

MALAWI HEALTH NEWS

Free antiretrovirals save lives in Malawi

Researchers report a ten per cent drop in overall mortality in Malawi following the distribution of free antiretroviral drugs. The government distributed free drugs to over 80,000 HIV/AIDS patients between 2004 and 2006. The authors, writing in *The Lancet*, say continued acceleration of the programme should lead to further drops.

2 million Malawi children targeted for vitamin 'A' supplement

Malawi aims to reach 2 million of its children with Vitamin A supplements and de-worming tablets in one of its major health campaigns to reduce child mortality.

The campaign has seen the government of Malawi mounting a task force of thousands of volunteers and health surveillance personnel, to cover the country's 28 districts, whose task will be to deliver the health supplies as well as educating parents on preventive healthcare needs.

Malawi has received international recognition in the last few years for its efforts to reduce under-five mortality, from 221 in 1990 to 120 in 2006.

Boom for Malawian HIV-affected fish farmers

Scientists at the WorldFish Center discovered that an innovative project to encourage fish farming among families affected by HIV/AIDS in Malawi has doubled the income for 1,200 households and greatly increased fish and vegetable consumption among the country's rural communities.

These findings were contained in a review of a multi-year initiative by the Malasia-based WorldFish Center, one of 15 centers supported by the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and World Vision, an international humanitarian aid organization, to promote aquaculture among "vulnerable populations" in Malawi.

Malawi rural men: "Having AIDS is macho"

"Rural men in Southern Malawi are convinced that being HIV positive reflects well on their masculinity and sexual prowess," a new report reveals. While many Malawian men were enlightened on the HIV-AIDS issue, some boast of having the virus as it proves they are sexually powerful.

This is documented in a study carried out by Amy Kaler, a sociologist at Canada's University of Alberta. The report also says: "Journals of recorded conversations, or passing reference about AIDS between the respondents, show that not only did they [men] associate manliness with HIV, but one man even corrects another by saying that he had slept with all the desirable girls in one particular village, and would be the sole cause of an AIDS outbreak there."

\$124 million grant for clinical trials in Africa

The European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) announced in June that it will inject over €80 million (around US\$124 million) into African medical

research. Half of this sum has already been approved and will go towards malaria research and the development of tuberculosis (TB) vaccines. The remainder, expected later this year, has been earmarked for HIV and TB treatment and for the provision of vaccines and microbicides. Dr. Victor Mwapasa of the College of Medicine is a grantee for a trial looking at whether antimalarial drugs, specifically artemisinin-based combinations, are safe to use in two particular groups — those who are HIV positive and children aged under six months.

Adopt TB approach to tackle chronic diseases

The framework for tuberculosis control should be adapted to counter Sub-Saharan Africa's growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), write Anthony D. Harries and colleagues in *PLoS Medicine*. The proportion of deaths in the region attributed to NCDs — including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, asthma and mental illness — was 20 per cent in 2001, but is set to double by 2020. NCDs are poorly managed and poorly followed up, even in specialist centres. This can be rectified by applying tuberculosis (TB) control frameworks such as directly observed therapy, short-course (DOTS) to NCDs. A key feature of DOTS is its "registration, recording and reporting" format, which keeps track of the number of patients signed up for treatment and records end-of-treatment outcomes. This enables the provision of uninterrupted drug supplies.