Integrating community engagement activities within implementation science research projects: lessons from the InterCARE project

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Implementation science is a relatively novel study methodology applied to research projects in the sub-Saharan region. Botswana joined 5 other countries, namely Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia, in conducting implementation science projects under the umbrella of the Heart, Lung, and Blood Co-morbidities Implementation Models in People Living with HIV (HLB-SIMPLe) Alliance. Community engagement activities are thought to be key to the successful implementation of evidence-based interventions (EBIs) and strategies in the communities most affected by HIV and associated co-morbidities burden.

The approach to community engagement within HLB-SIMPLe is 2-fold:

1. Each country project developed a community engagement plan as part of their respective project protocols, to ensure that their outcomes lead to culturally-appropriate and sustainable development and uptake of EBIs for integrating hypertension care in existing HIV care systems in diverse African settings;

2. An Alliance-wide Community Engagement Sub-Committee (CESC) was formed under the secretariat of the Research Coordination Centre at the University of Washington, which supports and oversees the engagement activities of the sub-committee. The Alliance’s CESC consists of stakeholders from each project and supports the integration of community engagement best practices among the various projects. The team recently conducted a survey to identify how the HLB SIMPLE consortium members conceptualize, define, and incorporate community engagement approaches within their respective project.

This presentation aims to present the numerous community engagement activities of the InterCARE project especially the adaptive approaches informed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The presentation will also describe the mandate of the HLB SIMPLE CESC and its plans to develop metrics of Community Engagement Research operationalisation to evaluate similar projects’ successes in low- and middle-income settings.