



SUCCESS STORY: TANZANIA

Sports Help Prevent HIV by Deterring Youth from Risky Behaviors

Youth find USAID football programs more compelling than former, more dangerous, pastimes



Family Health International, Bill Finger

Primary school boys, ranging in age from 9 to 15, from the “Mandela” (in red) and “Real Eleven” teams enjoy a pre-game photo op with a local school official.

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VILLAGE LEADERS IN IRINGA MUNICIPAL District in Tanzania have devised a simple and inexpensive solution to the perennial challenge of providing wholesome activities and positive role models for youth: keeping their feet busy.

With support from the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief through the U.S. Agency for International Development, 21,000 area youth have become active on football teams established in all seven Iringa municipal districts, thus diverting their attention from sexual activity and involvement with drugs.

Coaches and others trained as peer educators provide players with information on HIV prevention and the dangers of alcohol and drugs, using a curriculum that was recently revised with support from YouthNet and in consultation with officials from local and national health, sports, and culture ministries. The Iringa Development of Youth Disabled and Children Care (IDYDC) recently conducted four two-week training sessions on the new curriculum for 108 leaders, who then trained peer educators. The program, implemented by Family Health International’s YouthNet and coordinated by IDYDC, is so successful that it grew from about 400 to 700 teams in just the last six months.

The complete educational module, which includes informational booklets for both primary- and secondary-school children, and a training guide for peer educators, is the first of its kind to reach the communities and has been warmly received by both children and adults.

According to IDYDC director and co-founder Philostheous Njuyuwi, HIV/AIDS campaigns that focus on workshops, seminars, and meetings have a dual disadvantage in that they “cost a lot of money and do not reach the youth. Sports reach a lot of youth and can be developed in most rural areas with much less cost.”

Mario Mtitu, health educator and coach of the Ruaha Secondary School team, recognizes the program’s positive impact. Many of the girls in the area had been sexually active as young as 14, but when they “participate in the games, they are more tired, busy, and less active sexually,” he says.

The girls agree. Neema Sanga, who at 19 is already the mother of a two-month-old son, plays for the Upendo Vocational Educational School team. Before joining the team, Neema engaged in high-risk behavior. She now says, “I like playing football more.” Neema is fortunate: she was tested for HIV and found to be negative. Thanks to football, she is much more likely to stay that way.