

In Malawi, Africa, a country with a population of 12 million, more than one million have tested positive for HIV. The HIV/AIDS pandemic in Malawi is very complex and stems from problems of poverty, malnutrition, and lack of education. HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, and it is the virus that can lead to AIDS, or Acquired Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV/AIDS is deadly, and there is no cure.

The AIDS epidemic in Malawi has caused over 650,000 deaths and continues to be responsible for the deaths of around ten people every hour. AIDS is the leading cause of death among adults in Malawi, and is a major factor in the country's low life expectancy of just 38.5 years. The Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has sent millions of dollars in grant money to Malawi, and this has helped to a great extent. However, there are still several reasons the country continues to be gripped by this terrible disease. Here are a few examples.

It is not uncommon for children to be the head of a household because so many are orphans from the AIDS pandemic. A 13-year-old girl may be caring for her three siblings and two cousins, so she is often forced to choose from two options:

1. Allow her family to go hungry or
2. Sleep with an older man in exchange for food, placing herself at a high risk of contracting HIV

The government of Malawi has provided free anti-retroviral medication (ARVs), which can delay the onset of illness for several years in those who are HIV positive. But because of extreme poverty, people from remote villages cannot afford bicycles or the nominal fee for a bus ticket or a bicycle taxi to the clinics in the city to receive the drugs.

Those who do receive ARVs are often malnourished, so the medication cannot effectively fight the virus. ARVs will only work if the infected individual is on a proper diet. People in remote villages often have to walk a mile or more every day to get clean water.

Many children in Malawi don't finish school because they either have to work in the fields or they cannot afford the school fees; primary school is free, but secondary school is not. If they cannot finish secondary school, they cannot get an advanced degree. There is a major shortage of trained professionals in Malawi - people are either dying of AIDS or moving to countries where they can receive higher pay, faster than they can be replaced. Equitas is committed to helping the people of Malawi rebuild their villages, their families, and their lives.