Science in Unusual Places: Report

Background
The Science in Unusual Places (SciUP) project was proposed and implemented by Kondwani Jambo, Pauline Mlogeni, Kestern Mkoola and Vincent Mkwinda from Malawi-Liverpool-Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Programme (MLW), with funding and collaboration from NIHR Mucosal Pathogens Research Unit (MPRU). It was implemented in 2018 within Blantyre rural, Malawi. The Science in Unusual Places project aimed at sharing information of mucosal pathogens with the public by using football bonanzas. The approach to use football bonanzas to share information on mucosal pathogens was proposed to target Malawian men, who have been noted to have poor health seeking behavior. The project requested and received support from community structures working with MLW to share information of the importance of accessing treatment to avoid or treat mucosal pathogens. The Malawi Ministry of Health through the Blantyre District Health Office, Community Sports Committees and MLW Science Communication department worked together to implement this project.

The target locations for the project were Lunzu and Manje areas in Blantyre rural, Malawi. The locations were chosen because:

1. **Dense population**: Compared to other areas within Blantyre rural, which is home to about 800,000 people, both Lunzu and Manje have dense populations. Lunzu is home to more than 53,831 people with 27,329 being males, and Manje has a population of 37,847 with 18,976 being males. (National Statistical Office, 2018)

2. **Health Facility Proximity**: Both Lunzu and Manje communities have hospitals within 500m of the location of the football bonanzas, which could allow direct implementation of the key messages disseminated by the project team.

Description of activities
A football bonanza was conducted in Lunzu and Manje, with 8 teams participating in each location. The winners in each location, then competed for a final game in Manje. During the football games, which were advertised through a public-address system for several days before the event, several activities took place including:

- Sharing of mucosal pathogens messages during the bonanza
- Sharing branded t-shirts to winners of mucosal pathogen quizzes
- General voluntary health checks, including Blood Pressure Checks, Voluntary HIV testing and counselling, and BMI (height-weight) checks
Outcomes, Deliverables, and Impact

Outcomes

1. **Sharing of mucosal pathogens messages during the bonanza:** 2000 flyers containing key messages regarding pneumonia vaccination were shared with the people at the football bonanzas. Public announcements of key messages were also shared during breaks of the football games.

2. **Sharing branded t-shirts to winners of mucosal pathogen quizzes:** 200 t-shirts were distributed during the implementation of the project.

3. **General voluntary health checks:** People had their blood pressure checked, and those with critical cases were referred to the nearest healthy centres for observation and further counselling. Others had their HIV statuses checked and they received counselling based on their sero-status. Others had their weight and heights checked and were counselled on the need for a balanced diet and proper nutrition based on their BMIs.

[Bar charts showing results of blood pressure, voluntary counselling and HIV testing, and BMI]
**Deliverables**

1. **To generate media coverage around the issue of men and health, with an emphasis on mucosal pathogens**
   a. The project activities were aired on Times TV, which is a private TV station that airs nationally and is one of the biggest in Malawi

2. **To collect footage to be included in a documentary about men and health**
   a. A 5min documentary has been produced from the footage collected from the football bonanzas.
   b. We have also stored more footage, which could be used for future documentaries and spreading key health messages in the community.

3. **To collect data to be used for a social science publication**
   a. The team is drafting a manuscript describing our experience in using football as a tool to disseminate key health messages to attract men. Our target journal is Wellcome Open Research

**Impact**

The initiative proved to be a success by the large numbers of people, especially men and the youth, who were reached with key messages on mucosal pathogens that cause pneumonia. The flyers that were distributed during all events complemented the spreading of the key messages to people who did not attend the events. The media reports also generated more coverage around issues of men and health with focus on mucosal pathogens.

We, however, could have liked to include more measures of impact as part of the project implementation. We would have hoped to track the health seeking behaviors of parents or guardians who participated in the football bonanzas. In an ideal situation, we would have wanted to measure the participation of men in encouraging childhood vaccinations, before and after implementation of the project. However, the other measures of impact, such as, the number of men involved in the general health checks, suggests that football could be a good tool to attract men and provide them with key health messages, especially in countries like Malawi.

**Ideas for improvement for future projects**

1. Inclusion of more measures of impact
2. There is need to increase the funding allowable for such public engagement projects.

**Actual expenditures**

In summary, we received £4,349 and have spent 98% of the funds by 31st May 2019. A breakdown of the expenditure is attached.

**Reference**