

Tackling HIV/AIDS through reproductive and sexual health activities

Why mainstream HIV/AIDS prevention and information?

When we talk about reproductive health the first images are of pregnancy, delivery and other motherhood issues and often lead us to forget the role men have to play. But reproductive health as well as sexual health is of significance to both men and women. Reproductive health addresses reproductive processes at all stages of life allowing men and women to have responsible, satisfying and safe sex lives as well as the capacity and freedom to plan if, when and how to have children (UNAIDS).

It had been recently re-established that linking initiatives for sexual and reproductive health and HIV multiplies opportunities for preventing and treating sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS (ICAAP-International conference on AIDS for Asia and Pacific 2009 finding and recommendation).

There are clear interactions between reproductive health and HIV being sexually transmitted or associated with Mother to child transmission (MTCT) such as pregnancy, child birth and breastfeeding. We can often reach people living with HIV/AIDS through the provision of family planning, maternal and child health services. Evidences of feasible and beneficial synergies between reproductive health and HIV/AIDS activities (UNAIDS, WHO) is obvious. Although joint initiatives including Sexual and reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS would deserve broad responses, the specific context of Papua (remoteness, poor access to health, poor communication system) asks for small community-based projects.

MdM focus today and tomorrow

Since 2008, MDM integrates HIV/AIDS into reproductive health promotion through its mobile clinics. Through role plays, drama, condom demonstrations, the information is shared and messages of prevention are given. The student club in Mulia is an active and enthusiast partner of MdM. Trained as peer-educators on HIV/AIDS, they are strong actors in the organization of HIV/AIDS information and prevention activities for the communities. The health promotion on HIV/AIDS during major events (such as Puncak Jaya anniversary, World AIDS day,...) is very much appreciated by the communities. In 2009 in Mulia, condoms dispensers have been installed at strategic places around town and are widely used.



An activity of information about HIV/AIDS held together with the student group during the last Carnival.

With regard to these activities, we receive the support of the Dinkes (health authorities) and the Bupati (head of the district) who share the concern that HIV/AIDS

is a growing threat for the communities of the Puncak Jaya district where MdM operates. 2 years ago MdM faced some tensions to the religious authorities of Mulia in regard with our communications about condoms, but today we can see the religious leaders becoming partners of MdM: they want to be actors within HIV/AIDS activities and are willing to be particularly involved in the protection of families (housewives and children).

In 2010, the main goal is to address the communities in a holistic and adaptive way where it concerns sexual and reproductive health issues. It is to make people the recipients of information they can understand and can apply within their communities.

The factors MdM would like to prioritize are:

Where condoms are sometimes seen as an encouragement for 'free sex', the people of Mulia are starting to understand their importance as means of personal protection. The use of condoms needs to be reinforced as a way to protect your family from STIs and HIV/AIDS. In Mulia, demand for the female condom is increasing: this fact underlines the existence of an open dialogue on condoms and the fact that women are more and more willing to be pro-active in protecting themselves and are more aware of their rights towards their sexual and reproductive health.

As safe motherhood issues are being comprehended by community women, a PMTCT programme (Prevention of the Mother To Child Transmission) needs to be introduced and developed as Mulia Health staff are requesting information and training about it. Men also need to be strongly addressed by reproductive health initiatives not only as women's partners but as well as individuals.

As information is given to high-school students on sexual and reproductive health, there is also a need to focus on the younger population who are initiating their first sexual relations (first sexual relations in Mulia are as young as 14-15 years old for girls, 16-17 for boys).

Family planning has a bad reputation with the local populations (and is believed to be a way to sterilize communities), therefore it is important to inform people on the possibility to plan and choose pregnancies in order to avoid unwanted and risky pregnancies.

MdM wants to concentrate on ongoing capacity-building of all the actors to build-on sustainable HIV/AIDS sensitization and prevention:

- with the student group in schools: giving information and preventive sessions combining these issues
- by training peer-educators (from the student group and from the community) to give messages and accompanying their communities in health related issues
- by advocating for the different authorities and leaders (traditional, religious, health,...) to involve themselves in HIV/AIDS initiatives culturally adapted to the target communities (support group, community sensitization sessions,...)
- by bringing together communities and health staff in order to build understanding for better communication and care.

Adapted messages coming from different sources will be multiplied as it is necessary to repeat information regularly for the people not to forget easily and consequently endeavor into behavior modification.

Sampai bertemu lagi dan KINA WONAK!
MDM-Papua Team



HIV/AIDS information and prevention: condom demonstration for the villagers.

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