



AAA NEWS BRIEF – MARCH 2009

HIV/AIDS PREVENTION: LESSONS FROM AFRICAN CSOs

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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 TWO: Country Women's Association of Nigeria (COWAN)

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 will be published in AAA News Briefs in the next twelve months 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 Country Women's Association of Nigeria (COWAN) was founded by Chief Bisi Ogunleye. It is a rural organization born in Ondo State, Nigeria. COWAN has consultative status with the United Nations ECOSOC and has developed what is now called a tripod approach that has helped mitigate HIV/AIDS with micro financing. The tripod approach correspond with three areas of poverty that have been identified by members of COWAN: 1) Economic Empowerment. 2) Social Empowerment. 3) Political Empowerment. After more than twenty years of this integrated approach, COWAN now calls it the **Tripod Empowerment Approach**.

Although income generating projects have built-in risks of economies of scale and overhead costs, the ability of micro finance institutions to respond to the changing needs of their clients is crucial to HIV/AIDS mitigation efforts. The COWAN has successfully used micro financing to empower communities in addressing AIDS.

Building upon traditional savings and credit systems, COWAN developed the African Traditional Banking (ATRB) scheme to provide credit to poor people, especially rural women, who lacked the credit and financial resources. Central to ATRB is that each member must save to participate: NO SAVINGS, NO MEMBERSHIP", and its success has allowed COWAN to scale-up its efforts into health care. For instance, members save profits from income generating schemes not just to repay loans, but also for payments into ATRB Health Development Fund, which ensures essential health care services in case of emergency. COWAN also pools together resources among members to arrange for a nurse and/or doctor to visit communities on a monthly basis. Similarly, members pool together funds to buy medicine in bulk to purchase more medicines with the profits.

AAA has been inspired by COWAN when preparing the CARE –MIFED/AAA project in 2007 entitled "**La Micro Finance Instrument Privilégié dans la Lutte Contre le VIH/ SIDA.**"

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**COWAN
Pictures**

**Happy & peaceful
International Day
of the Woman!**