

Report on HIV / AIDS Seminar that was held on 7th March 2009 at the Primary School grounds at Mto wa Mbu.

Saturday 7th March a seminar was organised as requested by Sarakasi ya Vijana/Twiga Foundation on HIV/AIDS. The seminar was meant for the Sarakasi staff (15), the parents/caretakers of the children (13) as well as indirectly for all the members of the Sangoma traditional dance group (15) and the invitees (12). Total number of participants was therefore 55.



Last minute preparations: Mrs. Lanta Idi and in the background Mrs. Lomayani, Dr. Sanka and Mrs. Van Rijn.

The invitees were: The chairman Mr. Zacharia of town, the chairman of the ward Mr. Lukumay, the balozi (supervisor of 10 households) Mrs. Binti Idi, Mr. Massawe of the Tanapa Aids group, Mr. Charles of ICA, Dr. Sanka of the Kigongoni hospital, Mrs. Lomayani counselling and testing of HIV of the Diaconical hospital, Dr. Lazaro of Diaconical hospital, Mrs Lanta Idi and Mrs. Jamhuri of Mwanavumto. The last two ladies years ago set up a group of people who are suffering of Aids and who are admitting it, sharing experiences and helping others. The group now consists of some 90 women. Last but not least a Dutch nurse was present who had worked in the hospital in Haydom for half a year, Mrs. Baukje van Rijn.

She had asked her employer in the Netherlands for funds and succeeded in obtaining them to enable Sarakasi to implement a well organized, equipped and represented seminar.

Baukje had some Medical & Foundation) from guest Sanka, Mrs.



and Mrs. Mrs. Jamhuri) sat together to prepare the

also brought AMREF (African Research training materials Holland. The speakers (Dr. Baukje, Mrs. Lomayani

Lanta Idi and

seminar. Everybody was enthusiastic and eager to co-operate. The topics were divided over the guest speakers and a program and timetable was made for the day. Also George of Fiesta restaurant was asked to take care of the breakfast and lunch for all the seminar participants as well as the children and their coaches. Usually the mama's of the children's centre cook themselves but today they were participant in the seminar. Ms. Tessa Groot a friend of Sarakasi painted a big Twiga logo for the occasion.

It was decided to split the audience or participants in small groups of no more than 6 people. After a presentation of 15 minutes the participants would then split up in groups and discuss a couple of questions. This turned out to be a successful formula as all groups were soon engrossed in heated discussions.



Discussion groups.

The day was supposed to start at 10:00 but as is the tradition in Tanzania most people showed up an hour later so the day started at 11:00.

Mrs. Van Rijn started to explain about the difference between Aids and HIV. You can be infected with the HIV virus but not be sick (Aids). Even for more than 15 years. She also talked about the CD4 (a kind of white blood cell protecting the body from infections) and what medicine does with CD4 and the importance



Dr. Sanka, guard Mateo, Mama Lomayani and Mark Mwakarole guard.

thereof. Groups were formed (women with women, men with men) and they all received an exercise book with the questions as well as a pen to jot down answers. The first question was: what is the difference between HIV and Aids, the second question was where does the virus live in



the body? And the third question, How can you get infected by HIV?

Dr. Sanka then told more in detail about the transmission of the HIV virus and in which body fluids it houses. Also he talked about the importance of testing, treatment and prevention.

The third presentation was by Mrs. Lomayani who tests people for Aids at the Diaconical hospital. She used to be a primary school teacher for some 20 years and is an incredible powerful and charismatic orator. She talked about stigma and discrimination of people who live with Aids. Self stigma, stigma by the community and family.



Mrs. Van Rijn and Mrs. Lomayani giving their presentation.

Stigma hurts people living with HIV/AIDS. We were fortunate enough to learn from her about Aids and families in Mto wa Mbu. Some stories were shocking. Once she had heard that there was someone sick with Aids in the village. She made inquiries but was told by the family that there was no one. After 2 more visits she got to see the person who was covered in his own excretions and had been fed very badly. Those people thought if we don't give the patient food (who is regarded as carrying death) then we don't need to bathe him so often and thereby touch him. Mrs. Lomayani took that person to hospital and that person lives till today and is needless to say, grateful. Mrs. Lomayani told us it is ok to hug Aids patients, to wash their clothes, to greet and shake hands or to dance the Blues with them! Which she demonstrated by dancing close with William!



Again, groups were formed and the following questions were discussed; can you get infected by Aids through kissing? Can you get Aids from a dead person, how long does the virus stay in the body after a person has died? If a person was

infected today and tomorrow he would test, will the test show he was infected? Other questions that were later also discussed were; How can we prevent infections? Do you know the proper use of condoms? Why are people afraid to test? Is it good to stigmatize people with Aids? Do you need more explanation about Hiv and Aids? What did you learn today?

Then the group of Sangoma (15 persons) showed us a drama play on Aids. A farmer couple sell their land to pay the school fees for their son. The next day he leaves the village home for the big town. Unfortunately someone who supposedly wants to show him the way to the school, takes him to the street bar and prostitutes instead. The school fee money is thus spent on having a good time. Of course he does not use a condom and he is infected with the HIV virus and contracts AIDS. The parents are wondering why they didn't have news from their son. The father however, refuses the mother to go and look for him. After some time the son returns home. Luckily they take him to hospital, but soon afterwards he dies. After their performance we were all ready for a good lunch and soda.

Whilst we were in the seminar the children were at the centre enjoying also the Sangoma Group



The Sangoma group with the children.

the food and in the afternoon they went for a walk to the big Baobab. Unfortunately the video of ICA did not work so Mrs. Lomayani decided to give practical information and a demonstration on the proper use of condoms.



Lanta Idi leads the discussion Group, gardener Edu, the uncle of Stefano, the new Maths and English teacher Alfred and a member of the Sangoma group.



She and Dr. Sanka gave all participants a packet with a condom and remarked that unfortunately today they could not show a female condom. At first everybody felt very awkward but later on you could see people easing up and following the instructions that were given. There was more room for questions and one was asked concerning married women. It is a fact that most men sleep with other women also. How should the married women protect themselves when the men do not accept to wear a condom? Mrs. Lomayani said the woman should refuse and press for safe sex. However, the matter is more complex and many wives are beaten if they refuse sex to the husband.



All members of the Sangoma groep wore T-shirts with the advertising text of Tanzanian Salama condoms: "If you love her, you protect her".



Mrs. Lomayani finally tried her level best to get across the following message: Please do not for the sake of 5 good minutes risk the health of your own body, use your brain! And also more practical which made everybody laugh, don't switch off the light of your room in the guesthouse before you start sex.

Finally, Mrs. Lanti Idi and Mrs. Jamhuri who have Aids took the floor. Mrs. Lanta Idi told everybody that it took a long time before she was finally convinced to test for Aids. She could not believe it, that she could have Aids. When she did test and discovered she had Aids she went through all kinds of emotions, anger, self-blame, depression fear, shock and helplessness. By then she weighed 24 kg and had a CD4 count of 10. Now, seven years afterwards she weighs 78kg and has a CD4 count of 800. By telling this she convinced the participants of the importance of testing and of knowing early whether or not you are infected. She was also a living example of living positive with Aids and being determined to make the most of it.

These days, she said, there are good, free of charge medicines with which you can lead a good quality life. Mrs. Jamhuri told the participants laughingly look at us! Can you see we have Aids? We live a normal life and at least we know where we stand, look at yourselves are you guys sure you are not infected? How is it for you living with this insecurity and knowing that you are possibly transmitting the virus to innocent people?

Finally, Mrs. Lomayani made a plea to everybody welcoming them for a free and discreet testing at the Diaconical hospital.

Whilst William our youth worker was translating for Mrs. Van Rijn, Mrs. Lomayani was translating everything in the Maa language for all the Maasai guards present. She was also the coach of the Maasai men group. This group was very happy with the day and had learned many things. They did however, bring forward that it is very difficult to prevent Aids in the Maasai community as men tend to sleep with many women. These young adults however, made a vow to test themselves immediately. From Mrs. Lomayani we heard that five persons came immediately on Monday to be tested.

All in all it was a very successful educational as well as a fun day. Our staff learned amongst others, that there is no risk in children who have Aids and other children to play with each other. Only in the case that there is a lot of blood on both an Aids patient as well as the caretaker than the latter should take precautions and wear gloves. Not only as we learned to protect the caretaker from infection, but also to protect the Aids patient from infections (from dirty hands) and new HIV infections.

This day was sponsored by the Afrikafonds of the hospital in Emmen, the Netherlands. We are most grateful for this.

