



RAPID FUNDING ENVELOPE FOR HIV/AIDS: TANZANIA



IMPROVING QUALITY LABORATORY SERVICES AND HIV/AIDS TESTING IN ZANZIBAR



In developing nations such as Tanzania, health care systems are often overwhelmed, understaffed, and lacking in standardized protocols. Zanzibar, Tanzania is no different, but due to the efforts of three local organisations that recently joined forces to address these issues, knowledge about quality laboratory services related to HIV/AIDS is increasing.

In 2007, the Zanzibar Association for Medical Laboratory Scientific Officers (ZAMELSO) identified gaps in the laboratory services of Zanzibar, particularly those related to proper testing and diagnosis of HIV/AIDS. ZAMELSO is dedicated to promoting the interests of laboratory scientists and advocate for policies which enable conducive laboratory environments and a set of quality standards. In order to address the issues at hand, ZAMELSO developed a training programme which would include 120 current laboratory technicians across Zanzibar, incorporating those working in public, private, religious, non-governmental, and military hospitals. They applied for support for this programme from the Rapid Funding Envelope (RFE) 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.

Recognizing the importance of their proposal, the RFE agreed to provide support, but wanted to take it one step further by increasing the capacity of ZAMELSO itself. Upon the RFE's recommendation, ZAMELSO joined forces with Changamoto, a well established local organisation with expertise in financial management. ZAMELSO also brought in the Zanzibar Health Officer Association



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Technician Mbaraka Abdallah Muita, implementing new laboratory procedures.

(ZHOA), which specializes in issues of prevention and control. Thus a team was born, and together they began to tackle the critical issues facing Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) centers and laboratories, including inadequate knowledge and skills on new rapid HIV testing techniques, quality assurance, medical prevention, reagent shortages, and broken equipment.

Acting as the technical lead, ZAMELSO hired nationally certified trainers, one of whom is a member of the national committee that is writing Infection Prevention Control protocols for Tanzania, while another is a certified nurse, specializing in the counseling aspects of HIV/AIDS testing. Trainings lasted five days and included both theoretical and practical elements, including site visits to laboratories. Facilitator Salum Abubakar says he was overwhelmed by the participants' interest and eagerness to learn: "The students were very internally driven, they knew these were things that they needed to do, but until this training they didn't know how to do it."

Support provided by: Bernard van Leer Foundation, Canadian International Development Agency, Embassy of Finland, Irish Aid, Royal Danish Embassy, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, United Kingdom's Department for International Development, U.S. Agency for International Development.

The discussion-based training addressed issues such as the knowledge of blood born diseases, the safe handling of equipment, rapid testing techniques and procedures for working with clients. Of particular interest to participant Hamadi Abdallah, was the opportunity to learn rapid testing techniques and increased infection control measures – measures that will protect both him and his clients. Hamadi promptly shared his new knowledge with colleagues in his lab and they immediately made changes, such as increasing utilization of safety boxes and improving the disinfection of sharp instruments. Data taken from pre-and post- tests administered to the trainees show that Hamadi was not the only trainee that gained from this training: some students showed an improvement of over 50% in their knowledge and understanding of the issues discussed.

Students were also clamoring for information and skills on the counseling components of HIV/AIDS testing. Although not serving primarily as counselors, the technicians say that they are often faced with distraught or apprehensive clients. Counselor and trainer Asmar Ramadhan says that she was impressed with the participants' calm and compassion, as well as the sincerity with which they approached the training. She is pleased that these technicians are now better prepared, providing a higher quality service to clients every step of the way.

Taking their commitment to providing quality HIV/AIDS testing one step further, the ZAMELSO team also established four new VCT facilities throughout Zanzibar with support from the RFE. These facilities, three of which are housed within community centers run by the Zanzibar NGO Cluster on HIV/AIDS, will incorporate technicians trained by ZAMELSO into the team of HIV/AIDS community activists already working at the centers. Services will include community based testing and the provision of testing supplies.

As for ZAMELSO itself, all parties agree that their abilities were enhanced through their newfound partnership. A project steering committee met regularly throughout the project. Financial protocols were established, as were reporting procedures, ensuring accountability, and transparency as the team successfully met their goals. ZAMELSO's Programme Manager, Mr. Omar Kidua, says that they are already developing additional proposals and attracting attention from other donors for future projects. "We were a young organisation. We had our legs solidly on the ground but this partnership gave us the wings to fly. Now we see that we are having an impact and we are so pleased with the results."



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ZAMELSO training facilitator, Zawena Said.

PROJECT RESULTS:

- 100 laboratory personnel trained on new HIV Rapid Testing and counseling and Infection Prevention.
- 20 laboratory personnel trained on laboratory quality system at HIV Testing sites.
- 4 VCT Sites renovated, furnished and equipped.
- 18 Health officers trained as trainers of infection prevention and control.
- Infection prevention and control guidelines reviewed and developed.

June 2009. For more information contact Thomas Kipingili, tkipingili@msh.org.



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