

CPED Policy Brief Series 2012 No 1

Promoting Participation and Empowerment in **HIV PREVENTION** IN SCHOOLS AND RURAL Communities in NIGERIA: **SOME POLICY ISSUES**

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Preface

CPED's Policy Brief is a short publication designed to inform policy makers and other stakeholders at the federal, state and local government levels in Nigeria on the key policy issues emanating from the action research and intervention programmes carried out by CPED and its collaborators.

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Promoting Participation and Empowerment in HIV Prevention in Schools and Rural communities in Nigeria: Some Policy Issues

Background

Nigeria has recently emerged from a system that denied people access to a say in their future. Involving stakeholders in development planning and implementation allows for the joint identification of needs, innovative ways to meet these needs and ensures sustainable development. It creates ownership of management decisions regarding the local development issues among stakeholders. This can ensure stable benefits, access to information and opportunities for the local communities, and ultimately contribute to environmental conservation. It should be noted that public participation or involvement in planning is not an end in itself, but part of a broader process of pursuing sustainable development. The principle inherent in public participation is that the participation of all interested and affected parties, including vulnerable and disadvantaged persons, in development planning and implementation must be promoted. Consideration must be given to ensuring that people must have the opportunity to develop the understanding, skills and capacity necessary to achieve equitable and effective participation.

Many grassroots communities and their inhabitants, especially in the rural and other marginalised areas, do not generally have any input into decisions and the

implementation of programmes taking place in their localities. Stakeholder participation is an instrument that provides stakeholders the opportunity to participate in decision-making and potentially influence projects or policies. Stakeholder participation is more than involvement only. It implies a certain level of joint responsibility and/or empowerment of the stakeholders in decision-making. Consequently, stakeholder participation can best be defined as 'the act of empowering stakeholders in decision-making on issues they have a stake in'. Stakeholder participation is different from 'public' or 'citizen' participation, which implies more indirect involvement in decision-making. It means that the public (or citizens) has the right of judicial access, and the right of access to information on decisions. Hence, by use of public participation the decision-making becomes more transparent and accountable.

Stakeholder participation is considered by CPED as required in the context of Nigeria so as to achieve sustainable management from economic, environmental as well as from a social point of view. Consequently, the ultimate aim of applying stakeholder participation is to produce well informed management, with good chances of implementation in the rural communities of Nigeria. CPED believes that both decision-makers and stakeholders benefit from communication between them. The stakeholders will understand the relevance and need of the problem, project or policy, and can contribute to ideas and solutions. Decision-makers, on the other hand, profit from new ideas, etc. In a nutshell, stakeholder participation is expected to

improve the quality, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of programmes and projects and to increase the capacities, self-reliance and empowerment of local stakeholders.

What is participation and empowerment in HIV Prevention?

Reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS can only be effective if sexually active people most at-risk populations are specifically targeted. The young persons in different parts of the country fall in this category of people that need to be reached. It is only when concerted efforts are directed towards increasing knowledge base of youth on reproductive health (RH) issues that the rapid spread of HIV can be reversed. There is no doubt that participation and empowerment of youth in HIV prevention activities is essential. Global experience has shown that the effectiveness of responses to HIV/AIDS is strengthened by involving those most affected. In relation to HIV/AIDS programming, this includes involvement in analysing their own vulnerability and risk, in designing projects and in making decisions about interventions. An approach based on real needs ensures that resources are used more effectively and sustainably and ownership of projects is thereby strengthened.

This Policy brief provides an overview of some lessons that CPED and its partners have learned in the use of participation and empowerment approach in HIV prevention programmes.

Participation

Participation in HIV/AIDS programmes in rural communities in Nigeria is understood by CPED to be a dynamic, facilitated process that helps rural people to actively influence and engage in effective responses to HIV/AIDS. Participatory approaches can build people's skills and confidence and increasing their ability to make informed choices. These approaches can also strengthen service provision and influence the wider environment by helping to confront power dynamics, addressing areas of conflict and reducing stigma through challenging community norms and promoting changes in attitude.

Empowerment

Empowerment can result from participation when those key to the epidemic have sufficient skills, knowledge, confidence, power, self-worth and peer support to make the changes necessary for effective prevention and care – for and by them. Empowerment in HIV/AIDS programmes is understood by CPED and its partners to be a process whereby individuals and communities increase their awareness of HIV/AIDS, their desire and ability to reduce the risk of HIV transmission, and their demand for relevant services and commodities. Over the years, the CPED's experience shows that increased empowerment reduces risk of HIV infection and improves access to AIDS care.

The Example of “Promoting HIV/AIDS enlightenment in Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom, Edo and Imo States”

The overall goal of the project is to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS epidemic and facilitate prevention interventions 45 selected senior primary and secondary schools in Akwa Ibom and Edo States. The participatory and empowerment methodology was adopted entailing the following steps:

Identification of primary stakeholders: The main direct beneficiaries of the proposed project in the nine LGAs of the three states were estimated as follows: At least 90 leaders and members of 36 secondary school management and local education authorities in the nine LGAs of the three states; 250 teachers in 36 secondary schools in the nine LGAs of the three states; 500 student leaders of groups/organisations in the nine LGAs of the three states; and 15,000 students in the nine LGAs of the three states.

Mobilisation of primary and secondary stakeholders in the three states and the nine local government areas for the project: This entailed the mobilisation of the education authorities at the state and local government levels, the school management authorities, and student groups within the targeted schools.

Participatory baseline survey of the impact of HIV/AIDS on the target secondary schools: This entailed the participatory administration of survey instruments including: Information on School Data Sheet; Head Teacher Semi-structure interview; Teacher focus groups discussion;

Student focus group discussions; Teacher Questionnaires; and Student Questionnaires.

Preparation of action plan and pre-intervention consultative workshops: On the basis of the analysis and synthesis of the baseline information collected, the project team synthesised the conclusions arrived at in terms of needed intervention entailing institutional strengthening and capacity building of key stakeholders in each secondary school and general enlightenment and peer education activities into a draft action plan. The draft action plan provided the framework for conducting final consultative forums/workshops with the stakeholders from the target secondary schools in each local government area to delineate the pertinent activities with respect to combating the spread of HIV/AIDS in their schools and communities.

Establishment of School Implementation Committees: The project strove to demonstrate the value of ‘participation’ and ‘ownership’ in all aspects of its execution. Consequently, the implementation of all the different aspects of the action plan in the 36 secondary schools became the responsibility of a *Project Management Committee* of 6 to 10 members comprising teachers and students in each school. This committee participated in implementing most of the activities relating to the project.

Training of Trainers Programme on HIV/AIDS Epidemic in each target secondary school: The main purpose of this key component of the project was to train trainers who in turn participated in the enlightenment of other teachers and students on HIV/AIDS epidemic in each target secondary

school. Participants were empowered through this training to design and organize programmes and activities of their own for their peers in their respective classes and groups within the school. This training of trainers' approach allowed the project to reach a broader audience and ensure the development of a local capacity for civic education on HIV/AIDS since most of the trainees were based in the target schools.

Enlightenment on HIV/AIDS in the target secondary schools through peer education: The final component of the programme consisted of a series of follow-up activities in which the trained and empowered teachers and pupil leaders were supported by CPED to organize and implement various HIV/AIDS education activities in their respective schools. The general enlightenment programme on HIV/AIDS and the peer education activities was designed to apply the skills and knowledge acquired in train-the-trainers programme to their peers in the schools. Enlightenment activities were participatory and informal using appropriate peer education materials on HIV/AIDS prevention already designed during the train-the-trainers programme. Basically, the principal method of enlightenment and peer education used was the civic forum approach. Civic forum entails the engagement of small groups in a series of regular educational discussions where knowledge of HIV/AIDS was introduced. The trained peer educators facilitated the discussions. The different forms of the civic forums used by the peer educators include: round table discussions, class forums, club forums, and school education programmes.

The Example of the Participation of the Youth in HIV prevention activities in rural communities in Edo State

Another example of participation is highlighted by the '*HIV Prevention for Rural Youth in Edo State (HP4RY)*, Nigeria. The goal of HP4RY is to contribute to the reduction of youth vulnerability to HIV in rural communities by building and evaluating a research-based model that strengthens and expands the influence of the Family Life and HIV Education initiative. Of relevance to the theme of this policy brief is the community component of HP4RY. The community component used the AIDS Competent Community model. It consisted of multiple stages, beginning with the conduct of ethnographic studies, which highlighted areas of vulnerability and susceptibility. This was followed by the engagement of three sets of serving in Nigeria's National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) to mobilize the youth and adults in communities to increase communities' AIDS competence.

The Corpers formed and worked with various groups within the communities in the implementation of various activities including drama, song, poems, public campaigns, discussions, social networking groups, forming and training economic development groups, meeting in market places, bars, and various social gathering places to raise awareness, convey information, build solidarity, and empower the youth in particular to engage in shifting attitudes, increase motivation, and mobilize communities to build AIDS Competent communities. With youth empowered, solidarity between adults and youth evolved, leading to the

establishment of youth friendly centers, public library, increased condom use, vocational skills for young girls, increased HIV testing, and increased support for PLWHAs.

Participatory tools and techniques for HIV/AIDS programming

Strengthening the process of empowerment by building an enabling environment

The use of participatory tools and techniques for HIV/AIDS programming can be particularly effective in stimulating discussion of what can be sensitive issues around sexual health and stigmatised behaviours, such as injecting drug use, sex work and men having sex with men. They provide an opportunity to discuss behaviours and norms that influence vulnerability, raise awareness of HIV/AIDS, challenge myths and identify solutions and strategies that may work within particular contexts.

Examples of participatory tools used by CPED and partners include: community mapping, seasonal calendars, body mapping, timelines and trends, evaluation wheels, matrix ranking, daily activity charts, cartoon strips, Venn diagrams, causal impact diagrams, problem trees, and network diagrams.

Visual tools can be used very flexibly in order to accommodate the different perceptions and skills of the group. Local materials that are familiar to participants, such as sticks, leaves and stones, can be used to make quite

complex drawings and diagrams on the ground, providing a less threatening approach and allowing activities to take place wherever participants live and work or wherever they feel most confident. Visual representations enable ideas and concepts to be expressed so that situations can be thoroughly analysed and different solutions tested for effectiveness. They can also act as records for analysis of change over time.

Using tools for group work enables people to participate to the level and extent of their choice and means that discussions do not have to focus on individuals or individual behaviours. For example, drawing body maps and lifelines for 'typical people' minimises the need for participants' personal disclosures, such as their HIV status, sexuality and risk behaviours. It is important to note that while the use of participatory tools and techniques helps facilitate the participatory process, they are only one element of this process.

Strengthening the process of empowerment by building an enabling environment

Many of the factors that influence vulnerability to HIV and the ability to take action on HIV prevention, AIDS care and impact mitigation are related to external factors that need to be addressed to enable effective responses. These factors include policy, legal and human rights issues, and the availability of services and commodities such as condoms and voluntary testing and counselling. The synergies between promoting this 'enabling environment' and the

empowerment of people affected by the epidemic are mutually reinforcing. For example, as stigma decreases, people with HIV are able to become more visible and advocate for their rights.

However, there is a tension between empowerment as a long-term development approach and the need to respond urgently to the epidemic. To speed and scale up responses at the community level, CPED and its local partners support community-based associations and groups to help in the empowerment of marginalised people, providing access to services, resources and commodities and building an environment conducive to prevention, care and support. External or national contexts will affect how quickly an organisation is able to adopt a culture of participation. In some countries the practice of participation can threaten established structures and be risky for the organisation and communities involved. It is important, therefore, to create first a level of acceptance for this type of work to avoid any increased risk for stigmatised groups.

Key Messages to Policy Makers in Nigeria

- Meaningful participation and empowerment of risk prone populations in HIV/AIDS programming increases the impact of prevention and care interventions.
- The participation of those most affected or likely to be affected by the epidemic should be promoted at every level of the response and at every stage of programming.

- It is useful to locate participation strategies on a continuum of participation from inclusion through to empowerment, and to be transparent about levels of participation, particularly with regard to the expectations of participants.

- Investing in building an enabling environment that is conducive to prevention and care efforts and also to participation itself strengthens the process of empowerment.

- Participation requires an investment in the development of appropriate skills, attitudes and behaviours of facilitators. NGOs and NGO support organisations are in a strong position to support participation of communities in responding to HIV/AIDS. The provision of technical and financial support for this is important.

- Visual tools help people to communicate better about sensitive issues related to HIV/AIDS, to analyse these issues and to develop appropriate responses.

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