

Funding the HIV fight at grassroots level

With a US\$47.5 million grant from the World Bank's International Development Association, the fight against AIDS in Uganda is waged at the grassroots level – in villages like Mukono.

Mukono - Starting in 2001, the Uganda AIDS Control Project – part of the Multi-Country AIDS Program (MAP) – put program money in the hands of local residents, many of whom have been infected with AIDS: widows, orphans, elderly guardians. These are the results in Mukono.

One woman is on antiretroviral drugs, and says that is why she is strong, that is why she sings and dances.

The next singer to give testimony is Richard, the group's leader. His young son was born HIV-negative, thanks to medication which prevented mother-to-child transmission.

Richard's message is: it's possible to live a full life with HIV. People must be tested, he says, and start taking drugs if necessary. As for prevention, he urges abstinence, condom use and fidelity to a single partner. He ends his testimony by singing, "We shall overcome AIDS, let HIV stop with me."

The group then sings about antiretroviral drugs – how they used to be too expensive but now are freely available in the community, how before HIV-positive people were dying of malaria or diarrhoea but now they have a future. The group members touch their wristwatches in time with the beat as they sing about the importance of taking the drugs twice daily.

Another song performed by the post-test club focuses on the need to avoid rumours and misinformation. They explain that HIV is not caused by witchcraft but by a virus, and transmitted by sex. The song urges listeners to come to MASA for screening: "If you're positive, be strong. You are not the first to live with HIV."

A chain of support amid enormous needs

The Bank-funded Multi-Sectoral AIDS Program has created a chain of support extending down to the villages. Community groups across Uganda have been trained to plan, implement, monitor and report, buy goods and to manage funds. Over time, procedures for community participation have been clear, simple, and well publicized.

Group accountability has gone a long way to prevent corruption and led to good use of the funds. Everyone knew how much was received and how much was spent, which helped ensure that most projects were implemented as planned.

Communities have identified priorities and been empowered to meet their needs. Results include increased: voluntary counselling and testing, access to treatment through referrals for drugs to treat opportunistic infections and

antiretrovirals, support for AIDS orphans and widows, provision of home-based care services, income-generating activities that benefit members of community organizations.

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