Using rapid testing to increase access to HIV counselling and testing services in resource limited settings: Experiences from Uganda

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Issues

Uganda has registered remarkable success in reversing the trend of the HIV/AIDS epidemic over the last two decades although HIV/AIDS prevention and care services around the country are not ubiquitous.

Counselling and testing is an integral part of the HIV prevention, care and support.

Although 70% of the of Ugandans would like to be tested for HIV, only about 12% have ever been tested.

The coverage of HCT services at the sub county level is only 10% while that of PMCT services is estimated at 9%.

Constraints to VCT access include few sites, lack of sufficient test kits, storage facilities and lack of trained personnel. Over the past three years, the HIV prevalence has stagnated at 6-6.5%. This calls for intensifying prevention services including innovative ways of dramatically increasing the numbers tested and given results.

Description

John Snow Incorporated (JSI), with funding from USAID, is implementing a five-year multi-sectoral program in Uganda which among others, supports civil society organizations (CSOs) to provide HIV/AIDS related services in 18 Districts. These services include: HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT), prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT), care and support.

Counselling and testing is an integral part of the HIV prevention, care and support services. The project uses a multi-sectoral approach.

Activities performed

In 2005 as part of this project, 25 CSOs were funded to conduct HIV/AIDS related activities. Of these, 12 directly provided HCT and 6 directly provided PMCT services.

During 2005, 127 service providers from CSOs were trained in HIV/AIDS related activities in Uganda. Districts supported in HIV/AIDS related activities in Uganda.

The map below shows the districts where JSI supports HIV/AIDS related activities in Uganda.

Districts supported in HIV/AIDS activities in Uganda

![Map of supported districts]

VCT outreach in Amida sub-County of Kitgum – a conflict district

Lessons Learned

Rapid testing is quick, robust and technologically friendly.

The training for laboratory technicians takes less time because the procedure for rapid testing is simple.

Rapid testing does not require storage facilities and the training of the laboratory technicians takes less time.

With rapid testing, there has been rapid increase in the number of people receiving VCT services at static and outreach sites.

Rapid testing has made it possible to use innovative approaches to HCT such as home-to-home counselling and testing.

With rapid testing, it is possible to service hard-to-reach communities more cost-effectively.

Recommendations

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Acknowledgments

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We greatly acknowledge the contribution of all those CSOs who not only conducted the rapid testing, but also shared their experiences with us.

For Further Information

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Literature cited