



RAPID FUNDING ENVELOPE FOR HIV/AIDS: TANZANIA



PROMOTING HIV/AIDS LEADERSHIP AND DIALOGUE IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

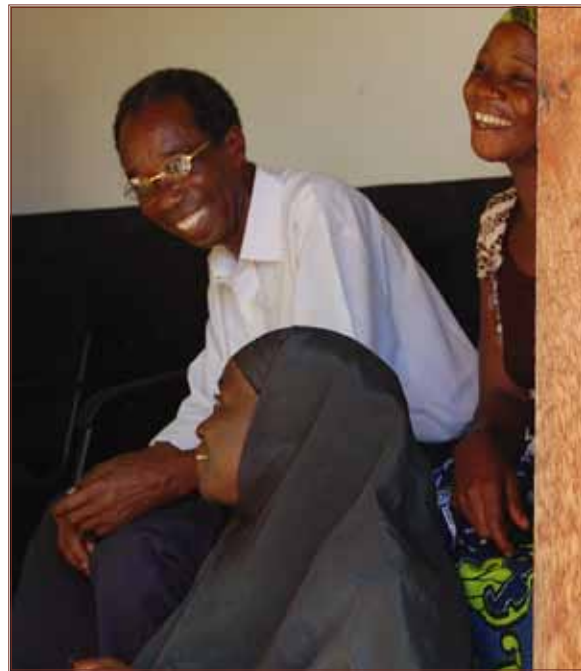


In the remote coastal town of Kilwa, Tanzania, 10 members of the local Muslim leadership have recently begun meeting for a new reason. Each of them is a leader in their own right—a sheikh, an imam, a teacher, or a women’s spiritual leader, and each is a seasoned facilitator. But today, they are not gathering to discuss traditional faith matters; they are gathered to discuss their personal progress in the fight against HIV.

In October of 2008, BAKWATA, The National Muslim Council of Tanzania, with support from the Rapid Funding Envelope (RFE), conducted their first HIV/AIDS stigma training with Muslim leaders across the region of Lindi. The RFE is an innovative partnership between the Tanzanian Commission for AIDS (TACAIDS), the Zanzibar AIDS Commission (ZAC), nine bilateral donors, and one private foundation. Established in 2002, the RFE’s purpose is to enable civil society institutions in Tanzania to participate fully in the national multi-sectoral response to the AIDS epidemic.

Through support from the RFE, BAKWATA piloted this unique programme—it is the first training of its type to focus on Muslim leaders in this region, and it is the first to ensure that women are included in the dialogue. For many participants, it was the first formal HIV/AIDS training of any kind that they had received. Upon completion of the training, they emerged with a different view of stigma and a plan to share their new-found knowledge.

Asked about the importance of this training, these leaders cannot say enough. An important point to realize, they say, is that many people in this area have no proper knowledge about HIV and, despite their Muslim faith, oftentimes fall back on traditional beliefs or superstitions to explain its existence. These beliefs explain HIV as



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Sheikh Rashidi Hiyara, Ustaadhat Sofia Mandwanga and Sheikhat Asha Lipamba, BAKWATA Anti-Stigma Trainers in Lindi.

a type of curse; a belief that in turn can bolster stigma. Participants in BAKWATA’s HIV/AIDS Stigma Reduction trainings, however, are respected, knowledgeable, and trusted sources of information, naturally garnering the confidence of the people. Armed with the true facts about HIV and stigma, they are now able to comfort and assist their followers.

In this region where 90% of the population is Muslim, the ability to place the anti-stigma message within the framework of faith and within the hands of the leaders is essential. Both men and women agree that the voice they have in the community is an important component of their success. For example, one of the ways in which Sheikh

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Saidi Abdallah is taking his message to the public is via early morning and late night public call-to-prayer: “I am working the anti-stigma message in before and after the call. I want people to have these things on their mind; in the quietest hours, I want them to be thinking of this.”

According Mr. Hamisi Malyunga, BAKWATA's Programme Manager, spreading their message has to happen with both male and female leadership working together: “We have found that our trainings must be carried out with women and men in the same room at the same time. This way the women are given an opportunity to engage in these dialogues, and it is clear that this is an essential message for all.”

Ustaadhat Sofia Mandwanga, a Secretary of the Muslim Women Group in the village of Mnazimmoja, says that she is using messages from the training with women in both formal and informal settings, including weddings, funerals, religious meetings, public gatherings, and even front doors. Amina Ahmadi, Chairwoman of the BAKWATA Women's Wing in Kilwa, explains the effect this is having. “Before this training,” she says, “if a woman that sold vegetables was known to be HIV+, other women wouldn't buy from her. Today, that is changing. HIV+ women are no longer being avoided and ostracized.” Both women note that women are the caregivers and communicators of their communities, so their beliefs and opinions are critical. Amina says women are beginning to understand that a reduction in stigma and an increase in openness is an important part of prevention. The anti-stigma message is increasing dialogue in the home, and influencing the men: “Fathers are even talking to their daughters about sexual issues now, in the past that would have never happened!”

With their newfound understanding of HIV, stigma, and its role within the context of their faith, BAKWATA trainees say they are well prepared in their fight against stigma. They also say they are proud that the government and BAKWATA have recognized their potential for enacting change within their communities. Sheikh Abdalah Chamalama explains, “Before the training, there were so many forms of stigma, but now, we have strategies to fight it. The training helped us to realize that when we discriminate against someone, we are making their situation worse, possibly even escalating the process of death, and that goes directly against our faith.”



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Sheikhat Amina Ahmadi reviews the Kilwa group's anti-stigma program goals.

PROJECT RESULTS:

- 6 district level facilitators identified and trained as HIV/AIDS Stigma Reduction trainers of trainers.
- 894 Muslim leaders (507 male and 387 female) trained as HIV/AIDS Stigma Reduction trainers.
- 33,061 community members (12,359 male and 20,702 female) reached with anti-stigma message.
- 20,000 copies of anti-stigma materials and 1,000 toolkits currently being distributed in the Lindi region.

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For more information on the Rapid Funding Envelope, please contact:

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