Mobilizing MSM and CSW communities to combat HIV in Ukraine

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Background: Reaching High-Risk Communities

Under the USAID HIV/AIDS Service Capacity Project in Ukraine, Project HOFE implements the community mobilization component. 48% of HIV infections in Ukraine are sexually transmitted. Accordingly, this project targeted two most-at-risk populations (MARPs): MSM and CSW. These groups are isolated and hard-to-reach, making mobilization an optimal tool for involving members in prevention and treatment. The project successfully activated MSM and CSW communities in the battle against HIV.

Methods: Educational Program for MSM and CSW

The program developed and implemented a multi-tiered Educational Program for MSM and CSW community leaders. The following training sessions were conducted:

- **Basic Counseling**: Utilization of peer-to-peer methods to share information on HIV and STIs. 60 participants, mostly NGO clients and self-support group members.

- **Organizational Development**: 20 leaders from MSM and CSW communities. Participants overcame their general closure and insulation to jointly participate in trainings. Topics included:
  - Organizational management and NGO registration.
  - Financial management.
  - Project development.

- **Community Mobilization**: The 20 leaders from MSM and CSW communities attended a Training-of-Trainees on how to mobilize communities.

The five best participants received financial and methodological support and conducted trainings for their organizations.

Results: Mobilized Disparate Groups to Work Together

- United high-risk communities. CSW began facilitating support groups for MSM. Communication with male SW was enhanced.
- Accessed transgender people. Conducted the first training on community mobilization techniques for a transgender group in Ukraine.
- Registered 5 new organizations that now implement HIV projects.
- Increased knowledge and skills of over 85% of participants in community mobilization and HIV.

Conclusions: Mobilization Effectively Expands Access

Community mobilization is an effective tool for expanding access to quality HIV/AIDS prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and support services to most-at-risk populations. Mobilization of MARPs effectively:

- Improves interaction between the groups.
- Enhances access to other MARPs.
- Motivates members of these groups to conduct prevention and counseling activities.

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