



Use of National Youth Service Corps to Raise AIDS Competence of Rural Communities in Edo State, Nigeria

Dr. Mrs. F. Omorodion, University of Windsor
Prof. Emeritus A. Onokerhoaye, CPED
Prof. K. Eghafona, University of Benin
Ms. E. Akpede, CPED

Goal

To decrease youth vulnerability to HIV infection through building AIDS Competent Communities (ACC)

Accomplished through:

- Part 1: Brief ethnographies
- Part 2: Using NYSC to build ACC

Part I: Research- Ethnographies of 10 Communities

- **Objective**

To identify and document social, cultural, & environmental factors that expose or protect youth against HIV infection.

- **Methods**

- 30 ethnographers

- Observation, interviews, group interviews, key informant interviews, records and documentation to identify social, cultural , & environment factors that are likely to expose or protect youth from HIV infection

Sample Findings

- Norms, practice, values and beliefs restricted talk about sex while promoting 'risky' behaviours.
Examples:
 - Multiple partners considered necessary
 - Sex essential to a serious relationship.
 - Sex necessary to good health
 - Females cannot negotiate sex.
 - Sex was exchanged for gifts
- Many myths about HIV. Examples:
 - HIV is “not real”
 - HIV is a witchcraft or night disease.
 - HIV is punishment for sins committed

Part 2: National Youth Service Corps

- **Objective:**

 - Building AIDS Competent Communities

- **Method:**

 - Recruited & trained 3 batches of corpers (total=40) on sex, sexuality, HIV/AIDS, & community mobilization using AIDS competent model.
 - Corpers deployed to 10 rural communities as agents of change.

AIDS Competent Community Model

- Raise Awareness & Build Knowledge
- Enhance critical thinking
- Identify & Build Solidarity amongst the populations
- Build Empowerment and Self Assertion
- Build social networks & support for HIV prevention activities
- Bridge human & social capital for HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment & care.

Corper Activities to Build ACC

- Formation of core groups
- Formation of in- and out-of- school youth groups
- House to house visits
- Youth writing & presenting dramas, songs, poems
- Meetings, debates, public rallies, public presentations, seminars & talks to faith-based organizations, bike riders, hair salons, barber shops etc.
- Creating social spaces for youth
- Training
 - on proper use of condom
 - skills to generate income for girls and women.

Examples of Increased AIDS Competence

Many examples cut across several
areas of AIDS Competence

Awareness Raised & Knowledge Built

- Increased discussions of sexuality among adults & youth
- HIV seen as real & present in the communities
- HIV not caused by witchcraft, nor a punishment for sins.
- HIV recognized as preventable & treatable, although not curable.

Critical Thinking Enhanced

- Youth increasingly rejected common myths about sexuality and condoms.
- Greater acceptance & outreach to PLWHA as a result of critically examining cultural norms.

Built Solidarity amongst Populations

- Community elders & leaders supported youth through donating land for youth friendly centers.
- Youth took up activities on their own
 - built youth friendly centers
 - designed & posted billboards carrying HIV messages
 - worked with PLWHA towards reducing fear, discrimination & stigma around HIV/AIDS
- Organizations in nearby communities collaborated:
 - health personnel facilitated seminars and talks
 - centers made testing available.

Empowerment & Self Assertion Enhanced

- Increased demand for & use of
 - HIV Testing
 - condoms
- Young girls & women willing to say no to sex
- Increased willingness of young men to accept that young women had the right to say 'no' to sex.
- Increased support & practice of one razor blade/needle for one client by traditional healers, barbing/hair salons

Built Support for HIV Prevention Activities

- PLWHAs connected with existing formal support groups & became support networks for each other.
- Youth worked together & supported each other in reducing behaviour associated with risk of infection.
- Women requesting husband-wife dialogue on sex & HIV/AIDS as means of promoting the use of condoms.

Human & Social Capital Bridged

- PLWHAs linked with treatment & care services
- Faith-based institutions invited corpers and youth to talk to their congregation about HIV/AIDS & HIV prevention.

Conclusion

With training, Youth Corps members can deliver community programmes that raise AIDS Competency.

Beyond the impact on communities, Corpers themselves benefit.

As one Corper said:

Apart from the fact that this is a study, we're touching lives. It's not just the priests and pastors that do it. I really want to say, 'God bless you for conceiving such an idea.' It gives me joy to see people empowered with right information. The relevance of our lives is hinged on this unequivocal credence that man is here for the sake of other men.