



HIV/AIDS PREVENTION: COLLABORATION WITH TRADITIONAL HEALERS

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Learn About African Action on AIDS (AAA)

AAA is a tax exempt non-profit organization registered in the USA and operating under section 501(c) 3 of the IRS code. It is also registered in Cameroon (auth. No 00174/A/MINAT/DAP/SDLP/SAC). It has special consultative status with the United Nations ECOSOC and the UN Department of Information.

AAA Mission Statement

We believe that no one is alone. We succeed when the youth we serve become agents of their own change and use their knowledge to change their communities.

We reach the youth of sub-saharan Africa whose lives are affected by AIDS.

We affirm that tomorrow's responsible parents are the knowledgeable youth of today.

We educate youth with the knowledge they need to stay alive, and teach them to share that knowledge with their peers

We build extended family support networks in local villages and communities to deliver security, food, education and healthcare to children orphaned by AIDS

We create healthcare awareness by funding women and children's health.

HIV/AIDS PREVENTION: WHAT WE LEARN FROM ORGANIZATIONS OF THE AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY

ARTICLE Five: The TANGA AIDS Working Group (TAWG)

More than twenty five years after the world first became aware of AIDS, it is clear that AIDS is still a threat in Sub-Saharan Africa. Its debilitating cycle definitely impedes on many aspects of the continent's development. Unfortunately, the death toll has been so heavy and overwhelming that official policies and strategies have tended to place more emphasis on treatment rather than prevention.

On the other hand, community responses throughout Africa have mirrored their social base and have generally adapted their initiatives to local needs and available resources. In so doing they have focused mostly on prevention and mitigation. Prevention, at community level has focused on reducing new infections and containing the epidemic through information, education and campaigns like the AAA JUST KNOW CAMPAIGN - for behavior change; condoms use training and distribution, targeting vulnerable groups. Mitigation has mainly focused on poverty reduction, and initiatives reinforcing community capacity to better resist and respond to the epidemic.

The purpose of the series of short articles that AAA has been publishing in its e-News Brief is to highlight local responses of organizations of the African civil society. Many organizations that initiated these responses were not able to pursue their activities for lack of resources. We would like this collective wisdom to inspire other communities even beyond the continent, while honoring the initiators, many of whom are /were partners of AAA.

The TANGA AIDS Working Group (TAWG): In the coastal region of Tanga in Tanzania, there are over 670 traditional healers. Traditional medicine in Africa is still perceived as not well documented or scientifically validated. For this reason, scientists continue to doubt the efficacy of time tested practices. TAWG was founded on a partnership between healers who had treatments for opportunistic infections related to the AIDS virus and doctors in charge of the welfare of their patients. With the collaboration of traditional healers, 3 efficacious herbal remedies were developed for the treatment of a variety of ailments commonly associated with HIV/AIDS. By 1992 and the energy of Levina Swai, a clinical worker of TWAG, the following results were reported: 120 traditional healers were trained and conducted home visits to 237 PLWHA, made 1600 referrals for HIV testing, and organized 1,241 educational sessions conducted by traditional healers and medical doctors, reaching 19,200 people.

Some of the lessons learned from TWAG are: 1) If healers are equipped with knowledge on how to identify HIV/AIDS, how it is contracted, spread and can be prevented, they can advise their patients and other community members. 2) The key to success is identifying knowledgeable healers and cultivating relationships with them. TWAG achieved this by treating the healers as professionals, allowing them access to the hospital and paying a fair price for their time and plants. 3) Leveraging traditional and modern knowledge systems can increase impact. For example, TAWG brought together traditional and modern health practitioners and inculcated mutual understanding and trust that has enhanced the effectiveness of HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention. 4) "Involvement of traditional healers in identifying needs for AIDS education leads to culturally grounded messages that are relevant, culturally sensitive and have the best potential for influencing behavior change". This kind of holistic approach can transform Traditional Healers in de facto community relay agents for HIV/AIDS and even Malaria!

Compiled by AAA Secretariat, based on UNAIDS (2000) report on Collaboration with Traditional Healers in HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care in Sub-Saharan Africa, Geneva; UNOSCAL (2002). African Civil Society Organizations & Development: Re-Evaluating for the 21st Century

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2010!



Pictures of TAWG consultation

Contacts:

Table with 3 columns: USA, Europe, and Cameroon. It lists contact information for Ruth Bamela Engo (President), Herta P. Kaschitz (AAA Representative in Vienna), and Theodore L. Tangie (Chief, AAA Yaoundé Office).