



PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY: CONSIDERING FUTURISTIC THINKING ON DONOR DEPENDENT VOLUNTARY MEDICAL MALE CIRCUMCISION PROGRAM, MALAWI CASE STUDY

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Key Words

Donor, Funding, Futuristic, Sustainability, Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision

ABSTRACT

Malawi is faced with various challenges related to health care due to high population and poverty worsened by disease burden with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Malaria and Tuberculosis recording high incidences. The country has strong health policies and strategic plans, but has no sustainability strategy. The objective of this seminar paper was to assess futuristic sustainability of Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC) program for HIV prevention in Malawi. We reviewed and analyzed literature on sustainability, frameworks on strategic management and public health. Of the 9 health sustainability framework domains, three are considered and implemented by the VMMC program. Out of 8 Health systems building blocks, non-is entrenched to support sustainability efforts for VMMC program. Though donor funding has drastically reduced, no efforts have been put in place to have a road map towards sustainable VMMC program. Despite VMMC program having been in force since its launch in 2012 where close to one million men have received services, efforts have not been thought out on sustainability. As a result, the continuity of VMMC program is at risk.

Introduction

Malawi is situated in Sub-Sahara Africa, one of the countries in the southern region of Africa neighboring Mozambique to the south and East, Zimbabwe to the South West, Zambia to the West and Tanzania to the North. According to United Nations, (2019) Malawi had a population of 19,129,952 people. This figure is projected to 20,589,251 by United Nations (UN) world meter data as of Friday 7th April 2023. Report by Kampanje, (2023) showed that most Malawians live on less than \$2.15 a day, as estimated using data for 2019. This puts Malawi as fourth poorest country in the world.

Due to high population and the economic state, Malawi is faced with various challenges related to health care. This challenges include, inadequate trained health care human resource; poor health infrastructure as well as short supply of equipment; supplies, commodities and medicines that hindered the quest of providing universal health care services. The situation is worsened by heavy disease burden with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Malaria and Tuberculosis recording high incidences as well as high modality rates.

Report by United National Children's Fund, (2020) stated that combined allocation of key social sectors of Health, Education and Social protection has gradually reduced as a share of total government expenditure from 35% in 2019/20 to hit a five year low of 29%. Reduced funding adversely affected functions of the ministry of health and restrained sustainability efforts as well as its vision of "achieving a state of health for all the people of Malawi that would enable them lead quality and productive health life". It would likewise hinder the task to fulfilling its mission geared towards "providing strategic leadership for the delivery of comprehensive range of quality, equitable and efficient health services to the people of Malawi". Connolly et al asserted, (2024) that Malawi Health Sector Strategic Plan III (2023-2030) has nine priority areas that included: service delivery; infrastructure; medical equipment; human resources; medical products; technology; digital health, research; leadership; governance and health finance. This is a blue print road map geared to the provision of universal health coverage in Malawi.

Under service delivery, health prevention docket operated and handled all prevention services to include HIV and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). This paper discusses Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC) a HIV prevention program, managed by Department of HIV/AIDS (DHA) and is guided by five-year multi-sectoral response to HIV epidemic and National HIV Strategic Plan (NSP) 2020–2025 to response to HIV epidemic.

The plan is a succession of 2015-2020 HIV NSP, building on previous achievements and addressed areas that needed improvement. The goal of UNAIDS, (2020) is to meet and Fast-Track 95:95:95 targets and eliminating HIV as a public health threat by 2030. Connolly et al noted, (2024) dramatic decline in the number of new infections from 111,000 in 1992 to 33,000 in 2019 and the decline in AIDS deaths from 71,000 in 2004 to 13,000 in 2019. As of September 2019, progress on the 95:95:95 was 93:84:92. The vision of Malawi National Strategic Plan is "A health and prosperous nation free from HIV and AIDS." This document outlines the mission, objectives, strategic interventions, activities, implementation arrangements and resources required. The strategy is aligned to various global frameworks that include, but not limited to, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Joint United Nations program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Fast Track Strategy, and the 2017 Global HIV Prevention Road Map. It's also linked to local frameworks such as: The Constitution of the Republic of

Malawi; HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Management) Act; the Malawi Growth & Development Strategy 2017-2022; the National Health Policy; the Health Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022; and the National Gender Policy 2012-2017. The NSP recognizes the ten Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are key for ending the HIV epidemic (No Poverty; Zero Hunger; Good Health and Well-Being; Quality Education; Gender Equality; Decent Work and Economic Growth; Reduced Inequality; Sustainable Cities and Communities; Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; and Partnerships for the Goals). Strong leadership and governance in all relevant sectors and strong, resilient and sustainable health systems critical to the HIV response. Thus, NSP priority is towards response by highlighting priority areas. Reaching the 2030 HIV incident, goals in high burden countries, particularly the Southern and Eastern Africa countries, and then keeping HIV incidents at low levels, required the right combination of prevention at high coverage levels.

Malawi launched VMMC program in 2012, since then 950,000 men have benefited from this service diverting approximately 190,000 new HIV infections and targets 940,000 by 2025. Since the launch, the program has entirely succeeded in its implementation through donor support. Majorly, 50% of the resources is from Presidents Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR). Other donors who have supported the program included, World Bank and Global Fund. Governments contribution is very minimal despite VMMC being a noble HIV prevention program that has contributed to significant reduction of HIV prevalence in the country.

Malawi government adopted several HIV prevention plans and strategies aimed at reducing Sexual Transmission of HIV as part of a comprehensive national response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Payne et al report, (2021) showed a decline in HIV prevalence in the adult population from 16.2% in 1999 to 8.1% in 2020 and this is attributed to responses put in place. Despite this and other achievements, UNAIDS, (2020) reported that Malawi is still registering more than 30,000 new HIV infections annually. This calls for strengthening the current HIV prevention strategies. Malawi's situational analysis on male circumcision also observed protective effects. The program targeted districts with high HIV prevalence and low circumcision prevalence.

It is in this context that this paper focused on futuristic funding of the VMMC program. Futuristic means relating to, describing, depicting events in an imagined future. What is the futuristic thinking of VMMC program in the absence of donor support? It is important for the government, institutions or organizations to think futuristic after experiencing effects of HIV epidemic. If the epidemic is well managed and in the process of eradication, therefore, those experiences, lessons and challenges need to be used as opportunities to control it and ensure maintenance of service delivery while resources are sustained. Looking at the resource for the VMMC program, its evident most funds are from donors and little from the local government, therefore it's the right moment for the program to be evaluated so that its implementation is geared towards sustainable efforts.

Sustainability on the other hand is the ability of a program to continue implementation even if a source of funding is lost. As a result, decreasing dependence on one source of funding and shifting financial support from program implementation to a new funding stream. VMMC program in Malawi is donor dependent with about 50% of resources from US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). In the past few years, the program has seen decline resources

allocation by PEPFAR, igniting the thinking of sustainability of the program among involved stakeholders. Sustainability should be planned and be part of the program strategy.

Project sustainability plays a role in providing sustained development for the current population without impeding the future populations, thus sustainability in projects all around the world has emerged as one of the important focus of not only researchers but leaders and policymakers as there are correlations with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Research Question

- Will there be sustainability of the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision program in the future without donor support?

Overall Objective

To Assess futuristic sustainability of Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision program in Malawi.

Specific Objective

1. To assess the strategic formulation of VMMC program.
2. To determine effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of VMMC program.
3. To ascertain sustainability plans for the VMMC program.
4. To propose workable recommendations for futuristic sustainable strategies for VMMC program.

Scope of Study

The Information presented on this paper is based on scholarly works through peer reviewed journals and articles on the topic of sustainability in project management. The scope of the study is limited to the definitional understanding of sustainability, its essential components and significance; relevant frameworks and program experience. The time scope is within the last 5 years of studies in project sustainability.

Justification

The VMMC program in Malawi has been implemented since its launch in 2012 during which time National VMMC policy and guidelines were developed as well as the standard operating procedures heavily borrowed from WHO guidelines. This was built up within the development of the current national HIV strategic plan. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Health sector strategic plans strengthens program integration into the national health system plan. This paper aims to consider stakeholders' perspective and values, program mission; objectives; protocols, procedures; resource efficiency; objectives, mandates; policies; regulations and laws.

Principles of Sustainability

Sustainability requires an integrated approach that takes into consideration environmental concerns along with economic development. What's Sustainability? A report by United Nations Brundtland commission, (1987), defined sustainability as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Today, there are almost 140 developing countries in the world seeking ways of meeting their development needs, but with the increasing threat of climate change, concrete efforts must be made to ensure development today does not negatively affect to future generations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) form the framework for improving the lives of populations around the world and specific and relevant to this paper is SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being.

Why is Sustainability Important? It's normal for stakeholders and executives to ask whether sustainable practices are worth it in the long run. Indeed, some sustainable solutions are costly, and in many cases, it's hard to quantify whether or how specific methods will be beneficial. What are the Benefits of Sustainability? Your corporate sustainability initiatives come with many benefits to your business. We may not discuss them all in detail, but we will just highlight a few. The following are the apparent advantages:

- Improved image and competitive advantage
- Increase productivity and cost reductions
- Increase business ability to comply with regulations
- Attract employees and investors
- Reduce waste
- Good impression on shareholders, who ultimately improve partnership and collaboration
- Enjoy tax benefits
- Attract more consumers
- Ensures the continuation of the business
- Improves lives of those who receive services from the program

The Principles

The principles of *environmental*, *social*, and *economic* sustainability each focusing on a company's impact. Corporate sustainability succeeds only when these three principles are included in their sustainability strategy. In respect to the VMCC program, these principles are considered and ultimately used for turning around the program towards sustainable initiative and enabling men to access to this services at ease and efficiently. You're probably wondering, then, what corporate sustainability is and how corporations can adhere to sustainable development by including these three principles in their sustainability strategy. The framework below on strategic management will provide some insight.

Theoretical Framework

A project designed by World of Work, (2019) modelled this strategic management theoretical framework that gives a high-level summary of a cyclical process of strategic creation. The strategy is split into a repeated formulation and implementation phases, each of which has its own sub-steps and activities.

Strategic Management Framework

Strategic framework provides a detailed overview of the process of a strategic process. The strategy process is separated by the framework into three different high-level activities that include, defining Vision/Mission, formulating strategy and implementing strategy. Each strategy has substages which compliments the structures below.

Stage 1: Vision and Purpose (or Mission)

Creation of an organizational vision and mission is the first activity that needs to be completed in the Strategic Management Framework. It will be a constant point of reference throughout the remainder of the organization's strategy process. For the Ministry of Health in Malawi, this is in place and we ego the government for having this organizational components for better direction and reference.

Stage 2: Strategy Formulation

Formulating a strategy becomes the second stage of this framework. This is done in several sub-stages, as described below:

Analysis

Analysis of the current state is the first sub-stage of strategy formulation. It's impossible to decide on and create a strategy if you don't understand the lay out of the ground. This involves analyzing a wide range of factors. At this stage, organizations consider and analyzes a range of factors including: the wider economy, their industry and their own specific capabilities, strengths and weaknesses. There are a wide range of strategic analysis tools that can help with this stage of thinking as presented below:

External Environment

These are factors outside the organization that can impact its performance. The five components of external environment are:

- Customer
- Government
- Economy
- Competition

- Public opinion

All above synergizes each other in the process as are presented in the figure below which shows the interrelations of the five components.

Industrial Environment

Its purpose is to determine the level of competitive pressure the business is likely to be exposed to in the foreseeable future. Industrial environment includes the following factors: Social, Demographic, Technology, National Economy, Governmental, and environmental.

Internal Assessment

Helps to understand factors contributing to sales, costs, profits, market share and relationship between these and other salient organizational characteristics.

Strategy Formation

After understanding the current state, a detailed analysis of the environment and industry, consider opportunities and threats that may be faced, with this combined understanding of the current state and some future analysis, an action plan and activities to be conducted is planned for while focusing on how to compete in the market place or environment.

In essence, these activities are the creation of the organization's strategy.

- i. Opportunities, Risks Scenario's

Recognizing and acting on strategic risks is vital to mitigate costly problems. Risks arise from inside or outside factors which require close monitoring.

- ii. Decisions

The eight types of strategic decisions include: Growth, problem shifting, goals balancing, escalation, rewarding, resource allocation, problem fixing and cooperation.

Goal Setting

The last part of the strategy formulation stage of the strategic management framework is to create goals and targets relating to the defined strategy. It's great to know what is going to be done at a high level, but for the strategy to be useful it needs to include specific details to manage. To help with this, a scorecard is needed because it clearly demonstrates the flow and sequences of the set goals.

Policy and procedure

Policies are decision orientated while procedures are based on implementation

i. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Function, Business Units (BUs) & Corporate

These are tied to financials and are about revenue and profit margins.

ii. Measures and Scorecard

It is a record of performance picture. It is also important to pay attention to non-financial strategic metrics.

Stage 3: Implementing of Strategy

The third stage of this framework focuses on the implementation of strategy, which is considered to have two sub-stages.

Implementing a Strategic Structure

In this stage, it focuses and ensures effectively structured deliver of the strategy. All what is required are expected to be in the right place and at the right time. At a practical level, this means that to be prepared to start delivering an effective strategy there is need to have the right leaders and individuals, the right business units, right legal structures, right processes and policies and capital assets and the right strategic projects lined up to help deliver the strategy effectively. Once these pieces are in place, then implementation is ready to take off in the following sequence;

i. Organization, Structure & Leadership

This involves organization formal reporting relationship, procedures, relationship and decision-making processes. Leadership is the foundation of these processes.

ii. Initiatives, Programs

This involves identifying high priority reaching each individual milestone and communicating clear goals to the team.

iii. Mergers & Acquisitions (M&A) & Disposals

This is to create value and enhance financial gains by creating synergistic combinations with other firms. A firm can supplement or complement its core skills and resources.

Controlling Strategic Delivery

The last part of this model considers the need to effectively control and deliver objectives. Once all the right pieces have started being implemented, there is need to monitor and control performance on a constant basis. Frequent fine-tuning is required to ensure success and feedback plays an important role in this. The key message here is that control frameworks are essential for strategic success in most instances.

i. Budget & Financial Plans

Monitors specific and measurable financial strategic goals on a coordinated, integrated basis, thus enabling the firm to operate efficiently and effectively.

ii. Intensive structure

Requirement for more formal division of labor where groups of people handle activities related to specific function of the overall business.

iii. Review & Evaluation

Initiates managerial questioning of expectations and assumptions. This triggers a review of objectives and values and stimulates creativity in general alternatives

Summary of the Theoretical Framework

In summary this model of framework by world of work presented the three high level activities (Vision & Mission, Formulation and Implementation) each with sub steps and activities. All the steps of strategic management framework described above were followed in the formulation of all the strategies that the Ministry of Health and the VMMC program in Malawi put in place. However, a sustainability strategy lacks.

Methodology

We reviewed and analyzed comprehensive literature on the subject sustainability that relates to public health the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision for HIV prevention programing. We borrowed a theoretical framework on strategic management to help in the design of this paper as well as core domains of conceptual framework of the HIV public health program that relates to capacity and sustainability. Experience of VMMC Program by the author of this paper who is a clinical, public and community health specialist will be included.

Outcome of Literature and Framework Review

Relating to Framework concept above and reference to the Malawi Ministry of Health, a vision and mission that are well define are created as point of reference by the Ministry are below;

Vision: “to achieve a state of health for all the people of Malawi that would enable them lead quality and productive health life”

Mission: “provide strategic leadership for the delivery of comprehensive range of quality, equitable and efficient health services to all people in Malawi”

The Ministry of Health further formulated the following strategies as guiding principles for the ministry.

- National health sector strategic plans
- Nation HIV Strategic plans
- VMMC strategic plans

All the three documents are to provide ongoing organizational process of using available knowledge to document intended direction. The VMMC program further has national policy, program guidelines and standard operating documents which are more technical than governance or administrative. These documents put in consideration situation analysis, strategic formulation and goal setting during their drafting.

Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision is the implementing strategy in this paper. This was initiated with the launch of the new VMMC HIV prevention strategy in the year 2012. In the implementing strategic structure, a national VMMC department was put in place with district coordinators appointed, where all the team members were trained to be able to handle the tasks under their dockets. They became the key program leadership and decision-making body which was supported by a sub task working group composed of all stakeholders involved in the program. Controlling strategic delivery is composed of resource sourcing under which budget and financial plans are managed in addition to intensive structure that handles the roll out of VMMC service delivery countrywide. Finally, as related in the framework is the aspect of review or monitoring as well as program evaluation as it progresses in its implementation. This involved data collection, analysis, storage, reporting through national DHIS2 platform as well as dissemination of reports and knowledge sharing with stakeholders.

Health Sustainability Framework Core Domains

Nine core domain's: The nine domains provides the structure of health sustainability framework as is demonstrated in the foregoing statements for each domain.

Funding Stability

This involves making Long term plans based on a stable funding environment. Kripke et al stated (2016) that circumcising men in urban areas would be both cost-effective and cost-saving, with a VMMC procedure costing about \$120 USD and with 15 years of VMMC implementation resulting in lifetime HIV treatment costs savings of \$331 million USD. This finding assessed the cost efficiency and benefit of the ongoing program which fully relies on donor funding. It means then, that if funds will not be available, then the program will probably run into jeopardy.

Political Support

Internal and external political environment influences program funding initiatives and acceptance of the program. A study by Masese et al. asserts (2021), key challenges to VMMC uptake where there was involvement of female health workers in the circumcision team and no incentives provided to traditional circumcisers. According to the findings of this study, VMMC services should be provided in a culturally competent manner that respects and considers existing cultural beliefs and practices in the community. Coordination between local leaders and health workers should be encouraged so that VMMC services are provided in traditional settings, allowing for safe outcomes, and increasing VMMC uptake. This consideration was key during the development of the national VMMC policy and guidelines.

Partnership

The connection between program and community sustains continuity of the program. Sustainable development needs public participation, meaning new partnerships are needed for the SDGs' success. Initiatives like the Open Government Partnership (OGP) provide a clear example of what can work. It is in the same thinking that the VMMC program require more involvement of the community who are the users of this services to partner and participate in the implementation of the program to allow them contribute their wealth of opinion, knowledge, and resources where applicable. This opportunities will be achieved if only they are called to respond to those areas which require their inputs.

Organizational Capacity

Resources are needed to effectively manage the program and its activities. This programs requires prudent management. Sustainability is linked to “transfer of knowledge” from one generation to another within a community; and capacity and sustainability were enhanced when goals were shared and health outcomes achieved. The need to capacity build those who manage programs can't be over emphasized. Capacity building improves an organization's ability to recognize and mitigate sustainability risks. With capacity building, organizations can evaluate their processes and identify areas where they can reduce their environmental footprint and social impact. Sustainability is no longer an option but a necessity, and businesses that invest in capacity building are well-positioned to thrive in the rapidly changing business environment. VMMC program is no exception and therefore requires well planned capacity building initiatives of all players that include community, traditional and local political leaders, service providers and health ministry leaders at all levels.

Program Adaptation

This is the ability to adapt and improve in order to create effectiveness. This is reacting to varied situations and be able to be better problem solver, embrace change, keep open mind, practice mindfulness, and push yourself out of comfort zone. According to a publication in asana, (2023) the resource sources cites six steps to use to build, refine and grow adaptability skills. These resources are:

- i. Improve problem solving skills
- ii. Learn to embrace change
- iii. Keep an open mind
- iv. Keep ego out of the door
- v. Practice mindfulness
- vi. Be out of comfort zone

Program Evaluation

Achieving sustainability objectives is not easy. It requires approaches adapted to the specificity's types of operations. This will allow structured and regular follow-up, and that are integrated into the project dynamics. Sustainability monitoring can help address this challenge of follow up of project dynamics. Monitoring and evaluation of process, outcome, and data associated with program activities are instrumental in assessing the success of the program. Evaluation therefore in the VMMC program is of paramount importance as it supports decision making by program leadership as well as provides evident based success.

Communication

This involves strategic dissemination of program outcomes and activities with stakeholders, decision makers and public. It is critical to inform and even involve stakeholders. For sustainability strategy to succeed, communication is required to be part of the strategic plan.

Why a company/organization should communicate about sustainability? Sustainability goals give meaning to employees' jobs. This leads to increased engagement and higher retention rates. According to HP sustainability workforce survey, (2019) reported that 4 in 10 employees would look to change jobs if their company doesn't implement sustainable practices. It serves to differentiate a company. Although sustainability becomes common practice in all layers of society, it can today still create a competitive advantage that helps business performance. While Nielsen, (2020) reported that when a company or brand embraces purpose, they build reputation and grow loyalty over time. The VMMC program in Malawi require to maintain its respectable brand that has built good reputation for the last 12 years.

Public Health Impact

This is in reference to programs effect on health attitudes, perception and behavior in the area it serves. As Fava et al noted, (2023) individual attitudes and behavior related to health and disease are major components of clinical encounters. These factors shape lifestyle, presentation of symptoms, access to patient care, interactions between patients and physicians, adherence to medical advice, and response to treatment. Health attitudes and behavior may range from anxiety and worry about illness to various forms of denial, such as delay of seeking care and lack of adherence to treatment. When attitudes result in health-damaging behavior, they may be particularly difficult to understand and become a source of frustration to both physicians and patients. Devising appropriate responses by health care providers may contribute to improving final outcomes and decrease health care costs. The VMMC program therefore, require continuity since a large group of population has already received this one-time service. Their circumcision status will have negative attitude, perception and behavior to those members of community who would want to have it. The success of a program depends on its reputation, relationship to the community it services, community perception about the program as well as noticeable effects of its impact.

Strategic Planning

The process that defines program direction, goals and strategies is a program life cycle. It is the process of planning, executing, and closing the work of a program to achieve specific goals and meet the success criteria. It involves coordinating and managing various projects and activities to deliver a solution that meets business needs and objectives. It involves a structured methodology that guides organization from vision to implementation. Programs have a set of outcomes to achieve one or more business objectives. The success of a program management process depends on the ability to deliver business results.

The 9 pillars of health sustainability framework as described above remain the core domains of a strong sustainability framework that will ensure prudent resource mobilization as well as resource use. With the domains in place and well implemented, there is assurance of success in sustainability strategy any entity would like to put in place.

Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision Program Implementation Experience in Malawi

A quote from WHO, (2020) states that “Just because there is a rationale for a service to be free of charge and a priority with its own funding does not mean it should require its own parallel structures for data, health personnel, supply chain, trainings, supervision etc.”. The description of these building blocks below gives the picture of the current VMMC program in Malawi.

For a VMMC program to be implemented successfully, 8 health system blocks are required to be in place as described in details for each block. This information is provided by the author of this paper based on experience that describes what the situation looks like currently.

Leadership and Governance

a. Sustainability Plans and Policies

There is no national VMMC sustainability document that is officially launched and fully operational. VMMC for HIV prevention is part of the national essential package of health services.

b. Program leadership and Coordination

VMMC and its strategic direction is owned and driven by national and local leadership, however there is still a sizeable support and direction driven by external partners. An intermittent involvement and engagement of relevant departments of the MOH in implementing, coordinating and overseeing VMMC activities e.g. broader HIV program, adolescent health, sexual and reproductive health, surgical services, behavior change, Infection prevention and control, safety etc.

c. Accountability, Oversight and Regulation

Support and supervision systems are in place and led by VMMC focal point persons and with active synergy with other HIV and health focal points at MOH e.g. periodic joint support and supervision visits with HIV program that has VMMC as part of terms of reference. A technical working group (TWG) in the MOH for oversight and review of VMMC performance including quality of services is in place, however, the activities of the group is very wanting as they often meet and program

decisions take long to execute.

Funding and Sustainability:

a) Resource Allocation

There is advanced National essential package of intervention in terms of policy, strategic plans as well as advance resource estimation, but no direct funds from national budget to the program. There is a minimal harmonization of donor-financed elements of the VMMC budget with the national MOH budget as well as focus on diverse mix of mechanisms and strategies to fund VMMC including through national health budgets, general taxation, earmarked tax, external multilateral funds, bilateral funds, voluntary contributions, and direct payments.

The ministries of Finance and health have not fully taken ownership of VMMC programs in Malawi. They have not embedded VMMC into their domestic plans and funding mechanisms. Equally, civil society and or the private sector have not spearheaded efforts culminating in a concrete social concept.

b) Purchasing of Services

An Intermediate Public financial management (PFM) flexible enough to adjust to the demand of services. Remuneration of service providers for effective delivery of quality, safe and people-centered VMMC service delivery is not applicable at this stage as providers are not dedicated to VMMC program, but practically they are remunerated on part time basis when they work to support VMMC activities implemented through donor funds. No demand-side barriers addressed through demand-oriented financial incentives.

c) Financial Risk Protection

No Financial risk protection for all adolescents receiving services. This still is met through donor funds.

Health Service Delivery

i. Access (Strategic Planning of Health Services)

Comprehensive assessment of VMMC service delivery based on inclusive characteristics (availability, accessibility, acceptability, contact/use and effectiveness) to inform planning and programming is in place. Mapping of existing service delivery infrastructure and resources necessary to deliver VMMC in community-based and health facility settings to inform planning and implementation of VMMC services.

ii. Reorienting Service delivery Models

Service delivery platforms for reaching adolescents including underserved adolescents is in place (e.g. in and out of school, community-based platforms, digital platforms, faith-based platforms) MC services delivered within an integrated package of services. Very few VMMC services supported by the MOH as part of routine platforms at the primary care level. There are clear referral systems for VMMC to serve as an entry point to other adolescent services (e.g. mental health, SRH, non-communicable diseases, vaccinations etc.). Use of digital platforms and technology for delivery of MC services including continuity of information, tracking quality, facilitating patients' empowerment and reaching geographically isolated

communities.

iii. Safety and Quality

There is a robust national quality standards and safety systems in line with WHO and UNAIDS global standards for quality healthcare services.

Global and Regional Advocacy

There is need for multinational agencies to take leading role in global, regional and national-level advocacy, creating compelling advocacy materials to ensure that VMMC remains prominent on the agenda. Civil society need to hold government and funding agencies accountable to their commitments and engage with communities to raise awareness and boost demand creation.

Partnership and Collaboration

The VMMC program has weak partnership and collaboration. There is need to bring together all stakeholders at all levels (National, Regional, District, Subdistrict and Area development). This will help in coordinating the programs agenda as well as have a vibrant touch with the local leadership that will lead in mobilizing eligible men seek services at all delivery points.

Innovation and Commodities

1) Norms and Standards

There are country strategic guidelines and implementation plans to support rational use of VMMC supplies and equipment and a set minimum requirements and recommended specifications (as relevant) on supplies/equipment to perform a safe medical male circumcision and including national surgical guidance on safe surgical procedures.

2) Procurement and Distribution

Procurement and distribution of VMMC supplies and equipment are part of national procurement and supplies systems, though heavily managed by the donors.

3) Quality

o Are VMMC quality standards available and integrated into national standards for quality of supplies? This is still under the management of the donor mechanism. There is need for the national supply chain to take up this responsibility.

o Is there waste management system that addresses segregation, storage, transport, treatment, and disposal of all relevant health care waste categories? At facility level, yes, they are available as well as at service delivery level. Most health facilities do have good incineration facilities. Likewise, the national quality team have put in place quality guidelines and standards.

Strategic Information, Demand Creation and Accountability

1. Data Collection and Management

VMMC data collection systems in donor supported VMMC service delivery points use paper based and electronic systems, but for the MOH supported services, this is purely paper based, but reporting for all is electronic. VMMC data management and reporting systems is through national country owned and driven DHIS2 system.

2. Data Analysis and Usage

Data is disaggregation by age and by geography locations

3. Safety Monitoring

DHIS2 is the only and effective safety monitoring/surveillance system.

Work Force

1. Pre-service and Continuing Education

VMMC is not part of national pre-service training requirements for cadres being prepared to work in the health care sector with tasks to deliver VMMC in their scope of practice. Continuing education and re-training requirements for VMMC service providers are available and all providers must undergo full VMMC training before being certified to practice.

2. Management, support and supervision

A National system for supportive supervision of service providers is in place

3. Health Workforce Planning

Country-level health workforce plan is not based on projected estimates of the number of clients including clients who will need VMMC. This is exclusively based on the funders of the program at different regions of the country.

In summary, the 9 building blocks lacks in the current national government run VMMC program in Malawi. It is challenging to have a sustainable program without this building blocks which are crucial for the sustainable and efficient and effective programming. The current program as it is today is exclusively dependent on donor support.

Conclusion

Malawi a third country in the Sub-Saharan Africa like many of the countries in the region face an uphill tasks in providing quality care to its citizens. Malawi Ministry of Health have well thought out health policies, guidelines, standard operation procedures and strategic plans. However, the disease burden is enormous due to its inability to fund the health care programs. Other than administrative and some operational costs funded through the exchequer, no other domestic funds are directed to implement major health programs.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) program is the biggest health burden to the people of Malawi. However, the program since mid-1980's has technically and financially been supported by multi sectoral donors. Presidents Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) was launched in 2003 and has been rated to have provided the most resource support to the HIV/AIDS program with billions of dollars since its inception. Other donors

who followed suit included, Global Fund, World Bank, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Clinton Foundation, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) among other Donors. These donors have sustained the program for the last 24 years with great strides towards epidemic control and a target of ending HIV epidemic by 2030. There are indications that funding is significantly reducing, and the big question is, how will the local government manage to sustain that status without domestic funding to maintain service delivery.

Likewise, following the launch of the Voluntary Medical male Circumcision (VMMC) in 2008, the program has reached about 950,000 men with quality VMMC services. It's worth to note that this is a very noble service in the prevention of HIV infection through heterosexual relationship. There is a huge new infection diversion compared to other HIV prevention strategies. However, there is no sustainability strategy to guide into the roadmap of sustaining the continuity of this program in the event there is reduce or end of donor funding. This paper looked at the existing sustainability framework and out of the 8 core domains, only 3 i.e. program strategic plan, impact and program evaluation that have been fully incorporated into program design and implementation. The rest 5 are not and this creates a huge gap towards a sustainable programming. For a health program to achieve its goal and deliverables, there are 9 building blocks:

- Leadership and Governance
- Funding and Sustainability
- Health Service Delivery
- Partnership and collaboration
- Innovation and commodities
- Strategic information, communication, demand creation and accountability
- Workforce

Of all the 9 blocks, none has been put in full independent of the national government to support program continuation in the event funding reduces or ends. All what the program implements in respect to the block are squarely donor supported.

Recommendations

The author of this paper therefore based on the findings of this study proposes the following recommendations to assure the sustainability of the VMMC program in Malawi.

- A study research be conducted to understand the best and effective sustainability strategies for the VMMC program
- Capacity build health centers, community hospitals and district hospital and integrate VMMC as a routine service
- Train many clinical providers to provide VMMC service routinely at the facility they are assigned to work at

- Allocate funds for the VMMC program through the domestic fiscal budget

Acknowledgment

I wish to Thank Mr. Zdeno Matta for the professional guidance while writing this paper. This work was self sponsored.

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