The Role of Religious Leaders in Addressing Stigma and Discrimination of HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia

Regional Videoconference
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
April 2, 2009
Country profile - ETHIOPIA

- Population - 73.9 million
- HIV Prevalence - 2.2% of adult population
- HIV positive population - 1.03 million
- Total Orphans – 5.4 million
- AIDS Orphans – 886,820
- ART needs - 289,734
FDRE HIV/AIDS Policy

- Policy Principles
  - Cognizant of the human rights of people living with HIV
- Policy Objectives
  - 2.5 To safeguard the human right of people living with HIV and avoid discrimination against them.
- General Policy
  4. Ensure the protection of the human rights of People Living with HIV

8. HIV/AIDS and Human Rights

  8.5 Children living with HIV shall be safeguarded against any form of discrimination and stigmatization
Strategic areas

• Guiding principles:
  – Together with PLHIV
    • The continued involvement of PLHIV as a guiding principle should significantly contribute to the reduction of the spread of HIV and AIDS and improvement in the quality of people living with the virus.

• Capacity Building
  – Objective 7: Protect the legal and human rights of individuals infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.
  – Strategy:
    • Review and update policies, legislations and guidelines with participation of PLHIV and their families.
    • Organize PLHIV into organizations
Objective 16: Improve quality of life of people living with HIV, orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC)

Strategies:

– Promote care within the family and mobilize the community to address and accommodate the issue of PLHIV & OVC through traditional and extended family mechanisms.
– Develop acceptable social security models towards the special needs of PLHIV/OVC
– Mobilize all stakeholders to address the needs of PLHIV/OVC in a sustainable manner.
Ethiopian Orthodox Church Involvement is Vital

- Long-standing presence and a network of 40,000 parishes, 1,200 monasteries & 500,000 in service clergy
- 43.5% of Ethiopians are followers, Sunday School enrollment of 6.5 million youths (aged up to 25 years)
- 3 Theological Colleges, 22 Clergy Training Institutes, 20,000 traditional church schools

Mobilize large numbers of community volunteers

Bulk of EOC service at the community level

Reinforces behavior change – societal acceptance of PLHIV and OVC, reduction of stigma and discrimination, increases uptake of VCT
EOC HIV Program Structure

EOC Structure
- EOC Holy Synod
- Patriarch Office
- Dioceses
- Woreda Church Administration
- Parish Churches
- Individual Priest

HIV Program cascade
- EOC-DICAC
- HIV/AIDS Department
- HIV Branch Offices
- HIV Woreda/District Focal Persons
- Volunteers
- Volunteer

Advisors/Committees
- Project Advisory Committee (PAC)-Patriarch Office
- Diocesan PAC
- PAC at Woredas
- PAC at Parishes
EOC HIV/AIDS Prevention Interventions

- Patriarchal Rallies
- Archbishop Rallies
- Clergy Education
- Peer Education
- Production & dissemination of BCC materials

Messages focused on:
- Abstinence until marriage
- Faithfulness in marriage
- Compatibility of Holy Water and ART
- Stigma and Discrimination
- Uptake of VCT
- Adherence to ART
- Fighting negative social norms
- Harmful traditional practices
- Basic facts of HIV/AIDS
- So far 9.5 million people got messages related to HIV/AIDS in 34 dioceses and 161 districts of the country.
Members of the Holy Synod or Church Leaders

Clergy leaders

The patriarch, members of the Holy Synod and clergy leaders discussing issues related to:

• Reduction of Stigma and Discrimination
• Providing spiritual and community support to PLHIV and OVC
• The importance of ART and its compatibility with Holy Water

Key Achievements
Working relations with the US Embassy

EOC Interventions…
The Patriarch, His Holiness Abune Paulos
  • Endorsed the acceptance of ART by the Faithful
  • Universal Acceptance of Holy Water and ART

His Holiness Aba Paulos & US Ambassador at one of the Holy Water dispensing Churches, Addis Ababa Entoto St. Mary Church
One of the Church’s significant interventions, Patriarchal Rally

HIV and AIDS awareness creation by His Holiness Abune Paulos
Success Stories…

Now PLHIV receive Holy Water and ART together and EOC clergy will advise them on adherence of ART.
Success Stories…

Kebebushe Tesema

“I can now smile back at the shining sun from the comfort of my shop”
Success Stories…

Asnake Hailu

“I now see that positive can come out of any situation”
The Way Forward

• More work on reduction of HIV/AIDS related stigma and discrimination for increased referral of clients to HIV related services (counseling, testing, PMTCT, ANC, ARV prophylaxis, etc..)

• Increased focus on MARPS (Most At Risk Populations)
Challenges

• Resource constraint
  – Inability to reach every Holy Water dispensing priest
  – Logistics in reaching people throughout the country (working only in 161 woredas of the 700+)
  – Inability to reach the remaining dioceses
  – Inability to support more PLHIV and OVC in economic strengthening activities

• Change in attitude and behavior takes time and difficult to achieve
Thank You