



COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND SOCIAL MOBILIZATION

Overview

The Federal HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office (FHAPCO) of Ethiopia has designated its Anti-HIV/AIDS Social Mobilization Strategy as one of the primary HIV prevention and control strategies in the country to generate community involvement and ownership to address problems related to HIV/AIDS.

NASTAD Approach

In 2009, NASTAD was funded to design and implement social mobilization for HIV/AIDS prevention interventions in line with the government strategy. NASTAD initiated this project in Dire Dawa, and subsequently scaled up to four other regions: Addis Ababa, SNNPR, Oromia, and Amhara.

In each region, NASTAD conducted a formative assessment in order to:

- Identify emerging high-risk populations
- Identify gaps in existing social mobilization interventions
- Assess the capacity of local media partners to participate in social mobilization activities
- Assess the capacity of local implementing partners to support and implement social mobilization activities

Using the formative assessment findings, NASTAD designed an intervention package to address each region's needs.

NASTAD helped to organize and coordinate community mobilization activities in all five regions, and provided technical support, supportive supervision, supplies and trainings to local government and implementing partners.

1. HIV and STI Prevention Intervention Package for Higher Education Institutions

In 2011, NASTAD began working in close collaboration with HAPCOs, RHBs and university staff to design an HIV and STI Prevention Intervention Package for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This package targeted university students, staff, and the surrounding community, and was designed to achieve the following objectives:

- **Structural:** Strengthen the capacity of the university in planning, implementing, and monitoring of HIV and STI intervention, in an effort to achieve greater HIV/AIDS Mainstreaming in the education sector.
- **Behavioral:** Increase responsible sexual behavior among university students, staff, and the surrounding community.
- **Biomedical:** Improve access to HIV and STI health related services, including HIV and STI services.

NASTAD supported six universities in five regions in the implementation of a wide range of activities included in the Prevention Intervention Package.

NASTAD

The National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) represents the United States' chief state and territorial health directors with programmatic responsibility for HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis, and associated public health programs.

NASTAD's Global Program works to build the organizational and human resource capacity of its HIV/AIDS program counterparts across the world. The Global Program uses a peer-to-peer capacity building framework to enhance local leadership to gather and use data to plan, manage, and evaluate HIV programs.

NASTAD played a leadership and coordinating role throughout the initiative, and provided technical assistance in the development of HIV policies, documents, and frameworks. NASTAD also conducted trainings to build university staff capacity in HIV/AIDS Mainstreaming, the implementation of behavioral interventions, and the provision of HIV testing services.

With NASTAD’s support, the structural, behavioral, and biomedical interventions were highly successful; the achievements are summarized in the table below.

Structural	Behavioral	Biomedical
Six universities produced and endorsed an AIDS policy	Conducted three SISTA Training of Trainers (TOT) reaching 1,200 female students at six universities	Conducted one training on HIV Counseling and Testing for all six universities
Five universities established HIV Units and assigned permanent staff	Conducted four edutainment sessions at six universities	Conducted one Syndromic Management Training for all six universities
Five universities conducted HIV/STI Risk Assessments	Conducted weekly Mini-Media Programs at six universities	Organized eight HIV Testing Campaigns allowing over 8,000 students to be tested
Five universities developed comprehensive HIV Plans and allocated budgets	Disseminated over 10,000 leaflets and brochures on preventing HIV transmission	
Four universities established AIDS Resource Centers	Conducted four panel discussions on HIV/AIDS prevention at six universities	



Figure 1: Education and Health Officials leading the HIV Mainstreaming Workshop.

2. Evidence Based Interventions

NASTAD was able to leverage the HIV prevention experience of its membership of U.S. state AIDS directors, who assisted RHB and NASTAD Ethiopia staff to adapt and implement CDC Diffused Evidence Based Interventions (DEBIs) for HIV prevention in the Ethiopian context.

Sisters Informing Sisters about Topics on AIDS

Sisters Informing Sisters about Topics on AIDS, more commonly known as SISTA, is a peer-led, social skills-building, group-level intervention designed to reduce sexual HIV risk

behaviors among heterosexual Amharic women, ages 18 to 29. SISTA involves the implementation of five two-hour sessions, followed by two optional booster sessions. The sessions cover the following subjects:

- Gender pride
- HIV/AIDS Education
- Assertiveness Skill Training
- Behavioral Self-Management
- Coping Skills

On average, 20-25 women attend each session, which are led by two female peer-facilitators who employ gender-specific and culturally relevant strategies in the discussion of these important but sensitive subjects.



Figure 2: SISTA Participants demonstrating the steps to take when using a condom.

With NASTAD's support, SISTA was implemented at Universities, high schools, and woredas in Amhara, SNNPR, Oromia and Addis Ababa. The program was extremely popular, and was found to increase knowledge about HIV/AIDS, increase self-confidence, increase knowledge of condom use, improve communication skills, and generate conversations around HIV/AIDS and gender issues. Due to this success, in 2013, SISTA was included in the National Higher Education Institution Communication Strategy and Intervention package.

Sister to Sister

Sister to Sister (S2S) is designed to reduce risk behaviors that increase the transmission of HIV and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among sexually active women ages 18-45. It targets mobile populations who may not be able to participate in longer trainings. It involves one two-hour one-on-one or one-on-many training which is delivered at the community level. During these sessions, facilitators share knowledge and skills in the following subject areas:

- HIV transmission and associated risk behaviors
- Condom use and efficacy
- Negotiating condom use and abstinence
- Common misperceptions about HIV and STI transmission and prevention

NASTAD supported the implementation of STS in Dire Dawa, Amhara, SNNPR and Oromia regions, largely targeting vulnerable, mobile women. S2S was also shown to be highly successful in that it led to better understanding of condom use, an increase in correct and consistent use of condoms, and an increase in the number of people testing for HIV after having participated in the training.

Women Involved in Life Learning from Other Women

Women Involved in Life Learning from Other Women (WILLOW) is a health education and skills building intervention that targets women living with HIV. It involves the implementation of eight weekly two-hour sessions, each of which targets 20-25 women living with HIV.

The sessions are designed to:

- Empower women and improve their self-perception and their relationships within their social networks
- Improve communication skills
- Increase knowledge about HIV, STDs, tuberculosis, Hepatitis B, condom use, risk behaviors and safe sex practices
- Build skills and strategies for coping with stress

An evaluation of the WILLOW intervention demonstrated that it increased knowledge about STD and HIV transmission reduction and re-infection, increased confidence and skills in condom use, decreased partner-related barriers to condom use, increased use of effective coping strategies, and increased use of social support networks.

A Testament from a WILLOW Facilitator

Shemshi Shifa, 45, is a trained WILLOW facilitator under *Shama Birhan People Living with HIV Association*. When asked to speak about her experience with WILLOW, she explained:

"I am HIV positive and I knew my status before five years. No one knows, even my son about my status, until I started participating in WILLOW training. I have been on ART for the last three years. My son is a third year University student and he doesn't know anything about my status. I used to hide my medications and there are times I forgot to take them. I wasn't feeling well and usually depressed. However, the lesson I got from WILLOW prompted me to speak out my status."

"In the middle of this year my son came for 15 days' vacation and I have decided to tell him all about my health. One day after we had eaten our lunch I said to him today there is something I should tell you. I have hidden you my status for a long time, but now I decided to tell you that I am HIV positive. After long silence he had to say 'My mother you have suffered a lot alone. You should have told me before; this is not a sin and it is not an end of the world, if you care for yourself you can live longer and enjoy life. Anyways I am about to complete my education and you will not be in trouble any more, I will be with you'."

"Then I stopped chewing khat and smoking shisha; and my CD4 and weight increased significantly. Now I am feeling very well and happy, that is why I feel I am born again after participating in WILLOW."

3. Using Traditional Birth Attendants as Voluntary Community Anti-AIDS Promoters

The Volunteer Community anti-AIDS Promoters (VCAP) are program trained volunteers who travel from house-to-house, sharing information about HIV. NASTAD collaborated with RHBs and RHAPCOs to train Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) to become VCAPs in order to target pregnant women in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission.



Figure 3: TBAs trained as VCAPs in Dire Dawa.

NASTAD worked with local implementing partners (IPs) in select woredas in four regions to train TBAs to visit households in their villages and discuss HIV and the importance of facility based health care for all pregnant women, for both antenatal care (ANC) and delivery. These TBA/VCAPs registered all pregnant women in their villages to allow for follow-up, referred all pregnant women to the local health centers for ANC and delivery services, and even accompanied pregnant and laboring women to health centers for institutional delivery.

In the woredas where the TBA/VCAP program was implemented, there was an increase in the number of pregnant women accessing antenatal care and institutional deliveries. TBA/VCAP was thus determined to be an effective model for increasing uptake of ANC and institutional delivery services, including

HIV testing during pregnancy and other PMTCT services. Today, the TBA/VCAP program has been integrated into the Health Development Army (HDA) structure.

Looking Forward

In 2013, NASTAD conducted one federal level and five regional level *Dissemination and Handover Workshops*. The purpose of these workshops was to:

- Disseminate the intervention and program implementation manuals
- Discuss the program and intervention evaluation findings
- Share NASTAD's experiences, challenges, lessons learned, and successes
- Share the testimonies of the beneficiaries of the COSM programs and interventions
- Identify the key roles and responsibilities of the regional and federal partners in ensuring the continuation of the COSM programs and interventions

NASTAD will continue to work with partners and implementers at all levels to ensure that these effective social mobilization programs and interventions are sustained and replicated.



Figure 4: Pregnant women and other community members participate in a march supported by NASTAD in Hawassa, SNNPR, to promote use of ANC services.