Overview
Community mobilization is a capacity-building process through which community members, groups, or organizations plan, carry out, and evaluate activities on a participatory and sustained basis to improve their health and other conditions either on their own initiative or stimulated by others. Community mobilization is a powerful tool for preventing HIV as it empowers community members to work together and actively participate in creating change, thereby building collective efficacy and increasing the likelihood that the change created is sustainable.

Activities
Under BRIDGE II, Save the Children International used the Community Action Cycle to provide communities with the tools and skills to create social change, reduce their vulnerability to HIV, and address other health and social issues on their own in the future. During these activities, community members and leaders were trained to identify and address key drivers of HIV infection in their communities.

Additionally, BRIDGE II engaged many other partners in different sectors and at many levels in the community mobilization process. These partners included representatives from the government at the district, traditional authority, group village headman, and at village level including community-based organizations. A key aspect of the project’s community mobilization approach and process was that partners at all levels were engaged in capacity building.

Voices from the Field
Bymon Malikebu (right), from Mahoya village in Zomba, used to engage in unprotected sex with partners outside his marriage to wife Melyia (left). Through HIV testing, he was found to be HIV positive while his wife Melyia tested negative. He continued his reckless behavior and reached a turning point when he was elected into a CAG under Ngongomwa CBO and attended a Tasankha open day on “know your risk” where he realized he risked infecting others with the virus.

“As a CAG member, I realized I needed to be at the forefront in advocating for positive behavior change in my community. I changed my behavior and dropped all the sexual partners to work things out with my wife. We now live happily and do the things that couples are supposed to do together such as taking a bath together. I also use condoms every time I have sex with my wife,” said Bymon.

Achievements
To date, 565 communities have been engaged through the Community Action Cycle. They identified key drivers of HIV infection in their communities, created action plans for addressing them, and implemented activities to create social change.

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and behaviour change focused on reducing HIV infection. Some community leaders have gone so far as to institute community by-laws banning cultural practices which the community identified as major contributors to the spread of HIV.

The Gunda Community Action Group from the Phalombe district developing an action plan for community engagement, using the Community Action Cycle.

**The Gunda Community Action Group**

The Gunda Community Action Group (CAG), pictured above, is an inspiring example of the change that individuals can create through the Community Action Cycle. Its ten members were trained by BRIDGE II in behaviour change communication, group dynamics and the Community Action Cycle. This CAG was considered to be one of the best in the Phalombe district. The CAG was completely self-sufficient, and able to develop plans of action and implement them independently. The CAG helped to strengthen families in its district through village discussion groups, and facilitated Open Days that allowed community members to access HIV counselling and testing (HTC) services.

The Gunda Group Village Head applauded the Gunda CAG, saying that the behaviour change the CAG was creating “…is doing magic in my villages. Imagine couples are able to discuss freely and [share] ideas on how to satisfy each other in their marriages. Couples are able to go for HTC services together and young people are going for HTC services before getting married. This is wonderful because issues of sex were not openly discussed; let alone the norm of having multiple sexual partners.”

Enefant Chinawa, the chairperson of Gunda CAG, acknowledged that, “…we adore the behaviour change which occurs in our community. When people come thanking us that we saved [their marriages from collapsing] we feel honoured and we regard ourselves as heroes.”

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Local Partners: Corporate Graphics, J&F Consult, Galaxy Media Consultants, National Association of People Living with HIV and AIDS in Malawi, Story Workshop Educational Trust, YouthNet and Counseling