• Linkages are the policy, programmatic, services and advocacy synergies between sexual and reproductive health and HIV and AIDS. Linkages can happen between core HIV interventions and core SRH intervention. Linkages also involve addressing the social and structural issues that make people vulnerable to sexual and reproductive ill-health and HIV. For example; gender inequality, poverty, stigma and discrimination and legal issues.

• Integration refers to different kinds of sexual and reproductive health and HIV and AIDS interventions and services that can be joined together to enhance outcomes. This involves the organisation of policies and programmes to deliver comprehensive interventions which provide a continuum of care for HIV prevention, care and treatment as well as meeting people’s sexual and reproductive health needs.

• Bi-directional linkages and integration mean that SRH components can be linked to HIV programmes and HIV components can be linked to SRH programmes. (International HIV Alliance, 2004)

EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE INITIATIVE

• Design programmes to support rights education, access to quality SRHR services, address discrimination and stigma

• Implement effective approaches that would reduce/eliminate stigma and discrimination by and towards health care providers and increase involvement of men and vulnerable group

• Build capacity of service providers in government and community based organisations to implement SRHR and HIV integrated services

• Address security of RH and HIV/AIDS commodities with Malawi-specific priority interventions

• Define contribution of non-health sector(educations, law enforcement and gender) in successful models and make recommendations for their inclusion of the coordinated programmes of support

• Document lessons learned and identify best practices models at the policy system and service delivery levels and disseminate them

• Participate in regional Knowledge sharing forums with other project countries to share Malawi’s linkages/integration experiences through south – south cooperation. This will help as evidence-based advocacy tool for leveraging and mobilizing additional resources to scale up the linkages
The initiative will focus on catalytic action in three selected pilot districts; Mangochi, Nkhata-Bay and Dedza. The aim of the initiative is to stimulate scaling up of the lessons learnt on the linkages in other districts as well as countries by means of regional-level action.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT**

- To strengthen linkages and effectively scale up efforts in SRHR and HIV integration in other districts as well as countries by means of regional-level action
- Increase access to and use of a broad range of quality services to appropriately include essential actions in the education, justice and gender sectors
- To document, disseminate lessons learnt and formulate best practices that facilitate south to south cooperation
- To improve access to and uptake of services, provide better care in a more integrated way, challenge the social factors that influence SRH and HIV, reduce stigma and strengthen rights-based policies and laws

**WHY LINK SRH, RIGHTS and HIV**

- Majority of HIV infections are sexually transmitted or associated with pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding
- The risk of HIV transmission and acquisition can be increased by the presence of sexually transmitted infections
- Sexual and reproductive ill health and HIV share root causes including poverty, harmful gender/cultural norms, rights violation, inequality and social marginalisation
- Most people think about their sexual and reproductive lives in a holistic way with HIV as only one aspect
- A sexual and reproductive well-being opens up many more opportunities to prevent HIV infection and care for people with HIV as well as improving sexual and reproductive health in its own right

**INTRODUCTION**

There is a growing consensus today that linking HIV and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) will make a big dent on HIV/AIDS and yield positive dividends for health and development, thereby contributing to the wellbeing of populations. Improving bi-directional linkages between HIV and SRHR can improve the lives of key populations affected by HIV and ensure that both women and men; whether they suffer from sexual and reproductive ill-health or are at risk of HIV or living with HIV have access to a continuum of services that meets their needs related to HIV and SRHR.

Malawi is one of the countries hit hard by HIV/AIDS with an adult national HIV prevalence (15-49 years) of 11 percent (13 percent for women and 8 percent for men), according to the 2010 Demographic and Health Survey. The majority of HIV infections are sexually transmitted or associated with pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding.

European Union (EU), as part of its health initiative and portfolio, is supporting partner countries, through a sub-regional initiative to overcome barriers by strengthening linkages between SRHR and HIV policies, programs and services. The initiative in Malawi is implemented by the Government through its Ministry of Health with technical support from UNFPA and UNAIDS and key partners from the National AIDS Commission (NAC) and Family Planning Association of Malawi (FPAM).