



EMPOWERING AND MOBILIZING PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

Using phones to promote healthy, positive living in Ghana

BEHAVIOR CHANGE COMMUNICATION

Implementation date: February 2012 to January 2014

Ghana has succeeded in keeping HIV prevalence relatively low (1.3 percent of people aged 15 to 49 in 2013), through strong support of government, NGOs and civil society. These stakeholders support the 90-90-90 target which focuses on ensuring that 90 percent of the population is tested, 90 percent of people living with HIV (PLWHA) are on treatment, and 90 percent of people on treatment have suppressed viral loads. The Empowering and Mobilizing People Living with HIV/AIDS (EMPower II) was a USAID funded project that worked with local organizations to ensure that the most at-risk populations in Ghana have access to necessary HIV prevention information and support services. EMPower II supported the development and transition of support groups into functional NGOs and equipped them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for participating in comprehensive HIV and AIDS prevention activities.

About EMPower II

A key component of EMPower II Project was raising awareness among PLWHA about key behaviors that prevent the transmission of HIV. To reach the largest number of people, the Project used bulk text messaging to confidentially communicate important HIV prevention and treatment messages to subscribers. These messages were designed to ensure that PLWHA had the information about HIV transmission (including key behaviors to minimize transmission) and access to treatment and services. The Project conducted a formative assessment among 200+ support group (SG) members, to guide development of message content.

EMPower II provided support to Ghana Network of People Living with HIV and AIDS (NAP+ Ghana) by contracting a local software development firm, DreamOval, to send bulk text messages using a platform called myTXTbuddy. Messaging costs were covered by DreamOval and then reimbursed monthly by NAP+. Staff of NAP+ were trained on the platform, to manage subscribers and messages. To attract subscribers, Lead Trainers and Counselors of

PLWHA SGs talked to SGs about the benefits of receiving the messages. The phone numbers of interested people were forwarded monthly to NAP+ and these numbers were enrolled to receive messages. The Project began sending HIV prevention messages via bulk text to voluntary subscribers in November 2012. “Call back” system was available to allow subscribers to get further counseling. Counselors were reimbursed by NAP+ for their time given over the phone counseling.

Additionally, EMPower II adapted INFOREACH (an existing HIV Prevention outreach guide for lead trainers) to suit the particular needs of the project’s target groups. INFOREACH covers the 10 key prevention behaviors, including legal issues, family planning, and stigma and discrimination. The INFOREACH content was recorded on mobile phone memory cards and CDs and distributed to Lead Trainers and Counselors for sharing with PLWHA. The recordings were used by Lead Trainers in one-on-one and SG sessions, and for large anti-stigma outreach campaigns. The information was also used by antiretroviral treatment (ART) centers.



Evaluation and Results

By project end, over 850 people were enrolled to receive text messages on HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment. On average, recipients received 8 different messages each month and the system registered an average of 77 total “call-backs” per month.

Qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used in the baseline and endline studies to examine changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practices among SG members who received the messages. The qualitative data were collected using mainly focus group discussions (FGDs) with target beneficiaries – men who have sex

with men who test positive for HIV (MSM+ve), female sex workers who test positive for HIV (FSW+ve), and community members. In-depth interviews were also held with key stakeholders such as MSM+ve and FSW+ve. Quantitative data were collected using questionnaires administered by a team of trained Research Assistants on one-on-one basis.

The following are highlights of EMPower II beneficiary responses knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to HIV:

- The commitment to partner reduction increased from 52.6 to 72.2 percent (27.1 percentage increase) with FSW+ves with the greatest pledge to reduce their partners.
- The Support Groups became the most preferred source of condom and lubricant supply from 6.8 to 26.5 percent
- The percentage of those who would disclose their HIV status was between 69.3 to 85.7 percent. FSW+ves were noted to be more likely to disclose their status (76.5 to 97.6 percent).
- Increased proportion of respondents with knowledge of their partners’ status from 37.5 to 54.4 percent with a percentage increase of 45.1 percent .
- Increased proportion of those on medication was observed – from 71.6 to 91.8 percent with a percentage increase of 28.2 percent. Medication uptake among the FSW+ves became universal at the endline from 64.7 percent. Those who migrated to full ART also increased from 47.6 to 85.2 percent.
- Increased reduction in ART default was also noted – from 60.9 to 39.5 percent, a 35.1 percent decrease. This implies more people were now adhering to their ART regimens. The bulk text messaging was cited to have played a protagonist role in this change.

Lessons Learned

- Involve project beneficiaries in all stages of the project, from design through to the implementation, management, and evaluation
- Even when there are no financial incentives, the receipt of information can be motivation enough to participate in an intervention if the target population is involved enough in the design of the project to personally understand the value of the content

Conclusion

EMPower II achieved its project goals and objectives by enhancing the administrative and technical and capacities of the partner NGOs and support groups to effectively lead and participate in the prevention of the spread of HIV in Ghana. Mobile technology played a significant role in the success of EMPower II. The bulk text messaging played a major role in reminding subscribers of issues relating to drug treatment adherence, positive living, and changes in attitude, most significantly towards alcohol and how its consumption can influence unhealthy behaviors. Bulk text messaging also reduced administrative costs for NAP+ by reducing time involved in sending letters to invite people for meetings and informing Regional and district officers of other important decisions, such as shortages of drugs and where people can get their stock.

Geographic Coverage: Ghana

Implementation Partners: World Education, Inc., Kharis Foundation, 4-H Ghana; Ghana Red Cross Society, Network Association of PLHIV (NAP+)

Funder: USAID

Contact Information:

World Education, Inc. | Huai-Ming Sun, Senior Program Officer (hsun@worlded.org)

USAID | Emmanuel Essandoh, HIV Prevention Specialist (essandoh@usaid.gov)