIV and AIDS control methods within the community

Improved understanding about HIV and AIDS helps community members make informed decisions about their personal health. Health centre data has shown that having access to information from trusted sources helps bring about changes in mindset and behaviour. Temwa's awareness events help reduce the stigma surrounding testing and encourage people to find out their HIV status. This messaging is tailored to specific high-risk groups, including young people, fishermen, and sex workers.

Quarterly awareness events in 5 health centre areas, including evening film shows, drama performances and community discussions

Following on from the hugely successful HIV awareness events held in the first year of the project, Temwa supported another 20 awareness events in 2024, 5 in each quarter, in collaboration with the District HIV/AIDs Coordinating Office. These included evening film shows, drama performances and community discussions.



Drama performances – These were performed by ‘Theatre for Development’ and were highly effective in engaging audiences and facilitating the understanding of complex HIV prevention and control methods, reaching 15,000 people over the year, with drama performances held in Chikwina, Chigwere, Bula, Sanga, Usisya, Yepe, Ruarwe, and Khondowe in March and July. 60% of attendees were female, highlighting significant participation from women, a key demographic in HIV prevention and control.

Figure 1: Drama performance raising awareness on HIV at Ruarwe

Evening film shows – 5 film shows were conducted at Mzgola, Bula, Usisya, Ruarwe and Khondowe. These films were produced by Temwa with authorisation from the Ministry of Health. A total of 8,000 community members attended the film shows. Question and answers sessions were also part of the activity for community members to reflect on what they have seen in the film and what is really happening in their communities.



Figure 2: Community members attending at evening film show on HIV at Mzgola



These performances generated a high demand for HIV testing, prevention and management tools as well as counselling services, with many individuals seeking further information about HIV and its prevention. The use of edutainment through drama performances has been found to be a highly effective method of conveying HIV prevention messages in an engaging way. Temwa is now incorporating these creative methods to ensure key messages resonate with diverse audiences into its project to improve access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services from 2025.

Figure 1: Vimbuza a traditional dance conducted at events

Community discussions

Community sessions created a safe and supportive environment where young people could openly discuss the challenges they face. Topics such as mental health, relationships, peer pressure, and personal well-being were explored, allowing teens to share their experiences and gain valuable insights. The opportunity to connect with peers facing similar challenges also helped reduce feelings of isolation and stigma, promoting a sense of community and belonging.

The psycho-social support sessions have empowered young individuals to identify practical ways to address the issues affecting their lives. Teens were provided with tools and skills needed to handle challenging situations and make informed, constructive decisions. By addressing their concerns in a nurturing environment, the initiative has significantly contributed to improving their mental and emotional well-being. Notably, all 32 participants have adhered to their Antiretroviral Therapy Treatment (ART). Health records indicate that 94% of these teens have shown improved viral suppression, while 88% reported fewer clinic visits due to illness.

The initiative has also promoted healthier lifestyles among participants. Teens have adopted better dietary habits and engaged in regular physical activity, with 70% reporting increased energy levels and improved physical health. There has also been a 30% reduction in cases of depression and anxiety symptoms reported during the final quarter of the year. These changes have laid a strong foundation for healthier, more positive futures.



The success of the psycho-social support sessions has demonstrated the power of community-driven interventions in addressing the unique challenges faced by adolescents. By providing a platform for open dialogue, equipping teens with practical tools, and fostering a sense of belonging, the initiative has contributed to building resilience, improving mental health outcomes, and supporting long-term adherence to healthy behaviours.

Figure 2: Young people at Bula during community discussions on HIV

Bi-monthly Radio Programmes on HIV topics

Radio programmes have been a vital way of reaching approximately 20,000 people living in remote communities in Nkhata Bay North with accurate health messaging. In the first year, radio programmes successfully created a platform for dialogue between health experts, young people and wider community members to discuss the stigma associated with HIV and to raise awareness of available HIV services available. Unfortunately, in the second year of the project, the Usisya Community Radio Station was not in operation, so resources were reallocated to producing short films for the evening shows.

Annual football competitions in the five areas, to engage community members on HIV issues through sport

Football competitions were conducted at Bula, Chikwina and Usisya. Temwa was unable to host football competitions in the remaining two areas due to the rising cost of commodities. Nevertheless, the three football competitions were attended by over 30,000 community members. Overall, the football competitions were a very effective way of educating a large number of people, improving awareness of HIV and prevention methods, including empowering individuals to take control of their own health and testing decisions in a private setting. A total of 117 people accessed HIV Testing and Counselling services during the events, leading to the identification of 3 new HIV infections, and ART was promptly initiated for those testing positive. Additionally, 278 oral self-testing kits were distributed to community members, allowing them to test themselves and their partners at home. Furthermore, 1,327 condoms were distributed to over 600 community members, promoting safer sexual practices as part of the ongoing efforts to prevent the spread of HIV.



In June, a Football Tournament was held over 2 days in Usisya with more than 11,000 community members attending. Officials from the HIV Department at Bula health centre were present during the event to disseminate HIV/Aids messages.

Figure 3: Community members watching football at Usisya during a football competition aiming at raising HIV awareness among community members

Many participants requested a desire to use condoms and the health provider gave assurances that condom distribution would continue, despite current shortages at Bula Health centre. The event highlighted the critical need for condoms and demonstrated the ongoing challenges in health resource distribution and the need for continued advocacy.

Annual production and distribution of information materials

100 T-shirts and 50 calendars were produced and distributed to community members over 2024. The T-shirts were presented to winners of the football competitions, to quiz winners and to the first users of HIV testing and counselling services.

Outcome 2: Strengthened HIV control services at local health facilities

Because of their isolated location, the five health centres in Nkhata Bay North are under-resourced and hard to access. As Temwa's awareness-raising events increase interest in HIV testing, it is vital that these services are widely available and sustainably run. Temwa provided tailored support to health centres and local governance to ensure these structures were able to deliver HIV services independently in the future.

Training of local governance structures and healthcare providers on new HIV/Aids guidelines

Training was provided to Local Governance Structure (LGS) members in each of the 5 health centres. This included updating members on initiatives such as Provider-Initiated Testing and Counselling (PITC), index testing, outreach HIV Testing and Counselling, and door-to-door testing. A total of 50 LGS members were equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills on the new HIV/AIDS guidelines. This training empowered LGS members to fully support the project, as they now had a clear understanding of the Project's goals and objectives.

According to the review meetings, 98% of LGS members are now actively supporting outreach clinics by mobilising community members, providing spaces for activities, and engaging community members with information about HIV/Aids. This has significantly contributed to the success of the project, with LGS members engaging more effectively with their communities, helping to increase the reach and impact of the project.

Quarterly progress review meetings at the 5 health centres

Many community members participated in the 4 Quarterly progress review meetings held in each of the 5 health centres. These review meetings highlighted specific challenges and allowed for a swift response. For example, a meeting in February in Usisya attended by sex workers, women and young adolescent girls led to raised awareness that adolescent girls' risk of contracting HIV/Aids was increased by sex workers lack of access to and use of contraceptive methods.

This led to all sex workers being provided with condoms, and a further 16 sex workers accessing Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) at the health centres, after engaging in unprotected sex with their clients. A further 4 adolescent girls accessed PEP from the health facility after having unprotected sex. In general, discussions led to a greater focus on improving adolescent girls' access to reproductive health services, including through a combination of education, contraceptive methods, and timely access to PEP and ART.

The second year of the Project also saw Health Centres distribute 7,512 condoms to community members, in recognition of the importance of this form of contraception in reducing early pregnancies, unsafe abortions and in reducing the prevalence of HIV/Aids in the broader community.

Additionally, community feedback during the meetings highlighted the importance of tailored outreach programmes. In response, health centres began organizing bi-monthly educational sessions, attended by an average of 120 participants per session, focusing on topics such as safe sex practices, the importance of regular HIV testing, and the benefits of early ART initiation. To ensure inclusivity, these sessions were conducted in local languages and utilized relatable storytelling techniques, which resonated strongly with the audience.

The impact of these efforts is further evident in the data from the health centres:

- HIV testing uptake among adolescent girls increased by 40% compared to the previous year
- Reports of unplanned pregnancies among adolescent girls dropped by 18%
- ART adherence rates among HIV-positive individuals improved from 78% to 85%

These results underscore the effectiveness of community-driven health interventions. By actively engaging diverse groups, including vulnerable populations such as sex workers and adolescents, the project demonstrated how collaborative discussions could lead to sustainable health improvements for the entire community.

Support health centres with monthly Outreach Clinics to remote areas



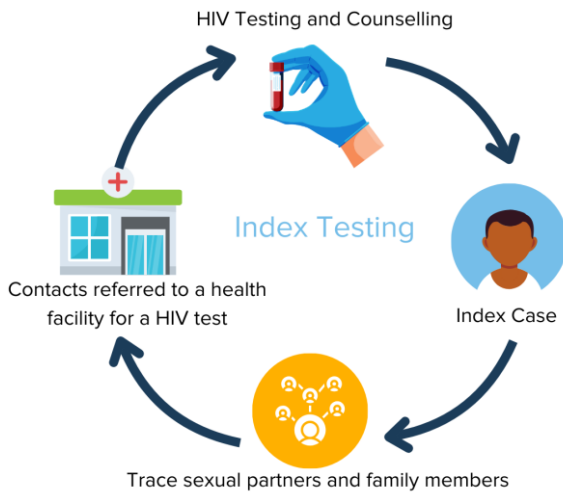
The project continued to focus on supporting the five health centres in the region with regular outreach clinics and weekend testing. The mobile outreach clinics reached people who have never been tested before or have not tested in a long time due to long distances from health facilities. The areas targeted are all around 15-30 km away from their nearest health centre.

18 clinics were conducted in Year 1 and proved successful in providing various health services alongside actual HIV testing. A further 28 clinics were conducted in Year 2. The outreach clinics successfully reached a total of 6,374 community members, providing a variety of health services, including HIV Testing and Counselling (HTC). Of these, 2,137 individuals were registered for

HTC, with 1,148 of them being first-time testers, compared to just 569 first-time testers in 2023. This rise suggests that outreach efforts are effectively encouraging people to get tested thanks to increasing awareness. Across the five facilities involved in the outreach, more than 2,000 HIV tests were conducted, leading to the identification of 79 new HIV infections over the year. These individuals were promptly initiated on ART.

Index Testing and contact tracing

The project provided support for index testing and contact tracing in 4 health facilities. Index testing and contact tracing helped identify individuals who may be at particular risk of contracting HIV, so that they could be invited to receive testing, counselling, and treatment, thus preventing further transmission.



As part of the work of the outreach clinics, ‘at risk’ individuals were notified and invited to get tested and offered PEP where appropriate. For example, 78 sex workers participated in the outreach efforts, with 68 from brothels and 10 from home-based settings. Those from brothels were given access to outreach clinics in their bars at the brothels where they were able to easily access services such as HIV testing and counselling, STI screening and treatment, TB screening, family planning and cervical cancer screening.

As a result, 46 sex workers received HTC, and 7 were diagnosed with new HIV infections. Additionally, 22 sex workers were treated for syphilis, and 28 were found to have Hepatis B. The initiative highlighted the importance of targeting health care services to high-risk populations, ensuring sex workers receive the care and support they need to manage their health and prevent the spread of infection.

Taking into account community outreach clinics, sex workers outreach clinics, index testing/contact tracing and HTC at the Health Centres, a total of 211 new infections were identified and the individuals put on ART treatment. However, while 70% of health facility clients were able to access HTC services, primarily through Provider-Initiated Testing and Counselling, there remains a significant gap in access to HIV testing among the general population. Less than 2% of the general population is using HTC services, indicating ongoing barriers hindering community engagement with testing. This disparity underscores the ongoing need for community-based outreach and awareness-raising to improve access to HIV testing outside of health care facilities.

Community Advocacy Meetings on the quality of HIV Service delivery

Overall, a total of 50 hospital management committee members were trained to advocate for the necessary services within their facilities. Earlier in 2024, Khondowe Health Centre lacked Unigold HIV testing kits, Bula Health Centre had only one HTC provider who also served as a Health Surveillance Assistant (HSA), and Ruarwe Health Centre had no dedicated HTC provider, relying on a retired HSA who volunteered for the role. Improved advocacy led to the training of two hospital attendants at Bula and Ruarwe Health Centres as HIV Testing and Counsellors. Improved advocacy also led to calls for more testing kits and other necessary equipment which has now been supplied, greatly enhancing the quality and availability of HTC services across all health facilities.

Community story:

Temwa Local Football Competition Offers Community Members a Chance to Know Their HIV Status



Neverson Chinula is a farmer from Wakhalika Village, where he lives with his wife and four children. His primary source of income is farming, and he is well-known in the community for his dedication to both his work and family.

On the day of the event, Neverson had initially planned only to watch a football match and support his team, Might Bula Select. However, when he arrived at the event, he was greeted by an announcement about the availability of HIV/AIDS services, including free testing. This ignited his interest, as he had always made it a point to get tested yearly for HIV. Seeing this as an excellent opportunity, Neverson decided to get tested.

"I am happy for this opportunity because now I know that I am well and will continue to protect myself", he shared. His experience was not only a health check but also a reminder of the importance of regular HIV testing and awareness.

What stood out to Neverson was the combination of health services with entertainment, which is rare in his community. The presence of music, games, and the football match created a vibrant atmosphere, making it easier for people to engage with the health services offered. He noted how the youth were particularly excited and eager to get tested, as they lined up to learn their status.

Neverson's story highlights the importance of combining entertainment with health education, making vital services like HIV testing more accessible and appealing to the community.

Community story:

Edas Finds Hope for Her Daughter's Future Through Temwa's HIV and STI Prevention Program

Susan, a 16-year-old student at Usisya Community Day Secondary School, has been part of Temwa's education sessions aimed at preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV. Her mother, Edas, is deeply grateful for the positive changes she has seen in her daughter as a result of these sessions.

Before participating in the project, Susan's behaviour was a major source of concern for Edas. Susan would often return home late, spending time chatting with boys at the market or near the lake. Edas worried that her daughter might become pregnant or contract an STI. As a single mother, Edas struggled to have meaningful conversations with Susan about her behaviour. Susan would often dismiss her concerns, stating she would do as she pleased.

However, after Susan began attending Temwa's community discussions, her attitude shifted. She gained valuable knowledge about sexual health, the risks of STIs, and the importance of making informed decisions. Through Temwa's guidance, Susan learned to recognize the potential dangers of risky behaviours and understood the importance of protecting herself and her future.



Edas has noticed a significant improvement in her daughter's behaviour. Susan now comes home on time, and is more focussed on her education. As a result, Edas feels a renewed sense of hope for her daughter's future. She believes that Susan will not only complete her education but will also go on to secure employment that will allow her to support her mother and siblings.

Figure 4 - Susan seating second from the left during community discussions on HIV and STI prevention session

Thank you

Temwa is incredibly grateful for your generous support towards this project, which has significantly improved access to HIV testing, treatment and counselling for many people in remote areas in Nkhata Bay. The project has helped to reduce the stigma of HIV/Aids through awareness campaigns, including through community discussions, drama and film shows, and football competitions that have provided communities with clear, accurate information on HIV. At the same time, Temwa has supported the improved availability of health services to meet the increased demand for testing and treatment. In 2024 over 4,000 tests were conducted with 211 new HIV infections identified, with all those diagnosed initiated on ART.

From early 2025, Temwa's support will broaden to improve access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services, that will continue to create healthier, empowered, and resilient communities who are able to transform their own futures.

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