

Prevention of HIV and AIDS by Targeting Highly at Risk Urban Youth in Addis Ababa

Through the Men As Partners ® (MAP) Approach

Hiwot Ethiopia MARPs Newsletter

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Why Intervene?

Recently, the general trend of HIV spread is showing a slight decline in the capital Addis, thanks to the effort being made by the government and other non-state actors. However, every year a significant number of individuals considered as the Most At Risk Populations (MARPs) become infected with HIV.

Due to their limited access to adequate information that is often associated with risky behaviors, Out of School Youth (OSY) and housemaids are commonly regarded as two of the most vulnerable groups (other MARPs). In addition, most behavioral change interventions are general and don't have a tailored approach to the specific needs of their target community. Failing to design appropriate interventions which build on the unique characteristics of other MARPs has limited progress.

Unfortunately, many of the city's OSY spend their time at Chat or Shisha houses. An alarming increase of drug & alcohol use coupled with porn addiction among OSY worries many parents and concerned bodies in Addis Ababa. These practices are among the risk factors that exacerbate the spread of HIV.

The other target group, housemaids (almost all of whom are young girls) are also susceptible to contracting HIV. In the past, many interventions directed towards HIV prevention neglected housemaids, as they were considered *the hard to reach population*. The problem worsened because too little effort and support from employers was given to housemaids to access basic HIV prevention information. More than any other woman, a housemaid faces the risk of being raped by her employer or other men at home. Many of the housemaids attend their school during the evening shift, they are thereby forced to face further risks. Moreover, their poor economic status pushes many of them to engage in transactional sex. According to a survey conducted in five Ethiopian cities, 44% of the Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) entered sex work from domestic work.¹

With the aforementioned rationale, Hiwot Ethiopia in partnership with EngenderHealth took the initiative to implement the Most At risk Populations (MARPs) project in an effort to curb the problem.

MARPs: Project Overview

From March to October 2011, Hiwot Ethiopia has been implementing the MARPs (Most at Risk Populations) project on HIV prevention in 4 sub-cities of Addis Ababa, with the financial and technical support of EngenderHealth Ethiopia-MARPs project. This project aimed to improve the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of vulnerable youth and evening students on HIV prevention. Out of school youth (OSY) and housemaids in particular, within the age range of 10-24 were the primary target of this intervention.



Pic 01: MARPs Project Familiarization Workshop with Key Stakeholders; April 08, 2011, Semien Hotel, Addis Ababa

Two major strategies were applied in delivering the desired output of the project. The first, group peer education (GPE) involved conducting discussions among members of a small group, usually consisting of 25 peers. Trained peer educators (PEs) at each group facilitated weekly discussions using the "Smart Journey" and "MAP® group education" manuals.² The second strategy, capacity building was used in order to assist the schools and youth clubs with financial, technical and material support so as to enhance their sustainability.

During the implementation of the project activities, Hiwot Ethiopia has been working with 20 schools, 12 OSY clubs, two Persons with Disability Associations and government agencies located in Arada, Bole, Kirkos and Yeka sub cities. The organization's proactive approach to actively involve key stakeholders has created a sense of ownership.



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Pic 02: Capacity Building Training for Out of School Youth Club

To conduct a series of GPE, Hiwot utilized discussion venues, chairs and tables, stationary and time without having to pay a penny. To maintain the standards and execute the activities of the project in a timely manner, staff members from Bole HAPCO, Yeka HAPCO and Kadamawi Menelik School have directly engaged in facilitating training and providing technical assistance along side with Hiwot's staff.

The management of Hiwot Ethiopia, would like to thank members of MARPs project staff who have shown diligent effort in coordinating and monitoring activities. Hiwot also acknowledges the contribution of partners including the four sub-cities' HAPCOs, education bureaus, women youth & children bureaus, schools, youth clubs, Persons with Disability Associations and EngenderHealth-MARPs project office. Finally, those committed 348 peer educators and facilitators/teachers fulfilled their duty & responsibility with a true spirit of volunteerism. Thus, they deserve a special thanks.

Key Achievements and Results

In an effort to address the severe problems being faced by the target population, Hiwot Ethiopia, in collaboration with EngenderHealth has been striving to ensure the successful implementation of the MARPs project. The in school discussions, as well as the out of school youth intervention have been conducted with tremendous enthusiasm and interest from the target community. A target population of 8827 has been reached with invaluable information and participation in interesting discussions on how they can successfully protect themselves and their fellow peers from HIV and AIDS. The training and discussions were largely aimed at protecting the most vulnerable groups from HIV by actively engaging peers and ensuring knowledge transfer in this area.

As planned, the MARPs project aimed at largely addressing the female population of MARPs, especially the most vulnerable housemaids within the in school intervention. Accordingly, 62.47% of the peers that took part in the discussions were housemaids. The remaining 37.56% constituted of other MARPs who are brokers, shoe shiners, petty traders, guards, gardeners, garage workers, janitors, daily laborers, construction workers, car washers, taxi assistants and the unemployed.



Pic 03: Evening School Discussions at Yewket Minch Primary School

Putting this fact into consideration, of the 8827 youth that have directly benefited from the MARPs project, 5469 were female, which constitutes 61.96%, while 3358 or 38.03% were male.

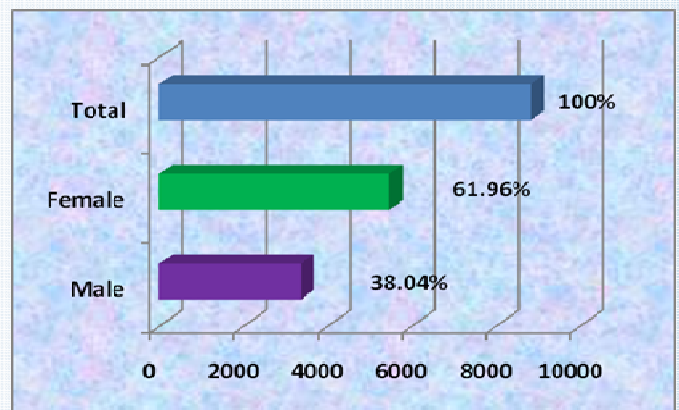


Chart 01: Gender Composition of Target Beneficiaries

In addition, Hiwot has taken a needs based approach to offer the capacity building support for schools, youth clubs and the Ethiopians for Ethiopians Blind Association and the National Association for the Deaf. Accordingly, material support of books, various music and other materials and stationary had been donated to Schools, Youth Clubs and Persons with Disability Associations. Partners have expressed that the support has been very helpful to enhance the quality of the performance of their respective organizations and that the use of the materials had already come in handy.

Among the most motivating results exhibited during the implementation of the project is the initiation of the peers to get tested for HIV after having been part of the intensive discussions on the issue. Accordingly, 160 peers have been referred for free VCT service through the direct result of the MARPs project, out of which 109 were Male and 51 were Female.

In addition, the peer educators training for persons with disability of both associations of Ethiopians for Ethiopians Blind Association and the Ethiopian National Association for the Deaf have been given. The reflection from the trainees was that it was important to address marginalized groups that are desperately seeking information with such important interventions. It was especially the trust and confidence on how they can change themselves and their fellow peers that motivated the participants.

Personal Accounts

“I have learned a lot within such a short time”



Mekdes Teshome, Age 20

“My name is Mekdes Teshome. I am 20 years old and a 6th grade evening student at Misrak Ber No. 1 primary school.

I used to work as a housemaid at a bachelor’s house. I spent my days washing cloth, cooking and cleaning for my employer. My previous employer had attempted to rape me once, but I screamed and managed to escape. After that, the thought of sex simply disgusted me. When my teacher told me that there would be a group discussion program at school and when he asked me if I was willing to attend, I immediately agreed.

Now, I have a very good understanding of how I can protect myself from the virus and about the correct use of condom. I have also asked my teacher to refer me to a free VCT service. I have taken the test, and I know my status. I now work with another family and I wish to become a doctor when I finish my education”

It is not only Mekdes, who has benefited greatly from the MARPs project. Wasihun Asamenew who is one of the members of the out of school youth club, “Tesfa Youth Association” sums up his experience in the following manner.

“I used to be afraid to get tested for HIV”

My name is Wasihun Asamenew. I am 19 years old and live with my 9 family members.

Before I became part of the discussions, I was afraid to get tested for HIV. After having participated in these hot, interesting discussions about HIV and AIDS, my fear has disappeared. I voluntarily got tested for HIV and I now know my status.

I have gained great knowledge about HIV and AIDS. I have learned to control my emotions and to never discriminate against people living with HIV and AIDS.



I enjoy drawing pictures and I aspire to one day have a higher level education. Today, I am proud of myself because the training has helped me to forget the bad practices of my past and become a better person.

I’ve overcome lots of

Wasihun Asamenew, Age 19 obstacles to reach this point and I suggest my friends should learn a lot from me. This training given by “Tesfa Youth Association” in collaboration with Hiwot Ethiopia has greatly helped me to change my friends.

Undoubtedly, taking part in the discussions made possible by the MARPs project has greatly impacted the lives of those individuals as well as many others. It has enabled the platform for vulnerable peers to come together and discuss about the various issues that they face and has helped them drop bad practices and positively change their lives as well as that of their friends.

Challenges

As with any other intervention, the MARPs project has passed through some of its own challenges throughout its implementation process. And with each challenge, a valuable lesson is learned and put into practice making it an integral part of the learning process in order to ensure the successful completion of the project.

Students would also be pressed since they were close to taking their national exams. For this reason, most of the peers who took part in the discussions were below the 8th grade. The demand to take part in this intervention was found to be very high. It was indicative of how much more needs to be done.

Although it was impossible to conduct supervision at every discussion, great cooperation from government officials, the Hiwot Ethiopia staff and motivated volunteers, as well as EngenderHealth, has made it possible to ensure the successful cascading of the discussions in the expected quality.

Lessons

Among the key lessons of the MARPs project setting up dialogue and discussion platforms early has proved to be very effective in curbing the challenges that were faced. Establishing understanding among these key stakeholders of the project has been extremely important during the implementation of the MARPs project. Officials that have been an integral part of the discussions exhibited greater engagement and faced less challenges on ensuring the smooth flow of the work than representatives of target schools that have been less involved in discussions. In addition, an invaluable experience on how we can inclusively work with persons with disabilities was also an indispensable lesson of this project. Finally, it was apparent that there is still need to continue to do more of such vital work among highly vulnerable groups that have been marginalized from previous interventions.

Among the sessions covered by the discussions “Smart Journey” and “MAP[®] group education” manuals, the session ‘Act Like a Man’ which provides the ability to recognize the effect of existing negative gender norms with respect to protecting one’s self from HIV and AIDS and STDs. This session has especially prompted participants to question factors exposing them to risky behavior and practices and has facilitated for greater understanding, and inspiration for them to be able to change their lives for the better.

Looking Ahead

It has been a most important lesson that such projects such as MARPs that entertain the diverse characteristics of different segments of the society needed to be scaled up. Although there is a common assumptions that most of the populations living in the urban sectors are very well informed and know how to protect themselves from HIV and AIDS, there still remains a significant portion whose

attitudes and behavior make them vulnerable to contracting HIV and AIDS.

In a final review meeting held on the 27th of October, 2011 with key stakeholders that have been part of the project implementation, a number of participants from Governmental and Nongovernmental institutions expressed their interest on continuing the project. It was reflected by various school officials that the project has facilitated for evening school students, who are mostly housemaids, to become more confident and take part in the discussions by freely expressing their opinions. Most stakeholders that the intervention was complimentary to the work being conducted by the government in that it addresses part of the population that desperately needed to be given due attention. Schools expressed that the demand to take part in the discussions was quite extensive and that collaborative work was mandatory to quench the thirst for knowledge among these groups based on the positive results exhibited due to the MARPs project intervention.

Furthermore, participants from out of school youth noted that young people that were previously into drinking, substance abuse and unprotected sex have been able to change their lives by practicing the lessons they gained from the project. In addition, it was mentioned that it was very motivating that the demand with persons with disabilities for such interventions was recognized and the work should definitely continue in a greater scale.

With the integral lessons from the MARPs project, Hiwot Ethiopia is fully capable to undertake further interventions in this area and is committed to equip these groups with the necessary information and instruments that will enable them to change their lives.

¹Population council: commercial sex workers in five Ethiopian cities, 2009.

²These standardized manuals are developed by EngenderHealth. Selected 12 sessions from these manuals were used to conduct GPE.

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