

Eritrea: Winning through Caring

From 2001 to 2005, PATH provided technical assistance in behavior change communication (BCC) to the Eritrean government and the World Bank's HIV/AIDS, Malaria, Sexually Transmitted Infections, and Tuberculosis Control Project (HAMSET), as part of FHI/IMPACT project. Through a highly collaborative process, PATH designed and launched Winning Through Caring, a comprehensive BCC program in 15 model communities. The program used peer-facilitated learning, participatory theater, interactive radio, and related activities to reach Eritreans with HIV prevention, care, and support information.

Setting the stage

HAMSET required a BCC strategy that responded to the cultural values of the Eritrean people, as well as provide a framework for collaboration, capacity building, and a comprehensive set of HIV prevention interventions. PATH's formative research showed that Eritreans were knowledgeable about HIV and AIDS but many misconceptions and information gaps existed. Community stakeholders expressed both compassion and fear toward people living with HIV and AIDS, and they shared a deep commitment to caring for family and community members who acquire HIV infection. PATH and the project partners identified this caring impulse as the defining facet of the social response to AIDS in Eritrea—and the strongest resource in combating fear, stigmatization, and shame, which led to the creation of Winning through Caring.

Encouraging peer dialogue and inquiry

To tap into this culture of caring, the Eritrean government formed peer-facilitated discussion groups in each of the 15 communities that the MOH selected for HIV and AIDS interventions. PATH trained supervisors, peer coordinators, and peer facilitators who led discussions among more than 32,000 high-risk individuals, including women, youth, workers, commercial sex workers, and military personnel. Other partners, such as the Eritrean Catholic Secretariat and the Interfaith Council, also used the project strategy and created learning groups that reached 15,550 church members.

To foster deeper dialogue, PATH adapted a process it developed for IMPACT in Kenya. The Splash! approach involves small peer groups in a process of intense dialogue and critical reflection, which in turn encourages knowledge, insights, and new behaviors to ripple through the community. Peer facilitators led interactive discussions on caring relationships and related health topics, and ensured that the discussion quality and levels of audience participation are high.

Interacting through theatre

The Winning Through Caring strategy incorporated folk media and participatory theater. PATH introduced magnet theater, which it developed under IMPACT. This powerful, participatory form of theater encourages community members to debate and participate in performances and solutions. PATH provided training for local partners, as well as organized study tours and site visits between Eritrean and Kenyan staff.

Taking messages to the airwaves

To maximize the project's reach, peer facilitation activities were designed to interact with the mass media through radio. PATH provided guest speakers and ideas for existing radio programs and developed a new program called Romadi (the name of a local grass that spreads quickly). The program included a soap opera and chat show. The team used a community-based, participatory process to develop the storyline and characters and trained writers and producers to incorporate HIV prevention and care issues.

Bringing it all together

The Winning Through Caring strategy ensured that BCC activities were well established in the project's model communities. Although IMPACT ended in September 2005, activities continue because the government was the project's primary implementing partner and through its collaboration with PATH, it has the capacity to design, implement, and monitor programs that prevent and mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS in Eritrea.



Poster promoting condom use

PATH improves the health of people around the world by advancing technologies, strengthening systems, and encouraging healthy behaviors.

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