

Community Response to Reducing HIV/AIDS Stigma and Discrimination

HIV/AIDS Situation in Cambodia

Cambodia is one of the few countries in the world that has reversed the HIV/AIDS epidemic as shown in the declining prevalence rate among adults. Between 1997 and 2003, the prevalence of HIV in the adult population fell from 3.0% to 1.9%. Currently, there are an estimated 123,100 people living with HIV (PLHIVs) in Cambodia and more than 77,000 children under 15 who have been orphaned by AIDS. Stigma and discrimination against PLHIVs continues to persist, isolating PLHIVs and forcing those most vulnerable underground with subsequent negative effects on their physical and psychosocial health.

Program Intervention

With funding support from USAID/Cambodia and Pfizer, the Pact Cambodia HIV/AIDS Program implemented the one year Community Response to Reducing HIV/AIDS Stigma and Discrimination project with the nationally-focused Cambodian People Living with HIV/AIDS Network (CPN+) and their eight CPN+ provincial networks.

The project emphasized several components: Community Forums, capacity building and organizational development, and IEC/BCC materials development and distribution.

To achieve these, Pact Cambodia developed the following objectives:

- ☞ Increased participation and involvement of People Living with HIV (PLHIVs) in project design and implementation
- ☞ Empowered PLHIVs who advocate for their rights and gain support from their community
- ☞ Increased access of quality care and support of HIV/AIDS education and awareness materials for PLHIVs and their care givers, especially in remote areas
- ☞ Supported and strengthened institutional capacity of the project partners

Achievements

- ☞ Thirty two community forums conducted with more than 6,400 community members
- ☞ The Commune Council placed donation boxes in the Commune offices, Pagodas, restaurants, community forums and meetings to raise funds to help PLHIVs with food, shelter and transportation to health centers
- ☞ Commune councilors, Village Chiefs, police, doctors, and district governors now support the psychological and physical needs of PLHIVs by increased home visits, improved access to education and health care services initiatives to stop community-based stigma and discrimination against PLHIVs
- ☞ Improved standard of living for PLHIVs as their businesses benefited from Increased community support



PLHIV is sharing her experience on stigma and discrimination in the community forum



More than 200 community members attended in each community forum



PLHIVs are very delighted to get community support



- ☞ 416,785 copies of IEC materials printed and 363,500 copies distributed throughout the country.

Lessons Learned: Project

- ☞ Placing PLHIVs at the center of the project's approach has been key to the success of any project involving PLHIVs
- ☞ The significance of developing and maintaining good relationships with a variety of organizations (government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private sectors) cannot be underestimated
- ☞ Formal evaluation of the project and the ability to conduct long-term follow up would more effectively allow for project improvement
- ☞ Capacity building to PLHIVs is a key element to successfully address a range of issues such as advocacy for improved rights of PLHIVs, access to health care services, the reduction of stigma and discrimination and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Lessons Learned: Community Forums

- ☞ Community forums enable citizens to access information and provide the opportunity for PLHIVs to seek moral and financial support
- ☞ Skill development of individual PLHIVs was enhanced by the desire of PLHIVs to plan and organize successful community forums
- ☞ The involvement of monks and local authorities in community forums, especially when giving advice on stigma and discrimination against PLHIVs, appeared to increase community support for PLHIVs. Pagodas also proved to be popular venues for the forums and attracted members of the general public.
- ☞ Community forums prepared and organized by PLHIVs more effective than NGOs Home Care Team



PLHIVs are attending the training on Planning and Report Writing Skills



Local authority is explaining on HIV/AIDS education in the PLHIV Support Group meeting



Monks are building a house for PLHIV family

