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TANZANIA

PHOTO & CAPTION

Miners Battle HIV/AIDS



Photo: USAID/Kim Wylie

How do you convince a group of men who risk their lives daily by going deep into the ground to look for Tanzanite gemstones to go the extra mile to save their lives by using condoms? In Tanzania, the answer is simple: make them cheap and easily available in the remote areas where they work.

This is what miners said at the Block D Mine in Tanzania's Mererani region — a frontier-like area not far from legendary Mount Kilimanjaro. Mining is a grim life — working far from their families, miners rarely see sunlight during long, demanding shifts underground. In Mererani, the miners drop into the earth in a large round metal bucket, held up by a greasy steel line, with just a flashlight tied to their soot-blackened heads. Long, hot working conditions and unsteady pay are the norm. When they emerge from the mines, many seek entertainment at guesthouses and bars during their free time. Often, this lifestyle and behavior lead to unsafe sex.

“This work is hard enough — who needs HIV/AIDS?!” said one miner from Mererani, an area near Mount Kilimanjaro.

Mererani has one of the country's highest HIV prevalence rates, which raises the risks of infection among miners. In coordination with the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, USAID is helping to educate miners and the girls with whom they associate about the risks of HIV/AIDS and methods for preventing infection. The campaign is linked to the launch of a new condom, Dume, a Kiswahili word pronounced “dew may” that connotes strength and responsibility. Through private sector distributors and marketers, Dume is reaching remote areas like Mererani together with an important message about changing risky behaviors. And at a price of three cents, it's an affordable product for miners.

One young miner's reaction showed that the Dume distribution and HIV/AIDS awareness campaign was succeeding: “If we can find these condoms easily in Mererani town, and don't have to buy them from an elderly shop owner, we'll definitely buy and use them. This work is hard enough — who needs HIV/AIDS!?”