

Dying in Silence

Leader's Guide

Subjects: African Studies, Health, HIV Education

Audience Level: HS - Adult

Length: 39 mins.

Objectives: After viewing, the audience should be able to....

- Describe the causes and effects of HIV on the people and country of Malawi
- Recognize how both political and personal denial and fear permit the spread of AIDS
- Consider the situation in Malawi in terms of one's own understanding and view of AIDS
- Become involved in the fight against HIV, either by changing one's own sexual behavior or joining community, national or world efforts to reduce the spread and devastation of the disease

Content

In 1969 and 1970, Max Reid was a Peace Corps volunteer in Malawi, captivated by the Malawan people and culture. He recently returned to find a country decimated by AIDS and on the verge of economic and political catastrophe. AIDS has affected every corner of Malawi, from village families to the country's infrastructure. And yet, few people openly admit to having the disease, unwilling to face being shunned and called promiscuous. Politically, the government, under long-time leader Kamazu Banda, officially denied the epidemic and refused to speak of it publicly. Additionally, the mainstream Protestant church emphasizes abstinence rather than prevention. The result is that Malawi is losing its teachers, engineers, medical personnel and ordinary citizens to a disease that could be restrained by education, treatment and proactive policy. This program profiles courageous AIDS workers who, against economic and social odds, are trying to combat HIV in Malawi so that a new generation does not die in silence.

Before viewing:

Conduct a short overview of AIDS with particular attention to how it is spread through sexual contact and how it lowers the immune system so that those infected are prone to opportunistic infections. Emphasize that the use of condoms can often prevent transmission.

After Viewing:

- Kamazu Banda's official denial of AIDS can be seen as the root of today's epidemic. Why would he have disallowed discussion of a sexually transmitted disease? What social and/or cultural conventions allow a government to disregard a potential disaster such as AIDS?
- The video shows that AIDS is both a political policy issue and a personal health problem. Discuss in what ways health policy and individual lives interact, and the government's responsibility to their citizens in contrast to the citizens right to privacy.
- Why are people in Malawi dying in silence? If the cause is rooted in societal mores, what will be required to change the very way people think about AIDS and sex? Can a society's moral underpinnings really change?



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- It is noted that women have little economic or social power and find it hard to refuse sex because of cultural imperatives. How might education help this? Consider ways by which woman could gain more independence and personal strength, such as by organizing women's work circles and arranging for them to sell their homemade goods.
- Cathrine Phiri and SASO fight for funding from a huge international drug company which can well afford to support it, while Youth Ambassadors for AIDS loses funding and disappears. If one part of fighting AIDS in Malawi is financial support, why is it so slow and hard to get? What could be done to encourage UNESCO, international companies and other wealthy organizations to increase their funding? Will additional funding be enough to slow the epidemic?
- Marylien Mulemba says that sex without condoms is "crazy," but is convinced that even with safe sex education, it will continue. What makes it so difficult for people to incorporate what they know in theory with how they live their lives in reality?
- Malawi is not the only country to grapple with open discussion and education about AIDS. Indeed, the beginning of the AIDS epidemic in the United States faced some of the same issues of morality, prejudice against those with HIV, a feeling of hopelessness and fear. What changed and how did it happen? How could this be used as a model in Malawi?
- Mulemba is encouraged by the dramatic effects of antiviral drug therapy, limited though it is. In what ways do the positive effects of drug therapy on quality of life offer hope to infected people and allow them to be role models for others?
- Do drug companies have a moral imperative to provide antiviral drugs in great quantity, either free or at reduced cost? If so, and since this conflicts with a business' goal of making money, in what ways might the problem be resolved?
- As with AIDS in Malawi, silence can kill. Discuss when it is right to stay silent and imperative to speak. Does context dictate this? Personal belief? Moral imperative? The greater good for the most people? The need for an educated populace? The need to respect privacy? How can people resolve this issue in their own lives?
- The video states that this generation of Malawians must remain uninfected. If not, economic and political chaos ahead. What causes a country's infrastructure to collapse, and what are the results? In Malawi, how is the country's future tied to the health of its individuals?
- Do all people have the responsibility to care for all others? Does disaster in one country affect all others? What recommendations would you make to international and grass roots organizations, and in your own life, to arrest the spread of AIDS in Malawi?

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