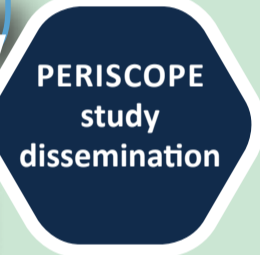




Cross sections of the PERISCOPE dissemination meeting at Tidziwe. Photos: Callisto Sekeleza

# 'LET'S DO MORE'



As one way of further reducing maternal mortality rates in the country, UNC Project has called for the need to increase more efforts and integration of issues to do with mental health and antenatal care among pregnant women in the country.

The call comes after presentation of results of the Periscope Study in Lilongwe on March 27 2023.

The Periscope study, which was in its pilot phase, aimed at finding out the fidelity, feasibility

and acceptability of having further studies on the topic.

Principal Investigator in the study, Angela Bengston said the introduction of anti-retroviral drugs for HIV positive pregnant women has resulted in a decrease in HIV transmission, maternal and infant mortality but the mental health of these women has been excluded which is why the study was conducted.

Bengston said issues of mental

health in pregnant women living with HIV has shown higher levels of depression due to fewer resources in psychosocial counselling and support.

"We know that people living with HIV, whether or not pregnant, have problems with mental health issues such as depression therefore we conducted the study to see if further studies could help in ending this. The study has shown that we can step up the efforts and do it at a

larger scale. At the end we hope that we can have routine antenatal care where we would have psychosocial counselling for these women", she said.

In response, Dr. Michael Udedi the Assistant director of Curative and medical rehabilitation responsible for mental health under the division of non-communicable diseases in the ministry of health said commended UNC Project for undertaking the study. >>> PAGE 2

## UNC Project awards 19 for publishing

Nineteen researchers received scientific writing awards on 24 March 2023 as Malawian first authors of papers published in various scientific journals.

The awardees included researchers currently working at UNC Project and also at various organisations but who collaborated with the Project.

Speaking during the auspicious occasion UNC Project Malawi Scientific Director Prof. Mina Hosseinipour thanked the awardees for working hard

in their studies to the point of publishing.

"This is the last part of your research work; so that people should know about it. Congratulations to all for this achievement," she said.

Echoing her remarks, UNC Project Malawi Country Director Mr. Innocent Mofolo said this marked the epitome of scientific achievement for the awardees.

"It's a quite a feat to research and publish in peer

reviewed journals. Thanks to all mentors who have made this possible," he said, adding that the organisation was looking forward to more of such publications.

UNC Project International Director Prof. Irving Hoffman summed it up, saying it was not an easy thing to be published in international journals.

He said this was a demonstration of hard work by the awardees.



Dr. Mvalo flanked by Profs. Hoffman and Hosseinipour upon receiving three awards.



**2** Two more classrooms availed at Dzama



**3** From driver to clinical officer



**4** Social welfare supports for Cyclone Freddy victims.

# PERISCOPE disseminates study findings

PAGE 1 >>>

Udedi said statistics show that indeed pregnant women who are HIV have mental health issues since being pregnant itself brings in issues to do with depression, stress and anxiety.

“The Periscope study has shown that it’s possible to integrate mental health care management and antenatal care in pregnant women. This is effective as women out there have mental issues that statistics show that 11% of women attending antenatal care pass through stress and depression among other things. We are currently providing social support and medication to those affected”, Udedi said.

The Periscope study used a Friendship Bench model of counselling which aims to addressing common mood disorders and enables clients to help themselves.

The study was conducted in Lumbadzi, Nathenje and Mitundu health centres in Lilongwe and started in December 2019 to September last year.



The classroom block during construction Photos: Innocent Mofolo

# TWO MORE CLASSROOMS

BY JAMESON MAKANDE

UNC Project continues to upgrade academic lives of learners at Nafutsa Full Primary School at Dzama Village in Lilongwe as it has just constructed a new two-classroom block

The development comes at a time enrolment is on the increase. The addition of the new block will go a long way in easing congestion of learners in classrooms at the facility.

Nafutsa head teacher, Maliseni Kafungu lauds the strides the school has accrued since its inception. He says the addition of the block will help the school in many ways, one of which is treat the congestion problem.

“Initially, this used to be an orphanage. There was just one church block which was housing

orphans and other children who would just come as well. This was also coupled with hunger issues which engulfed people from around. This resulted in huge number of dropouts. You would notice low availability of learners in school due to food scarcity issues,” he adds.

These are some of the problems that probed UNC to jump in to their rescue. The end goal was to help eradicate food scarcity and minimise school dropouts which was a huge barrier. Kafungu alludes that the schools in Dzama vicinity are far which was another reason for low patronage in schools as many children would not manage walking long distances. That would force them to in other activities like piece works, while others would resort to rogue and vagabond.

Then UNC Project came after

seeing the need that we were lacking so they initiated a project of distributing porridge flour and eggs to the learners. This coaxed many children to join the school. This prompted UNC project to initiate a building project which begun in 2014, elevating the school from a nursery setup to primary school which has now grown up to class 8.

Kafungu, however, sought for more aid especially with the toilets.

“The most pressing need now are the toilets. The toilets are in poor condition which at times forces some of the learners to relieve themselves in the surrounding fields to the dismay of field owners”, he adds.

On its inception as a primary school, the facility started with 371 students and 10 teachers. UNC Project would build additional blocks over the years. Currently, the school has 2058 learners and 32 teachers.



This is an in-house publication. Its mission is to promote a sense of community by communicating information relevant and vital to the operations and staff of UNC Project Malawi. In a drive to increase participation and bring variety to the publication, all UNC Project staff are free and encouraged to contribute articles in this publication. Write ups are welcome in the range 400 – 600 words for event stories and a maximum of 1000 words for other more technical issues worth sharing.

Forward your contributions to: [csekeleza@unclilongwe.org](mailto:csekeleza@unclilongwe.org)

Graphic layout:



COMMUNICATIONS



## Quality Improvement Data analysis and Manuscript Writing workshop

From March 27 to March 29 2023 clinical and public health practitioners from across the country converged in Salima for a quality improvement data analysis and manuscript writing workshop. The participants were the inaugural 2021 cohort of Quality Improvement MHIRST fellows. The workshop was facilitated by Dr. Mitch Matoga, Prof. Mina Hosseinpour and Melissa Stockton. Photo: Mitch Matoga

## Social Welfare donates to Cyclone Freddy victims in Zomba

Through out the month of March 2023, UNC Project Social Welfare team has been collecting items which they recently donated to Cyclone Freddy victims from Zomba-Thondwe area.

Speaking when he led the team in the donation, social welfare chairpeson Lawrence Chaduka said the Project staff felt they still could gather what they could, in responding to calls for support to the victims.

“It is our appeal that the relief items we have donated reach the affected area and be distributed fairly,” he told the representatives from the area.

The relief items which were donated included packs of clothing and food items.

Meanwhile collection of relief items to be given to more beneficiares still continues.

## UNC PROJECT PEOPLE

## SAIDI ALLI DEFIES THE ODDS

## From UNC Project driver to clinical officer

*He is a hardworking man who started out as a driver at UNC Project, has fought his way across the academic corridors to become a clinical officer.*

*Jameson Makande had a chat with him to learn more about Saidi Alli.*

.....

#### Who is Saidi Alli?

Saidi Alli is a young man born on 6 July, 1993 at Salima District Hospital. I hail from Chimombo village, TA Kalonga in Salima. I am a second born in a family of four.

I did primary school in my village before attending secondary school at Dzenza in Lilongwe. After writing Malawi School Leaving Certificate Examinations (MSCE) in 2010, I went to South Africa in search of greener pastures. My journey proved unsuccessful which led me to return back home. In 2012 I applied for a post at the Project as driver. That is how I got into UNC Project.

#### Tell us your journey from being a driver to a clinical officer

After I had started my job as a driver, which I loved, I would be involved in a lot of travelling. On many occasions I would pick and drop Project staff to and from the Airport. I grew fascinated by that. That is when I felt like I could be more than a driver. My heart pushed me to go higher. That, however, was limited by my academic background. I was only an MSCE holder. That is how I got compelled to go back to school. As if that was not enough, Project management announced salary increments which would be based on grades. My grade only allowed me to attain a 5% increment. This just made me more motivated to pursue more studies because I could see some of my peers with higher grades getting more.

I approached the office of Country Director which was occupied by Prof. Francis Martinson and the then associate country director Mr. Innocent Mofolo for advice. They both encouraged me to go back to school and let my papers fight for my salary increment.



#### What was your experience when you went back to school?

My academic experience was somehow elongated in terms of the duration. I went to Malawi College of Health Sciences in Blantyre and I was there from 2017 to 2021 studying clinical medicine. The elongated duration came about due to an academic strike at the school which resulted in us spending about 13 months at home. That really affected me negatively because I felt so much delayed. Then as we were approaching resumption of school, Covid-19 landed. This led to another school closure and that only further added to the dream being differed. Financially, I was not stable too so the delays meant more pressure in trying to solicit funds to fend for my livelihood.

#### How did you cope at school while you were not fully employed?

I would still request some monetary support from the Project and I



can say they really came in when I needed them the most. I presented a request to be working at the UNC Project during holidays which they granted me. This helped me hugely.

#### Among various professions you would have opted for, why did you venture into the clinical medicine?

It is something I had wanted for long time. I was not contented with simply being a driver. I wanted more and I believed I could achieve anything given the resources. So, when an opportunity presented itself I had to grab it by the horns. While in school, we would do ward rounds at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital (QECH). We would go there, find patients and present to consultants the next day. This hugely got me excited. That is how my hunger for the field grew.

#### What are your future plans?

Currently, I am a clinical officer which is, by far, a high position I did

not know I could attain but I would like to pursue more studies should resources, particularly money be available. I would want to be one of the consultants in the country. Consultant Saidi Alli would really be a nice tag one day (chuckles). I would want to study Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS).

#### What do you like to do as hobbies?

I am a Football fanatic. I am an enthusiast in the emergency fraternity actually. I consider that a hobby too (smiles). I am currently a national registered trainer for basic emergencies.

#### Any parting words?

Yes please. I would want to thank the UNC Project management for according me the opportunity to excel my academics and reach my goals. Particularly, the departments of Transport, Community, Data and everyone who has played a role in my journey

# PICTORIAL FOCUS

# YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED THIS!



The UNC Project Social Welfare Committee presented relief items to representatives from Zomba Thondwe Constituency in response to the devastation caused by Cyclone Freddy in March 2023.



On 28 Feb 2023 the PHASES adolescence study had a protocol training at Tidziwe facilitated by Kristen Sullivan, Hadas Baron and Magda Conway. Thi new study which is looking at involvement of HIV positive pregnant adolescence in HIV prevention trials.



Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI 2023) was held in Seattle, USA, from 19-22 February. Prof. Mina Hosseinipour, Dr. Maganizo Chagomerana, and Dr. Emmanuel Singogo attended the conference.



UNC Project was part of the Malaria Vaccine Implementation Programme (MVIP) Investigators' meeting in Lilongwe from 13 to 16 March 2023. Participants came from Malawi, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, Congo, South Africa, United States, Switzerland and United Kingdom.



Top layer: New rooftop for the Annex Building ready to supply solar electricity.

Technicians during the fixing foundation for installation of solar panel.