



U.S. Agency for International Development

Bureau for Global Health

# SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

## Four-Country Study Finds Persons Living with HIV/AIDS Benefit from NGO Involvement

IN MUCH OF THE DEVELOPING WORLD, people living with HIV/AIDS conceal their illness out of fear—fear of rejection by family and friends, fear of job loss, fear of being denied health care—only to find themselves leading increasingly isolated lives. As a way to help HIV-positive individuals remain productive members of society and increase acceptance of HIV/AIDS, a growing number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are recruiting people living with HIV/AIDS to help support their peers and others affected by the epidemic.

Until recently, few studies had been carried out on the impact of greater involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS in NGOs providing HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support. To add to the knowledge base in this important area, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) supported a four-country study by the Population Council’s Horizons Program and the International HIV/AIDS Alliance. Working with local partners, researchers assessed the individual and organizational benefits of using HIV-positive individuals—on either a volunteer or paid basis—to counsel, educate, and plan services for peers,

their families, and communities.

“After seeing us, their perception toward life changes and fear goes out of them. They start feeling that they can also change and live life.”  
—An HIV-positive peer counselor in India

Study respondents—who included staff and beneficiaries of 17 HIV/AIDS NGOs in Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Zambia, and India—reported significant therapeutic outcomes for people living with HIV/AIDS who chose to participate in NGO programs. Results across the four countries included: improved psychological health as a result of increased peer support and knowledge, decreased isolation, improved physical health due to access to information about care, and in some cases, direct HIV/AIDS-related medical care and treatment. Said one HIV-positive peer counselor with The Salvation Army in India, “After seeing us, their perception toward life changes and fear goes out of them. They start feeling that they can also change and live life.”

Some respondents in Zambia and Ecuador also cited less risky behavior, especially reductions in the number of sexual partners, and wider acceptance by family members as they realized that people living with HIV/AIDS could be productive members of society.

“The group has really boosted my morale,” reported one HIV-positive self-help group participant in Zambia. “When we meet as a group, we feel better because the way we relate to each other is like one big family. You become a pillar of strength for those who have just been tested.”



Photo courtesy of Population Council/Horizons

The Maharashtra Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (MNP+) developed this poster displayed at a train station in India. Its message: “My friend with HIV is still my friend. He needs my support more than before.”

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Researchers also concluded that involving persons living with HIV/AIDS in volunteer or paid NGO roles can improve services and strengthen NGOs by:

- Making care and support services more relevant and personalized
- Increasing the effectiveness of HIV-prevention activities by improving people's perceptions of persons living with HIV/AIDS
- Raising staff awareness of issues from the perspective of HIV-positive persons and promoting recognition by staff of the contributions people living with HIV/AIDS can make
- Increasing credibility of NGOs and their services
- Broadening activities to include advocacy for the rights of persons living with HIV/AIDS

A few respondents reported that greater involvement of persons living with HIV/AIDS had negative repercussions on either the HIV-positive individual or the NGO. In Ecuador and Zambia, for example, some persons living with HIV/AIDS reported stigma and discrimination related to their visible involvement in delivering services and/or managing an NGO. The study recommended, among other actions, that NGOs take steps to ensure confidentiality and allow HIV-positive volunteers or employees to make their own decisions about HIV-status disclosure and visibility.

<http://www.popcouncil.org/horizons>

[http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/global\\_health/aids/](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/)

Multiple Countries, May 2004