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## ARVs used to distil Kachasu



Written by Mc Donald Chapalapata & Charles Mpaka

Tuesday, 03 November 2009

There is a health scare in Thyolo district where life-prolonging Anti Retroviral (ARV) drugs are being used to distil locally brewed liquor popularly known as 'kachasu', a *Malawi News* investigation reveals.

Members of the Thyolo Churches Development Coordination Committee (CDCC), a grouping of faith leaders from various denominations in the district, told *Malawi News* during its investigation this week that apart from distilling Kachasu, the ARVs are also being used in livestock feeds to make the animals grow faster.

“As pastors, we couldn’t go where they sell the liquor but we sent people from our congregations to go and investigate for us. They confirmed to us that this is indeed happening,” said Blessings Mathuwa, secretary of the committee.

Another CDCC member Charles Makwiti said a member of his congregation who takes kachasu admitted to having tasted Kachasu distilled using ARVs.

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“He told me that the ARV kachasu works faster in him than the one without ARVs,” said Makwiti.

Malawi News travelled to Chibwana Village, one of the villages where this is being practised. Village Headman Chibwana in Traditional Authority Mchilamwela said in an interview at his house that he had heard about distillers using ARVs to make Kachasu for the past two years now.

“But I can’t pinpoint who is doing this because it is a sensitive matter and such people cannot come out in the open. That is where the difficulty is,” he said.

Zione Enock, a kachasu distiller from the village, who denied using ARVs for her spirit, explained that the drugs were being favoured by some kachasu makers in the area because they quicken production.

### **FAST FERMENTATION**

She said in an ordinary kachasu brewing process, fermentation of the ingredients which include maize husks and sugar takes place after three days.

But it was learnt that when ARVs have been used, the fermentation takes place within 24 hours, which allows kachasu makers to produce more in a short time and therefore make more money.

Malawi News also learnt that using ARVs requires less quantities of sugar. With one tablet of ARVs, distillers are using one packet of sugar to produce eight litres.

“In a normal process, we use four packets of sugar, which gives us five or six litres of kachasu,” said Enock.

“I am also told the first ‘run’ of kachasu made from ARVs is yellowish and they throw that away before settling for the final product,” said Enock.

Asked what is in the ARV drug that could influence the speed of fermentation, acting registrar for Pharmacy, Medicines and Poisons Board, Aaron Sosola, said it could be that the drug activates the enzymes for fermentation.

“I have never heard anything like that before but people are trying all sorts of things thesedays. From what you are telling me, it could be that the ARVs activate the enzymes and make them perform faster,” said Sosola.

Accompanied by village headman Chibwana, the Malawi News team took a leisure walk in the village and found a place where the liquor is made and taken.

The team, mistaken for officials from a road construction project in the area, offered to buy two

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imbibers some Kachasu at Bosco's in the village.

Two more people joined the session and each one of the four revealed having taken the kachasu made from ARVs.

With just the first sip of the brew, all of them were able to tell that this product was not from Aids drugs.

"I have tasted the one from ARVs. It's not nice. It has a funny smell. And when you take it, you have problems rising from bed in the morning because you are in severe pains all over," said a customer known as Jeffrey.

The imbibers said that the ARV kachasu was often too strong for any single person to take up to one litre.

But how are the Kachasu distillers accessing the ARVs?

Duncan Chitsulo, another member of the Thyolo CDCC said the ARV users were the ones supplying the drugs to the distillers.

"If one takes the ARVs for some time, one feels better and ends up selling them to the distillers," said Chitsulo.

This was supported by an official working with Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF), one of the key players on anti-HIV/Aids campaign in the district.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, he said those on ARVs were responsible for the leakage of the drugs to the kachasu distillers.

"In conjunction with the district health office and Napham [National Association of People living with HIV/Aids in Malawi], we have in place a comprehensive monitoring mechanism on how drugs are dispensed from the facilities to the people.

"I have no doubt that those that are on ARVs are the ones using the drugs for making kachasu or selling them to the distillers," said the official.

Thyolo district health officer Beatrice Mwangomba was shocked when Malawi News contacted her for her comment.

"This is very sad. For now, it may not look like a big problem. But we are dealing with a monster here. Both those taking the kachasu and those selling it from their own dosage are creating a danger to the communities and to themselves," she said.

Mwangomba said her office and Napham were conducting their own investigations.

## Foreign Exchange Rates



Monday 07 September 2009

CURRENCY	BUYING	SELLING
Dollar	145.9987	150.9987
Pound	266.9983	288.9885
Euro	190.8332	209.0987
Rand	15.9987	20.9987

“We do not have tangible evidence yet until we have concluded our investigation. For now, we will have to intensify public education. But this is truly dangerous. We may not be able to deal with a situation where people develop resistance to the first line treatment,” said Mwagomba.

According to the Department for Nutrition, HIV and Aids, the first line treatment for Aids costs government K1, 000 per bottle per person in a month.

The second line treatment costs K10, 000 per bottle per person and every month.

Mwagomba said the district currently has 18,000 people on ARV treatment.

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ena (168.167.93.245) 2009-11-05 19:27:51

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zithandiza koma zimenezi? nanga anthu otigawira ndalama za ma arv akamva ndiyetu miyoyo ya anthu ambiri ivutika. ndikuona ngati akhoza kusiya. nanga mpaka mowa abale.zifuzidwe bwinobwino zimenezi ndithu.

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Shaa!!!!

Eric (41.177.102.93) 2009-11-05 22:08:57

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I am really disappointed with those pple who are doing this, i think they are sick in mind.

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Promote local technology..

..igwe (41.210.193.210) 2009-11-06 20:03:28

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Despite being a misuse of the ARVs, the dicovery by the villagers of this side of the ARVs is soimething that must be promoted in our local technology development!

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