

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

PLHIVs Action

in Promoting Community Support

HIV/AIDS Situation in Cambodia

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Program Intervention

Pact Cambodia HIV/AIDS Program implemented a one year project entitled "Community Response to Reducing HIV/AIDS Stigma and Discrimination" with funding support from USAID/Cambodia and Pfizer. Pact partnered with the Cambodian People Living HIV/AIDS Network (CPN+) and eight CPN+ Provincial Networks. The objectives of the project include:

- Increased participation and involvement of People Living with HIV (PLHIVs) in project design and implementation
- Empowered PLHIVs to 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 PLHIV and their caregivers especially in remote areas
- Increased community support in decreasing social vulnerabilities and increasing coping mechanisms for orphan and vulnerable children affected and infected by HIV/AIDS
- Supported and strengthened institutional capacity of project partners



Approaches

To achieve the project's objectives, Pact placed poor PLHIVs at the center of all activities. Pact worked with PLHIVs and NGOs through:

- Partnerships with 6 local NGOs partners and eight CPN+ Provincial Networks and selected PLHIVs Empowerment Workers (PEWs) to organize the HIV/AIDS community forums to reduce HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination
- The Appreciative Participatory Approach (APA) to guide the PLHIV at-risk families to develop and prepare plans for the future of their children



Community forum conducted on March 16, 2006 in Siem Reap Province



PLHIV at-risk family stamp on inheritance document for her children

- Living wills developed by PLHIVs for their children's inheritance and filed with local government institutions
- Establishment of community-based networks
- Capacity building and organizational development
- IEC/BCC materials related to care and support for PLHIVs and their caregivers



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Lessons Learned

- The value of placing PLHIVs at the center of the project's approach has consistently been key to the success of all Pact Cambodia projects involving PLHIVs
- PLHIVs can successfully implement and facilitate community forums to address PLHIV rights, stigma & discrimination
- Community based advocacy activities are strengthened with the support of local authorities and communities
- Collaborative relationships with government, LNGOs and community based-networks play a critical role in developing community support for PLHIVs to prepare inheritance documents
- Skill development in planning, communication, facilitation, negotiation and advocacy to PLHIVs is needed to successfully implement a grassroots project



PLHIVs attend the training on Advocacy and Negotiation Skills



PLHIV advocate his rights in the community

Recommendations



PEWs visit PLHIV and explain on getting better health care and PLHIV success story

- PLHIVs should encourage other PLHIVs to speak out and assist each other, especially when engaged in advocacy activities
- The capacity of CPN+ and PLHIVs to advocate for their rights complements skills needed to develop and facilitate community forums.