



UN Cares in Action

The Case of Ethiopia 2013

HIV testing and counselling

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The UN Cares team in Ethiopia won the 2012 UN Cares award to recognize excellence in the work of UN Cares teams at the country level. The team was awarded the 2012 UN Cares Award for having promoted HIV testing and counselling according to the highest standards of quality, confidentiality and respect.



The UN Cares Team with UN Resident Coordinator, UNAIDS Country Coordinator and WHO Representative-Ad-Interim at the 2012 UN Cares Award Ceremony on 7 December 2012.

Summary

The UN Cares team in Ethiopia won the 2012 UN Cares award for having promoted HIV testing and counselling according to the highest standards of quality, confidentiality and respect. The UN Cares team in Ethiopia together with partner organizations have been working on promoting HIV testing and the importance of knowing one's status through the offering of free HIV testing and counselling services at the UN Health Care Centre (UNHCC); adoption of intense advocacy and campaigning through the use of different media during UN World AIDS Day Commemoration, UN Day, National HIV Testing Day etc. ; partnership between UN Cares and UNHCC, and the implementation of Provider-Initiated HIV Testing and Counselling (PITC) at UNHCC. The UN Cares team in Ethiopia recognizes the incorporation of free HIV testing services into different health campaigns and wellness activities as being vital in increasing HIV testing rates.

Background and context

Approximately, 790,000 people are reported to be living with HIV in Ethiopia, of which approximately 610,000 are adults, aged 15 and up; 390,000 are women, aged 15 and up, and 180,000 are children, aged 0 to 14. The total number of deaths due to AIDS is reported to be 54,000¹.

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UN Cares structure / Leadership of and Advocacy for UN Cares

The UN Cares program in collaboration with the UN Medical Services (UN Health Care Centre) continuously promotes and works on improving

accessibility of HIV Counselling and Testing services for UN staff and dependents. As part of UNHCC, some of the services are charged to the insurance and others, called core services, are free. HIV testing is free in UNHCC.

The organizations participating in this project include the ECA, ILO, IOM, ITU, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNDSS, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOAU, UNOCHA, UNOPS, WFP, WHO and the World Bank Group. The ECA, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO account for 75 per cent of all UN staff in Ethiopia and are all active participants in the UN Cares programme.

The UN Cares team in Ethiopia won the 2012 UN Cares award to recognize excellence in the work of UN Cares teams at the country level. The team was awarded the 2012 UN Cares Award for having promoted HIV testing and counselling according to the highest standards of quality, confidentiality and respect, and having had it taken up by 1,311 UN staff and dependents working in 20 UN agencies in Ethiopia from June 2008 and August 2012.

Sources of Funding

Prior to 2012, the UN Cares program had no systematic source of funding and its activities were carried out by contributions from different UN bodies by dedicating staff time, sponsoring events, and providing services for free. For instance, the ECA doesn't charge fees for training rooms; UNHCC provides HIV testing free of charge while covering the expense from the clinic's budget and the WHO sponsors transport and DSA for field visits. In 2012, the UN Country Team decided to include the UN Cares budget in the UN Resident Coordinator budget.

UN Cares-Approaches adopted

Free HIV testing and counselling services: HIV testing and counselling is provided free of charge at the UN Health Care Centre. UN Cares also organizes HIV testing campaigns for staff and dependents during different events. Intense campaigning is done for the UN World AIDS Day Commemoration, UN Day, National HIV Testing Day and also different local public events like the Great Ethiopian Run where the UN Community is a major partner. Testing services are set up by the UN Health Care Centre, IOM clinic, and local partners. Many staff members undertake HIV testing during these special events.

Approximately 75 per cent of all individuals who were offered these services accepted to be tested, and the most common reason for refusal was recent HIV testing elsewhere. After the introduction of Provider Initiated HIV Testing and Counselling (PITC), in which the UNHCC staff would actively offer a test to patients, regardless of the reason for their visit, there was a three-fold increase in the number of tests done in 2011.

Training of UN health care medical personnel: In 2011, UN Cares participated in organizing refresher training for all UN Health Care Centre medical personnel on PITC. PITC refers to HIV testing and counselling,



Several promotion methods were adopted for the promotion of HIV testing and knowing one's status through the use of different media.

of HIV testing and knowing one's status through the use of different media (Appendix 2).

- Posters were used to continuously display promotional messages in many strategic places in the compound.
- UN Cares task force members have changed their e-mail signature to promote knowing one's status.
- Promotional messages in the form of quizzes were sent to staff through the Internet during special testing campaigns like World AIDS Day.
- Different videos and digital screens were used to flash messages during special testing campaigns.

Strengths /Successes of the project

The UN Cares team identified the following as being keys to success:

- **Confidentiality procedures:** The incorporation of human rights and gender equality perspectives was ensured. Confidentiality procedures were put into place through the use of a coding system. Steps were taken to avoid breakage of confidentiality during the processing of financial claims. HIV testing was done only after obtaining written consent. The obtaining of written consent serves two purposes:

recommended by health care providers to persons attending health care facilities as a standard component of medical care. The major purpose of such testing and counselling is to enable specific clinical decisions to be made and/or specific medical services to be offered that would not be possible without knowledge of the person's HIV status. The medical personnel offer PITC for all UN staff and dependents accessing the clinic for medical exams — employment related or general medical check-up. (More detailed information on PITC can be found in Appendix 1 of this document).

Intense Promotion: Several promotion methods were adopted for the promotion

- The consent form, which is filled out with the counsellor, provides data, in the event that some form of documentation is needed in the future. The consent form is the only place where the staff member's name is written out. The request forms only have codes. The consent forms are also designed to collect patient demographic information, agency, reason for testing, etc. The results from the consent form are decoded.
- The issue of written consent is being reconsidered by the UNHCC in view of the recent UN Medical Service guidelines for HIV testing. However, being a workplace clinic, the medical staff need some kind of protection if medico-legal issues arise related to consent for HIV testing.
- **Free HIV testing:** All UN personnel and dependents are eligible to access HIV testing organized by the UN. Testing campaigns included even external contractors in the UN compound. The uptake of Couple Counselling and testing also was promoted.
- **Strong advocacy and promotion through different media**
- Continuous campaign for uptake of HIV testing and counselling, especially during World AIDS Day, UN Day, National HIV Testing day, etc.
- Partnership between UN Cares and UN Health Care Centre (UNHCC) for this activity:
- UNHCC co-chairs the UN Cares taskforce together with ILO [the convener]. Therefore, a significant amount of the planning and implementation of UN Cares activities was done by UNHCC. While UN Cares is involved in the overall process of planning and promotion of HIV testing activities, UNHCC provides the technical expertise by providing the HIV testing and counselling services.
- Implementation of PITC at UNHCC

Barriers

The UN Cares team identified several barriers in the effective implementation of programme activities. These barriers are:

- **Complacency:** HIV-related activities and programmes have been numerous and ongoing for several years. As a result, people have developed an attitude of complacency and have lost interest. UN Cares staff needs to now work harder to motivate people on issues related to HIV and AIDS.
- **Lack of full time staff:** The current projects and activities are not being carried out at full capacity due to lack of paid staff. Most staff members volunteer to participate in these promotional activities.
- **Lack of trust:** Staff members are afraid of getting tested or disclosing their status since they continue to lack complete confidence in the confidentiality of the testing services offered by the workplace program. Although, trust in UN Cares has improved over the years, the fear of real or perceived stigma

as a result of HIV status continues to serve as a barrier.

- **Stigma:** Although the prevalence of stigma had reduced over the years, it is still high at the duty stations. This stigma prevalent at the duty stations is reflected among the UN staff as well.
- **Lack of knowledge/awareness:** The belief that HIV is a disease of the Africans and not a problem of the Western world persists in the community. A similar belief is also present locally, where people from the highlands are believed to be more likely to become infected. These beliefs influence the effective use of testing services offered.

Advice to other UN Cares teams

The UN Cares team in Ethiopia found that staff and dependents are open to knowing their status if the services are provided. When testing services are offered, the acceptance level was reported as being very high. Additionally, partnerships with service providers were found to be vital in increasing the availability of testing services. As part of these partnerships, some standalone HIV testing organizations were invited during different events like World AIDS Day, and UN Family Day to provide HIV testing and counselling services to staff and dependants.

Future projects/Plans

Future plans of the UN Cares team in Ethiopia include:

- **Scaling up Provider-initiated testing and counselling (PITC) to all clients of the medical services:** The UN Cares team is working on scaling up the existing PITC to offer these services to more staff members. The existing clinics serve numerous patients a day and address all health needs including antenatal care, thereby limiting effective delivery of this service to all incoming patients. The team wants to train all doctors at the UN Health Care Centre to maximize the offering of these services.
- **Incorporation of HIV Testing into different health campaigns and wellness activities:** The UN Cares team in Ethiopia recognizes the incorporation of HIV testing into different health campaigns and wellness activities as being vital in increasing HIV testing rates. They would like to pursue it as part of their future projects. They plan to increase the availability of more testing campaigns and wellness activities using different events such as WAD, National HIV testing Day, UN Family Day, etc., to hold Wellness Days.
- **Couple counselling and testing:** Couple counselling and testing was conducted as part of the UN Cares teams' promotional efforts and showed great response rate. The team would like to routinely offer these services at the UN Health Care Centre by training more staff. However, the limited personnel at the clinic serves as barrier to the expansion of these activities.
- **Lack of services outside Addis Ababa:** Currently, due to lack of fully paid staff, services outside Addis Ababa are scarce. Staff members volunteer

to perform these activities, as it is not part of their job descriptions. It is challenging to continuously monitor activities outside Addis Ababa. The team visits four to five duty stations a year and encourages staff outside Addis Ababa to use the available testing services. Those that express an interest are connected with local service providers. This has been identified as an area that needs further expansion.

Sources

- ¹ UNAIDS. Epidemiological Factsheet, Ethiopia 2011: Retrieved online on July 10, 2013, at <http://aidsinfo.unaids.org>.

Appendix 1

- Provider-Initiated HIV Testing and Counselling (PITC)
- Provider-initiated HIV Testing and Counselling (PITC) refers to HIV testing and counselling that is recommended by health care providers to persons attending health care facilities as a standard component of medical care. The major purpose of such testing and counselling is to enable specific clinical decisions to be made and/or specific medical services to be offered that would not be possible without knowledge of the person's HIV status. PITC is not compulsory.
- Provider-Initiated Testing and Counselling is:
 - Designed to integrate routine offering of HIV Testing and Counselling services into clinical services such as TB, STI and family planning clinics as well as out-patient clinics;
 - Uses opt-out approach, i.e., when the patient is notified that an HIV test is routinely offered and recommended, and that he/she may refuse the test;
 - Intervention is brief, taking just a few minutes.
 - The advantages of Provider-Initiated Testing and Counselling are that it:
 - Increases access to and acceptance of HIV testing and counselling among populations who are most likely to be infected and need care;
 - Facilitates identification of ARV-eligible persons early in the course of the disease;
 - Utilizes existing personnel and infrastructure; efficient for clinics to implement;
 - Facilitates linkages to care and treatment;
 - Less stigma as compared to voluntary HIV counselling and testing (VCT) since the individual comes to the clinic for general medical services.

The UN Cares team in Ethiopia found that staff and dependents are open to knowing their status if the services are provided. When testing services are offered, the acceptance level was reported as being very high.

Appendix 2



ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA
COMMISSION ECONOMIQUE POUR L'AFRIQUE

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM — MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

To: All ECA Staff

Date: 26 November 2010

From:

Abdoulie Jannoh
Executive Secretary

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abdoulie Jannoh', is written over the printed name of the Executive Secretary.

Subject: Commemoration of the World AIDS Day 2010

Every year on December 1, World AIDS Day is observed by the global community. It is a chance to show solidarity with people living with HIV and AIDS, and also to remember those who have died from the disease. But World AIDS Day is also an opportunity to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS to prevent more infections. For the UN community, it is an opportunity to know one's status and maintain healthy behaviors. Dying of ignorance in the midst of plentiful is a crime and not an excuse.

The recently released UNAIDS 2010 report brings a message of Hope. The prevention and treatment efforts are working resulting in fewer new HIV infections and AIDS related deaths where there is adherence to all preventive measures and care.

Yet a lot remains to be done. The Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the region most affected by the epidemic with 69% of all new HIV infections, unacceptable number of people dying from AIDS and babies born with HIV.

On this World AIDS Day 2010, I urge the UN community to be part of the global effort by observing the following actions:

Let us all:

1. Wear the red ribbon as a symbol of solidarity with people living with HIV throughout the month of December
2. Adopt and maintain preventive behaviors, protect ourselves and our family members from HIV infection