



## Evidence-based HIV Prevention Interventions

### Goal and Proposed Outcomes

Based on an assessment of need conducted in five regions in Ethiopia (Dire Dawa, Addis Ababa, SNNPR, Oromia, and Amhara), and as a part of the COSM (Community Outreach and Social Mobilization) initiative, the design of specific, targeted interventions for key populations was identified as a priority. Although Ethiopia's National Social Mobilization Strategy included some defined prevention interventions, those at the greatest risk of HIV infection noted that the programs were not well designed to help or empower them.

NASTAD Ethiopia's goal was, thus, to help the Regional Health Bureaus (RHBs) identify, adapt, and pilot targeted and evidence-based prevention methods with the identified populations. The key populations that were identified in the five regions included female sex workers, HIV positive females, and other vulnerable women including female high school and university students.

### Strategy and Approach Used

Leveraging NASTAD's peer-to-peer technical assistance model, and the experience of U.S. state HIV/AIDS program staff in implementing CDC-developed evidence-based HIV prevention interventions (DEBIs), NASTAD twinned each region with a U.S. state. Together, the teams assessed specific needs and identified opportunities, selected the most appropriate DEBI, and then worked to adapt and modify the content to the local context.

Evidence-based Prevention Intervention Manuals were developed and customized to Ethiopian context, translated into local languages, and

delivered to local partners to guide community implementation. Training-of-trainers were conducted with regional partners to cascade training to local implementing partners.

### Summary of Outcomes and Impact

**Sisters Informing Sisters about Topics on AIDS (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 gender pride, HIV education, assertiveness skill training, behavioral self-management, and 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.

With NASTAD's support, 245 female students were trained as SISTA facilitators, and SISTA was implemented at universities, high schools, and woredas (counties) in Amhara, SNNPR, Oromia and Addis Ababa. The program was extremely popular, and was found to increase knowledge about HIV, increase self-confidence, increase knowledge of condom use, improve communication skills, and generate conversations around HIV and gender issues. Due to this success, in 2013, SISTA was included in the National Higher Education Institution Communication Strategy and Intervention package.

Since NASTAD support ended in 2013, several participating universities continue to support the implementation of SISTA among their student body.

**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 related to HIV transmission and associated risk behaviors, condom use and efficacy, negotiating condom use and abstinence, and common misperceptions about HIV and STI transmission and prevention.

NASTAD Ethiopia supported the implementation of S2S in Dire Dawa, Amhara, SNNPR and Oromia regions, largely targeting vulnerable, mobile women. S2S was also shown to be highly successful as 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 (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, targeting 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, and 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.

### SISTA participants demonstrating the steps to take when using a condom, Ethiopia



### Testament from a WILLOW Facilitator

ShemshiShifa, 45, is a trained WILLOW facilitator under *ShamaBirhan 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 for five years. No one knew 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.”

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