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SUCCESS STORY

An Oasis of HIV/AIDS Care and Treatment Exists at the Edge of the Sahara

By early 2004, the Centre Oasis in Burkina Faso was treating 196 people living with AIDS



International HIV/AIDS Alliance

Madame Aballo discusses her medical care with an Oasis physician.

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THE *CENTRE OASIS* HAS COME a long way from its humble beginnings. The center now exists in a modern building—now being used while still under construction—where people living with HIV/AIDS can find compassion, care, and treatment. As one visiting father explained, “[Oasis] is my second family. Here we share the same disease, so we can speak openly without being ashamed.”

Centre Oasis was established in the early 1990s, when a group of friends concerned about AIDS began to distribute condoms and to buy clean razors for barbers. Through posters and small forums, they explained how people could protect themselves from HIV. The approach was not just about clinical services and prevention. It was, and is, a holistic approach to the needs of its members—or beneficiaries. Oasis has grown slowly as a result of the dedication and commitment of the community. “At the time when many of us were dying, we were told that the community cannot do it. We wanted to show that the community can do it,” says President and founding member Issoufou Tiendrebeogo.

Fund-raising began through friends and local donors. In 1997, the group registered with the government as a charitable community-based organization under the name Association African Solidarité (AAS). AAS was then able to access funding for staff training and technical assistance through national and international donors, including USAID, via the Horizons Program and the International HIV/AIDS Alliance. The center also supports income generation for 60 positive beneficiaries through an Internet cafe and 14 roadside kiosks that sell snacks and provide information on HIV prevention and referrals for counseling and testing.

With a staff of three nurses, a pharmacist, a medical records technician, and four physicians (one full-time), Oasis now offers HIV counseling and testing, along with medical care and low-priced medicines to treat opportunistic infections among its 1,000 clients.

By early 2004, Oasis was treating 196 people with antiretroviral drugs. The clinical results have been impressive, but challenges remain: decisions must be made as to which Oasis members will next receive the antiretroviral drugs.

One client, Raphaële Aballo, a 47-year-old mother of five, says, “When I started treatment, I was almost dead. [But] when I began treatment, I changed physically, and those who [had refused] to greet me became friendly again. Some would ... touch my hands to make sure it was really me. I would say to them, ‘Yes, it is true. God has let me live.’”