

News Flash E-Bulletin



National AIDS Commission
Responding to HIV/AIDS in Belize

March 30, 2012

Global AIDS Response Progress Report Nears Completion



The National AIDS Commission Secretariat held its Global AIDS Response Progress Report 2012 Consensus Building Workshop on March 28, 2012 at the Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry Conference Center in Belize City. The Global AIDS Response Progress Report, formerly referred to as the UNGASS Report, monitors the progress of our National Response towards the 2015 targets set in the 2011 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.

The purpose of the workshop was to engage key stakeholder's input into the reporting process by reviewing the draft report towards the development of a representative and comprehensive final report. The 2012 report, which fortunately shows progress from the previous one, includes components that assess our policy environment, national spending, and our national indicators of prevention, attitude and behavior as well as our progress towards universal access. In addition, this year's Global AIDS Response Progress Report 2012 will include assessment of the sexual and reproductive health services provided.

The draft report showed that although Belize's national response shows improvement in its overall performance during 2010-2011, the key findings of this

period also underscore main areas that still require attention such as improved evidence-based planning and coordination of the national response; achieving universal access; progressive sexuality and HIV education training for most at risk groups; monitoring national AIDS spending and collecting relevant data for both private and public sectors; reducing stigma and discrimination; and the continued mainstreaming of meaningful involvement of people living with HIV.

Many salient recommendations were shared at the consensus building workshop as well as interesting and provocative comments that call for the formulation of new measures to a strategic vision that results in more tangible accomplishments to be reported in the next scorecard via the increased collaboration of all stakeholders. Toward this end, a call is made for the continued meaningful and increased cooperation of stakeholders in realizing our commitments, as postulated in our NSP, and that they be clearly captured in our upcoming NOP and M&E Plan.

Marketing/BCC Training Delivery Proves Successful



The National AIDS Commission Secretariat, with the support of UNDP, successfully delivered a three day workshop on the development and implementation of targeted behavior change campaign designs. Forty-two participants from the District Committees and IEC Sub-Committee, including representation from HECOPAB, YFF, Belize Red Cross, BFLA, RSDU, UNIBAM and C-Net+, benefited from the capacity building initiative identified in the NSP 2012-2016 as a key area for building skills and technical capacities.

A number of concepts were covered in the training modules such as social marketing; building audience profiles; brand archetypes, personality and positioning; market segmentation; delta processes and other critical components in the production of well-targeted media campaigns and PSAs.

While three days of training in the development of effective human rights and gender responsive marketing and behavior change communication is not enough, all participants left with a wealth of information in their pockets that will serve as good reference points to revisit and assimilate the lessons .. Equally important, these participants will be able to apply this knowledge to their individual areas of work particularly benefiting their next engagement in the production and

implementation of behavior change programs in prevention. All participants are encouraged to make much use of all that was learned during the three day workshop. We are sure the time was well-invested and that the results will be reflected in the successes of our continued work to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. Finally, we would like to acknowledge Mr. Kerry Singh from PSI for facilitating very informative and engaging sessions as well as to acknowledge Ms. Anita Zetina for her presentation on Human Rights and Gender perspectives in Information, Education and Communication.

Capacity Project Carries Out M&E Functions with District Committees Under the Continuum of Care

The term Continuum of Care (CoC) refers to the range of services available within the health care sector, and to some extent, outside of it, to address the health and wellness needs of people with HIV. In accordance with the National Strategic Plan 2012-2016, District Committees (DCs) are being trained and supported to serve as the gatekeepers/guardians of the CoC on the ground. In Corozal, on March 23, an all day workshop was held in which members of DCs identified the roles that their various organizations played in upholding the Continuum of Care and did the first ever assessment of their functions as a district committee. This benchmark activity allows them to identify gaps and develop an action plan to fill those gaps and improve the overall impact of their Continuum of Care. This parallels the performance optimization work that continues at public health facilities across the country with the kind of capacity building project that DCs can look forward to the Secretariat and the Capacity Project working with them in the future to utilize performance improvement processes and tools.

These efforts further demonstrate the commitment of the Capacity Project and allied partners in reducing the effects of the constraints of financial access to care, lack of information to assist consumers make best choices, geographical and cultural barriers, and other factors to achieving a locally relevant continuum of care model sought for people with HIV and most at risk groups to HIV.

BDF Introduces Exciting New Medical Facility

The Belize Defense Forces launched its new Camp Belizario Medical Center on Monday, March 19 in Belmopan. Several HIV response stakeholders attended the inaugural ceremony of the medical center which offers a full range of services. This new facility will support Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) services, a mini lab that also facilitates rapid HIV tests, ARV mobilization and clinical case management of Belize's military forces via the services of a visiting doctor and support of available clinicians.

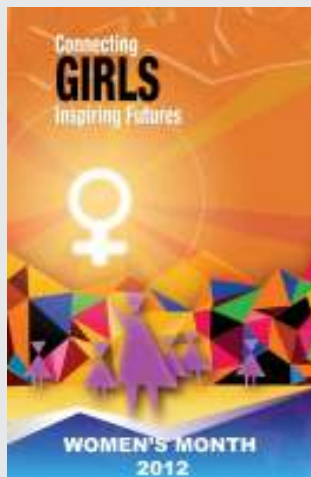
This new facility is a great stride in improving access and the quality of HIV services to the military forces and is part of a three year project funded by the US

Government via the CDC. This project further brings to culmination the well-coordinated and multifaceted program and prevention initiative which include HIV policy development, STI testing, HIV prevention education, VCT services, development of a behavioral surveillance study, free condom distribution and now comprehensive medical services.

Significant to the national HIV response, the Belize Defense Force will be able to manage the facility sustainably through the training of staff, human resource mobilization and collaboration with non-military partners in the response. The military camp in Punta Gorda, Toledo may benefit next from a similar HIV medical program expansion.



Celebrating Women in March and Year Round



With the end of the month also comes the culmination of a very special month dedicated to the celebration of Women's History Month. This month is also an internationally designated month dedicated to highlighting the many contributions of women to today's society and underscoring the important work that remains to be done in transforming and empowering the lives of girls and women.

Throughout Belize, partner agencies in support of women's issues collaborated in an extensive calendar month of events in honor of women, emphasizing the

importance of women's role in society, and the significance of the education, strength, resilience and progress made over time.

The vibrant month of March featured a number of activities including: informational and enlightening seminars and sessions in self-development and gender issues; award ceremonies; a women's summit; poetry competitions and a number of sport activities promoting healthy lifestyles.

One mesmerizing and successful event was the Poetry Competition hosted by the Women's Department. Emerging poets in Belize City submitted poems accentuating the theme for Women's Month, "Connecting Girls, Inspiring Futures". The competition received entries throughout the country and featured a total of 16 poems recited at Bird's Isle Restaurant on March 10, 2012 by the authors themselves. The fun-filled event enjoyed a great turnout as family and friends came out to cheer and support the competition participants.

March 22nd kicked off with the 7th Annual Women's Summit held at the Radisson Fort George Hotel and Marina. The summit highlighted issues that continue to affect girls and women as well as the need to address these gaps with empowering initiatives and programs. The event featured presentations from girls on their experience in community involvement depicting the struggles that women have to overcome in time, as well as to illustrate the successes which have been made in creating an image of strength and capacity for other women and girls in both urban and rural Belize.

While the month of March has been rich with so many colorful, entertaining and informational opportunities, it also illustrates the role that women can play in building societies' individual and collective potential. Certainly, this task at hand is not for the month of March alone but a priority throughout the year.

Social Marketing Efforts and Testing Work Hand- in - Hand at La Ruta Maya Challenge



Belize's international and iconic event, La Ruta Maya Challenge, was as vibrant as ever and as always drew crowds from all walks of life. Belizeans rushed to their

favorite spots along the Ruta Maya route to celebrate this longtime tradition and exciting five day event to cheer and support their preferred canoe race team. With such large captive audiences that include youths at risk and other vulnerable groups to STIs and HIV, the event provides a great opportunity to promote outreach activities aimed at increasing HIV awareness and to implement other social marketing strategies that prevent the spread of HIV. These youths at risk and other most at risk populations to STIs and HIV transmission were creatively engaged in a number of exercises as part of PASMO's targeted prevention strategies. The well-trained PASMO team strategically partnered with Dr. Mendoza from the current CDC/BSS research team, and clinicians from the Northern Regional Hospital, to conduct 95 tests aimed at the identified risk groups. PASMO's signature brand of high-quality condoms - Vive - and water-based lubricants were also widely promoted as efficient and effective tools in reducing risk factors to HIV/AIDS. Once again, the PASMO team is applauded for their great strides in the fight against the spread of HIV and fostering proper sexual and reproductive health while utilizing targeted research and innovative social marketing strategies aimed at most at risk groups.

Final High School Debate Tournament Reveals Winner



The High School Debate Tournament under the tag line, "Sensitizing communities, reducing HIV related stigma and discrimination for MARPS," culminated on Monday March 26, 2012 with the final round at the UWI Auditorium. In this final debate, the top two debate teams from Anglican Cathedral College and from Gwen Lizarraga High School debated on whether the workplace HIV status disclosure in Belize was helpful or hurtful. The former team argued that developing HIV status disclosure laws in Belize would decrease stigma and discrimination by forcing employees to reveal their HIV status to employers. The opposing team offered the counter argument that compelling employees to disclose their HIV status to employers would in fact worsen the problem of HIV stigma and discrimination. Both teams were able to articulate strong persuasive statements and provide substantive evidence in support of their argumentative positions. Ultimately, the team with the negative position convinced the judges that compelling employees to disclose their HIV status would exacerbate stigma and discrimination in the workplace because the right to confidentiality of the employee would be violated. This was said to be especially true if proper structures and mechanisms are not in place to provide adequate support to those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

These six weeks of debate tournament provided the debate teams from several participating schools in Belize City the opportunity to extensively research factors that perpetuate HIV-related stigma & discrimination while creating much awareness in the process. The debate teams, teachers, and fellow student supporters at the tournaments benefited from the wealth of knowledge and understanding shared about modes of transmission, drivers of the epidemic, and even information with regards to existing strategic frameworks for assistance in-country. Laudable initiative certainly underpins the creative means of promoting HIV/AIDS awareness that reduces HIV-related stigma and discrimination especially for groups most at risk of HIV. Furthermore, these efforts demonstrate the continued commitment of partner agencies such as Women's Issues Network and UWI in forming strategic partnerships in sensitizing communities on issues surrounding HIV and using educational settings as an effective means of reaching targeted prevention among youths.

Upcoming M&E Training for GFRD9 Sub-Recipients



The Global Fund RD 9 project entitled, 'Accelerating the Pace: Reaching Marginalized and Vulnerable Populations with Critical Services,' is well underway with both overall successes and challenges in certain programmatic areas. Recognizing the need to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation capacity of Sub-Recipients (SRs) and to ensure improved results of budget management and targets, an M & E workshop is being tentatively planned for April 18 - 21. In further preparation for this useful workshop, twenty-three participants gathered on March 23 at the NAC Conference Room to be introduced and oriented to an online self- help guide - a resourceful monitoring and evaluation instrument from the Global Fund. Furthermore, the half day session was designed to facilitate a better understanding among participants of basic M&E concepts.

These training opportunities are most helpful in building a greater understanding and appreciation of the importance of proper and continuous monitoring and evaluation in project management in the national HIV response. The Global Fund self-help tool will ease improved reporting as the modules are built with a comprehensive set of guidelines on M&E standards and practice throughout GF M&E standards that facilitate performance-based funding. Therefore, participants benefit from learning and applying this tool when carrying out their M&E functions in

a systematic and structured way that ensures reporting and data quality assurance in meeting our required national standards.

U.N Secretary General Ban Ki- moon Delivers Historic Speech on Human Rights



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