



Hassan riding a donkey to reach hard-to-reach communities

communities like Tsafe.

“Before I was trained, I never saw the importance of assisting people to know their HIV status,” Hassan said. “I’m grateful to Jhpiego for teaching me how to carry out HIV testing and counseling services in my community.”

In a little less than 3 months, Hassan and his small team have provided services to 9,733 people and are motivated to do more. They test clients and ensure that identified HIV positive clients are linked and referred to hospitals miles away. To ensure the clients are able to complete the continuum of care, the team provides escort or “buddy” services that can help prevent and reduce clients’ loss to follow up.

His hard work and efforts have earned him the name “soja,” meaning protector of the people, in the communities. Mallam Ginger Isa, is one such person who appreciates the work of “soja.” “As a nomad, I have moved from one border town to different communities and have been told about HIV, but never had the opportunity be tested,” said Mallam. “Now I know my status as well as my family. I was happy that I and my family members were tested and we all tested negative.”

As a result of providing HIV services, Hassan and his team have built relationships with the traditional rulers. These traditional rulers are now working to provide

additional health information and resources for their communities: insecticide-treated mosquito nets for pregnant women and their children, health education, family planning services, promotion of access to medical care, and promotion of hospital delivery with a skilled birth attendant.

“It has not been easy, but I am happy to reach many people to give them services that they would not have gotten considering the distances they have to cover before getting to health facilities,” said Hassan.

“It’s also important to know that many other communities are now sending messages to us to bring the testing to their areas. This is a totally different HIV picture in terms of awareness from these very conservative communities compared to a year or two ago.”

** Contributed by Angela Colson in collaboration with Jhpiego*

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Meet Hassan: HIV Counselor Reaches the Hard to Reach Communities in Nigeria

Riding donkeys, motorcycles, and bicycles and walking along rugged roads for long distances are just a part of Hassan Mohammad’s daily routine. Hassan is a community health extension worker and team lead of the HIV Testing and Counseling Unit at Tsafe General Hospital. Tsafe is an area located in Zamfara state in northwest Nigeria. It has several remote communities with an estimated population of

over 90,000 people who have little or no access to hospital care.

Through PEPFAR and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Nigeria, Jhpiego—an international, non-profit health organization—trains community volunteers and health care providers like Hassan to provide HIV testing and counseling services to hard-to-reach vulnerable



You Need to Know

Further on Young People and HIV/AIDS

Young people represent 40 percent of all new HIV infections, meaning 890,000 young people are infected every year, or nearly 2,500 every day, according to UNAIDS.

Knowledge about HIV among young women and men has improved worldwide, but only slightly, since 2008. Only 34 percent of youth have complete and accurate HIV knowledge, and less than half of young people living in 15 of the 25 countries with the highest HIV prevalence (including Nigeria) can correctly answer five basic questions about HIV and how it is contracted.

Efforts that continue to expand knowledge about HIV are crucial to achieve an AIDS-free generation. Without these, the goal of an AIDS-free generation will remain out of reach for years.

The family, social, cultural, and institutional settings in which youth live profoundly influence their behaviors. Close interactions with parents and other adult role models, regular school attendance, and supportive societal norms are protective factors that are associated with positive youth behaviors.

As a critical step toward an AIDS-free generation, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) supports programs that focus on youth before they have established patterns of behavior that increase their risk of HIV infection.

PEPFAR also promotes early diagnosis and treatment of HIV for young people to reduce the risk of passing the virus on to others.

To our contestants here today, I would like you to note that for centuries, the youth have been a force to reckon with in efforts to advance the course of development. Your vigor and resourcefulness adequately position you to achieve every goal you can conceive, including the goal of an AIDS-free generation. Indeed, your presence here today, even though it is exam period, is a pointer to your determination to be a part of the movement for an AIDS-free generation. I would lend my voice to the slogan that ensuring an AIDS-free generation truly begins with the individual: "it begins with you."

Being excerpts from a speech by U.S. Ambassador, The Honorable Terence P. McCulley, during a rap contest for high school students in Abuja, in commemoration of World AIDS Day 2012.

LeaderSpeak

(Quotes on PEPFAR)



"I would like to thank development partners "like PEPFAR and CDC [a PEPFAR agency], like IHVN [a PEPFAR Implementing Partner] for their unrelenting efforts to partner with Nasarawa State on public healthcare. We are encouraged and emboldened by this stance." – *The Governor of Nasarawa State, Albaji Tanko Almakura on November 9, 2012 in Tudun Gwandara, Lafia, during the official flag-off ceremony for accelerated services in prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission, supported by PEPFAR.*

News & Titbits

A two-year-old child born with HIV infection and treated with antiretroviral drugs beginning in the first days of life has been declared "functionally cured" of HIV. The baby has been free of active virus, although very sophisticated tests can find traces of the virus, it is not able to replicate and spread. This is described as a "functional cure." A finding on a research into the matter was presented on March 3, 2013 at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections in Atlanta, U.S. The research was funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health and the American Foundation for AIDS Research. Reacting to the news, UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé said: "This news gives us great hope that a cure for HIV in children is possible and could bring us one step closer to an AIDS free generation... This also underscores the need for research and innovation especially in the area of early diagnostics."

History: An HIV Time Line

November 2012:

UNAIDS reports that new HIV infections have plummeted by more than 50% in 25 low- and middle-income countries, and the number of people getting antiretroviral treatment has gone up by 63% in the preceding two years. However, more than 34 million people are still living with HIV, according to global estimations.

PEPFAR News edited by Olayinka Balogun