



REDUCING RISK BY REACHING OUT

HIV/AIDS ACTIVITIES IN DARFUR



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**HIV/AIDS UNIT
AFRICAN UNION - UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN DARFUR (UNAMID)
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Foreword

I'm pleased to introduce "Reducing Risk by Reaching Out: HIV/AIDS Activities in Darfur," a booklet which endeavours to provide a succinct overview of the activities conducted by UNAMID's HIV/AIDS Unit in the past year. I hope readers find useful information and a valuable, insider perspective on significant issues surrounding HIV/AIDS in Darfur, such as increasing accessibility to Voluntary and Confidential Counseling and Testing (VCCT) for larger groups of populations deemed most at risk and conducting widespread sensitization activities across the region.

A collaborative spirit informs the work of HAU—strategic partnerships with Government of Sudan institutions such as the Ministry of Health, state prisons, the Sudan Armed Forces, the United Nations Country Team and the National Intelligence and Security Service has resulted in a coordinated response to HIV/AIDS in Darfur.

In recent times, HAU's momentum has increased due to growing interest on the part of various stakeholders, including the Sudanese government, in promoting HIV/AIDS awareness in Darfur.

On 1 January 2014, the Minister of Health, Mr. Abu Abbas Abdallah Tayeb noted that "there was an increase of HIV/AIDS cases in 2013 in Darfur." The Minister revealed that out of 3,000 people in North Darfur who were provided access to Voluntary and Confidential Counseling and Testing (VCCT) services, 51 tested reactive to HIV.

The table below uses statistics provided by SNAP to provide a snapshot of the on ground situation in terms of HIV/AIDS:

- Comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS transmission: 9.4%*
- Prevalence among female sex workers (FSW): 4.4%**
- Prevalence among men who have sex with men (MSM): 7.7%**
- Prevalence among prisoners: 8.6%**
- Prevalence in border towns: 2 to 5%
- Prevalence among general population: 0.67% (updated after secession of South Sudan).

* Sudan Household Health Survey

** National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan 2010-2014

With an increase in incidents of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV); displacement of populations; porous borders between Chad, Central African Republic and South Sudan; the low rate of HIV/AIDS awareness among people and lack of access to HIV/AIDS services, Darfur's future generations appear to be at greater risk of contracting the virus; hence, the need for a rigorous approach toward HIV prevention in the region.

HIV detection rates in Darfur have gone up due the establishment of VCCT centres in the region as well as the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT). More than 26,000 Darfuris availed of HIV/AIDS services provided by UNAMID HAU in 2013 alone.

These numbers are a testament to the efficacy of information-sharing activities conducted by HAU among the local populations. UNAMID HAU has partnered with the Sudan National AIDS Programme (SNAP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for this initiative.

HAU also provides technical assistance to SNAP regarding the case manage-

ment of reported rapes and HIV Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) with relation to sexual violence in times of conflict.

Another positive development in the struggle to propagate HIV/AIDS education in Darfur is the success of the various awareness-raising and peer education-based training programmes conducted by HAU, in partnership with relevant stakeholders, in all five states. Through such programmes HAU has reached out to local communities, internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in camps, women, prisoners, armed forces and a cross-section of Darfuri youth.

Additionally, the rehabilitation of the blood bank at Nyala Technical Hospital, the first of its kind to provide comprehensive screening of blood samples to reduce chances of HIV transmission via transfusions, is a landmark achievement.

Besides all the outreach activities detailed in this documentation, the HIV/AIDS unit is implementing a full-fledged internal HIV service delivery program for UNAMID peacekeeping personnel (military, police and civilian) in accordance with UNSCR 1308.

In the face of on-ground situational hazards as well as operational roadblocks, HAU has come up with innovative solutions and established relationships of mutual trust with local implementing partners; this enables the Unit to make substantial contributions toward improving the general health and overall wellbeing of Darfuris.



Margaret Masenda-Simbi
Chief HIV/AIDS Adviser
UNAMID

UNAMID AIMS AT HALTING THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS IN NORTH DARFUR PRISONS

BY KEBBA JOME



Prison staff in North Darfur pose for a photograph at a training session conducted by UNAMID's HIV/AIDS Unit. Factors such as overcrowding in single cells, unsafe injecting practices related to illegal drug use and unprotected sex among inmates contribute toward making HIV/AIDS a serious problem for prison populations. Photo by UNAMID HAU.

State prisons, across the globe, are one of the potentially most high risk environments for the transmission of HIV/AIDS. According to statistics, in most countries the rates of HIV infection are several times higher among prisoners than among the free population.

Factors such as overcrowding in single cells, unsafe injecting practices related to illegal drug use and unprotected sex among inmates contribute toward making HIV/AIDS a serious problem for prison populations. The situation is also exacerbated by high rates of multi-drug resistant tubercular infections, Hepatitis B and C as well as other sexually transmitted infections.



All these aspects, collectively combined with meagre nutrition and limited access to adequate health care, render prisoners extremely vulnerable to the disease.

According to most national and international laws, governments have a moral and ethical obligation to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in prisons and to provide proper and compassionate care, treatment and support for those infected. Policies and programmes that effectively reduce the spread of HIV in prisons and provide care, treatment and support for prisoners living with HIV/AIDS already exist in several countries.

In 2006, the Sudan National AIDS Programme (SNAP) conducted a study in Sudan (before the secession of South Sudan) to establish the prevalence rate of HIV in prisons. The study revealed a prevalence rate of 8.6 per cent in Sudanese prisons; in comparison, only 1.6 per cent of the general population in the country was infected. Subsequent to these findings, the prevention of the spread of HIV in prisons became a priority for SNAP. In Darfur, this resulted in collaborative efforts between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) to address the spread of HIV in prisons.

UNAMID's Prisons Advisory Unit (PAU) and HIV/AIDS Unit (HAU) provide financial and technical support to GoS and State Prisons' authorities to implement programmes for prisoners and prison wardens to halt the spread of HIV in prisons in all the five states of Darfur. These programmes are conducted through implementing partners and in accordance with the UN Security

Pictured here are the beneficiaries of HIV/AIDS training programmes conducted among prison staff and inmates in North Darfur by UNAMID's HIV/AIDS Unit. State prisons, across the globe, are one of the potentially most high risk environments for the transmission of HIV/AIDS. Photo by UNAMID HAU.

Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1983 which mandates HAU to provide external support to all such initiatives.

This collaborative partnership has resulted in four key areas, involving both inmates and prison staff, where positive results are being observed—HIV/AIDS education and information through training and awareness sessions for prisoners and prison wardens, joint prisons assessment missions, Voluntary Confidential Counseling and Testing (VCCT) services, provision of IEC materials with messages on HIV/AIDS.

UNAMID's HAU and PAU sections have conducted a series of training and awareness sessions for prisoners and prison wardens on HIV/AIDS. Topics covered during such sensitization activities include basic facts about the disease, common notions of stigma and discriminatory practices faced at a societal level by those diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, the obligation of local authorities to meet the health needs of prisoners, establishing standards of health services for prisoners thereby working toward enhancing prisoners' rights to receive the same quality of health services as free communities.

Additionally, these sessions deal with the special health needs of women inmates as well as establish a framework to chart out the inclusion of HIV/AIDS services as part of the basic health package that is delivered at every prison. Relevant Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials are distributed at the end of session and inmates as well as prison staff are offered VCCT services through SNAP.

The second key area where UNAMID HAU and PAU have played a pivotal role is organizing regular assessment missions to prisons in Darfur to assess prisoners' health and well-being and the overall prison conditions. The HAU

Pictured here are the beneficiaries of HIV/AIDS training programmes conducted among prison staff and inmates in North Darfur by UNAMID's HIV/AIDS Unit. State prisons, across the globe, are one of the potentially most high risk environments for the transmission of HIV/AIDS. Photo by UNAMID HAU.





has been instrumental in providing technical advice targeted at ensuring prisons are HIV-free environments and that prisoners have access to accurate information about HIV/AIDS.

Voluntary Confidential Counseling and Testing (VCCT) services for both inmates and prison staff forms the third important aspect of collaboration between UNAMID HAU and SNAP. Increasing access for testing and counseling in prison environments is a priority for all stakeholders; prisoners as well as those working in these institutions should be given the opportunity to know their status, receive timely treatment and appropriate psycho-social support.

During all such activities, UNAMID HAU distributes IEC materials such as pamphlets, t-shirts, caps, posters and banners to enhance the understanding of the audience. The language used for such material is Arabic

In addition to working with the prisons authorities, HAU supports SNAP in the implementation of other HIV/AIDS related activities such as annual outreach programmes commemorating World AIDS Day, training external Peer Educators, training midwives on preventing Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV, providing training and guidance to doctors and nurses in administering of Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) kits.

These outreach and awareness activities reach large parts of at-risk local populations in Darfur and reflect UNAMID's commitment to the belief that people in Darfuri prisons have the same right to health care, including preventive measures, as those who live free lives.

An IDP woman receives a water roller at the Al Salam internally displaced persons (IDPs) camp on the outskirts of El Fasher, North Darfur, during the World Aids Day celebrations in 2013. Agglomerations of people living in close proximity to each other in the absence of accessible and adequate healthcare facilities has led to an increase in the outbreak of communicable diseases in Darfur, including HIV/AIDS. Photo by UNAMID HAU.





Pictured here is the head of Mobadiroon, a Sudanese nongovernmental NGO that is UNAMID's implementing partner for Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in South Darfur, receiving a cheque from the UNAMID Sector South Head of Office and Team Leader. These QIPs have resulted in the rehabilitation of the Nyala Teaching Hospital Blood Bank and isolation ward at Nyala, South Darfur. Photograph by UNAMID HAU.

UNAMID'S QUICK IMPACT PROJECTS INCREASE ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

BY JAMES NKANGABWA

The conflict in Darfur has resulted in huge displacement of populations, disruption of family structures and livelihoods as well as deterioration of health infrastructure. Additionally, it has led to the formation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps across the region.

Living conditions in such camps are far from ideal—lack of proper sanitation facilities, hygiene, food and water supplies and healthcare are some of the concerns that the displaced face.

In general, the spread of HIV/AIDS is exacerbated by conditions of violence and instability that increase the risk of exposure to the disease through large

movements of people, widespread uncertainty over living conditions, and reduced access to medical care.

South Darfur mirrors all these situations and is at the epicenter of the ongoing conflict, with constant movement of civilians across the Darfur region and also to neighboring countries with high HIV prevalence levels.

In South Darfur, Nyala Teaching Hospital receives the maximum number of HIV/AIDS patients. In order to improve the quality of health services provided to such patients, UNAMID HAU has supported three key areas at the Nyala Teaching Hospital via the Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) programme—rehabilitation of the blood bank and the isolation ward as well as the establishment of Voluntary and Confidential Counseling and Testing (VCCT) services.

In order to ensure the availability of safe blood and transfusion services, the State Ministry of Health, South Darfur, approached UNAMID to support the rehabilitation of the Nyala Teaching Hospital Blood Bank. The Blood Bank conducts routine analysis and blood testing for all hospital patients and handles up to 40 patients on a daily basis. Before rehabilitation work commenced, it lacked amenities such as running water and also suffered from a termite-damaged ceiling and dilapidated fixtures.

UNAMID, in collaboration with the hospital and a local nongovernmental organization called Mobadiroon, began rehabilitating the Blood Bank between April and July 2013. The project was aimed at creating a hygienic environment for patients as well as service providers; this would ensure availability of infection-free blood and accurate testing services requested by the various departments within the hospital.

The main activities of this rehabilitation project included the procurement of a 2,000-litre water tank and a pump, the construction of a stand for the water tank and necessary plumbing to ensure that the Blood Bank has an uninterrupted supply of water. Five wash basins were renovated, worktops resealed, the ceiling repaired, walls painted and the sewage system unclogged.

This project resulted in improved hygiene and greater infection-control for blood storage and transfusions. Additionally, it also contributed toward increasing the efficiency of sample analyses conducted at the Blood Bank.

The Minister of Health and other government officials expressed their appreciation for HAU's work at the handover of the project as well as on the occasion of the UNAMID Joint Special Representative Mohamed Ibn Chambas's visit to the Nyala Teaching Hospital VCCT centre.

Another significant initiative undertaken by UNAMID was the rehabilitation of the isolation ward at the Nyala Teaching Hospital. The isolation ward functions as the main referral centre for patients with illnesses that inhibit them from staying with other patients for fear of causing an epidemic. Such illnesses include yellow fever and tuberculosis. Such wards are critical in minimizing the spread of infectious diseases among the general population.

The isolation ward at the Nyala Teaching Hospital required a great deal of renovation. The project, once again a collaborative venture between UNAMID and Mobadiroon, was completed in three months between April and June 2013. The aim was to improve the living conditions of patients inhabiting the ward through the provision of proper beds and renovating toilets and bathrooms.

A 2,000-litre water tank was installed along with a pump to facilitate continuous supply of water to the ward. Five toilets and bathrooms in the Male Wing and three toilets and two bathrooms in the Female Wing were renovated. The sewage system was also unclogged and upgraded. Additionally, 40 new hospital beds were installed for inpatients.

Apart from such facility-improvement endeavours, UNAMID has also contrib-



A glimpse into the newly refurbished Blood Bank at the Nyala Teaching Hospital, South Darfur. UNAMID, in collaboration with the hospital and a local nongovernmental organization called Mobadiroon, began rehabilitating the Blood Bank between April and July 2013. The project was aimed at creating a hygienic environment for patients as well as service providers; this would ensure availability of infection-free blood and accurate testing services requested by the various departments within the hospital. Photo by UNAMID HAU.

uted directly to the provision of HIV/AIDS testing opportunities to patients at the Nyala Teaching Hospital.

The UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS on 27 June 2001 concretized the need for joint efforts in addressing HIV and also helped ensure all major players, including UN member states, are fully committed to the cause of HIV/AIDS. In June 2011, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1983 propagating the incorporation of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, and VCCT programmes in peacekeeping operations, including assistance to national institutions, Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) processes. The resolution recognized the Department of Peacekeeping Operations' (DPKO) contribution and incorporation of HIV awareness in mandates, activities and outreach projects for vulnerable communities and also highlighted the importance of UN Mission leadership in supporting HIV/AIDS issues in peacekeeping environments.

It is against this backdrop that UNAMID Sector South partnered with the Sudan National AIDS Program (SNAP) in South Darfur, to increase access to VCCT as a way of facilitating people to make informed decisions regarding staying HIV-free or live productive lives with HIV/AIDS.

Collaborating with local NGO Mobadiroon, UNAMID and SNAP established and equipped five Voluntary and Confidential Counseling and Testing (VCT) sites to offer VCCT as well as Prevention of Mother to Child HIV Infection (PMTCT) services in South Darfur. The VCCT sites are located in Nyala, El Wohda, Buram, Kubum and Rehal Berdi.

According to SNAP reports, these facilities now contribute 20% of the total coverage of VCCT in South Darfur. These facilities are mostly used by pregnant women and youth who represent a significant section of the total population of South Darfur.

The response to these sites has been phenomenal. The total number of VCCT performed in the month of January 2014 alone was more than those conducted in the entire year of 2012. The Director of SNAP commended the provision of services through these newly constructed and equipped centres by UNAMID. "The numbers speak for themselves; UNAMID has done a tremendous job in increasing access to VCCT," he said in a recent speech.

Additionally, to date, UNAMID has also trained 80 HIV/AIDS Peer Educators. These are individuals identified from government departments, youth groups, community-based organizations and theatre groups, who undergo a five-day training on HIV/AIDS, and are taught communication skills and techniques that enable them to conduct peer education sessions and provide basic HIV counseling helping people decide to go for HIV VCCT.

These Peer Educators have provided HIV/AIDS awareness education to various categories including the disabled, school-going youth, the hearing- and speech-impaired, police personnel and other community members, thereby increasing the demand for HIV services.

HIV is known to affect individuals and communities through high morbidity and mortality rates especially among the most productive populations, reducing their ability to contribute effectively at the personal as well as the national level. VCCT therefore provides an entry point for people to determine their status, develop risk reduction plans, and for those found to be HIV positive, continue to live productive and prolonged lives through treatment, care and support.

Currently, UNAMID continues to partner with SNAP and civil society organizations in South Darfur so as to improve health services, increase access to VCCT services for community members in order to reduce their vulnerabilities to HIV/AIDS, as per UN Security Council resolutions 1308 and 1983.

The Sector South Head of Office officiates at the handing over of the Nyala Teaching Hospital Blood Bank in South Darfur. This project, undertaken collaboratively by UNAMID's HIV/AIDS Unit and local NGO Moadiroon, resulted in improved hygiene and greater infection-control for blood storage and transfusions. It also contributed toward increasing the efficiency of sample analyses conducted at the Blood Bank. Photo by UNAMID HAU.



UNAMID EMPOWERS YOUTH WITH HIV/AIDS EDUCATION SKILLS

BY CISSY KINAAWA

Young people across the world naturally explore and take risks in many aspects of their lives, including sexual relationships. Therefore, a combination of behavioral, psychological and socio-cultural factors make the youth more vulnerable to HIV than mature adults. When it comes to Darfuri youth, a prime focus is addressing the key factors that account for increasing transmission of the virus. Therefore, UNAMID, in partnership with the Ministries of Education, Health and Social Welfare, have been working intensively with young people in the region so as to enable them to gain a thorough knowledge and understanding of HIV/AIDS issues.

In West Darfur particularly, a key factor influencing the youth is the fact that it shares borders with Chad a country where HIV prevalence rates are higher than in Sudan. In order to ensure that West Darfuri youth receive the support and awareness required to protect themselves from life-threatening infections such as HIV, UNAMID, with its partners, have conducted skills- and knowledge-based workshops aimed at empowering young people with life-changing tips geared toward influencing behavioral change.

Workshops conducted so far focus on issues such as HIV/AIDS knowledge, Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCCT) and peer education training. Music, dance and drama, and ensuring youth participation on World AIDS Day are some of the tools being used to reach out to young Darfuris in the region.

In 2010, the UNAMID HIV/AIDS Unit (HAU), Sector West, started a youth-focused campaign on HIV/AIDS at Krinding High Secondary School for Boys. As part of this campaign an interactive lecture was organised; this attracted a number of students who participated actively. Another similar initiative aimed at increasing student involvement in HIV/AIDS issues was a debate with prizes for the best speakers.

Additionally, UNAMID HAU organised a seminar under the theme “Challenges of HIV/AIDS at Schools and Higher Schools of Learning.” The students who participated in the seminar demonstrated a high level of awareness and understanding of the disease and its effects on the community. HAU officers used the forum to educate participants and correct common misconceptions, such as whether mosquito bites can transfer HIV, and urged students to take part in educating the communities about the dangers of getting infected.

HAU has also organised numerous training workshops with various partners, such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), popular radio channel SAWA Sudan and the Ministry of Social Affairs, for young people from different localities in West Darfur—Masteri, Mournei, Forobaranga, Habila and Kulbus. The aim is to equip the youth with skills geared toward a positive and productive life. HAU also facilitated sessions on HIV transmission as well as Behavior Change and Communication (BCC).



In addition to workshops and training sessions peer education is another strategy used to reach out to the youth in West Darfur. Peer education is a tool used to promote positive attitudes and skills toward abstinence and condom use. UNAMID HAU, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Youth Volunteers Rebuilding Darfur Project, University of Zalingei and Community Based Organization (CBO), conducted peer education for young people in the Mukjar, Bendisi, Beida and Masteri localities of West Darfur. 100 peer educators have been trained since to further HIV/AIDS education in schools, universities and different local communities.

Moreover, in collaboration with the Sudan National AIDS Program (SNAP) and the Red Crescent, HAU has campaigned for youth to know their HIV status and used drama presentations to disseminate their message. According to statistics published by SNAP, a total of 5,358 youth in West Darfur have accessed VCCT services in response to HAU's outreach activities.

Another significant aspect highlighted during awareness-raising training sessions on HIV, is educating young people on the relevance of World AIDS Day and encouraging them to participate in outreach events related to the same. On 1st December 2013, West Darfuri youth actively participated in the World Aids Day celebrations. HIV awareness has also become an integral part of most school programmes in West Darfur.

UNAMID HAU has also been supporting The Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in West Darfur through provision of technical and psychosocial support services, to reduce stigma and discrimination they face in society. The PLWHA, an association that supports both Sudanese and Chadians, became

Participants at a peer education training conducted by UNAMID HIV/AIDS Unit in West Darfur. Sector West HAU in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), University of Zalingei and the Youth Volunteers Rebuilding Darfur Project, and Community Based Organization (CBO) conducted peer education for young people in different localities across West Darfur. Photo by UNAMID HAU.



Women attending a peer education training session organized by UNAMID HIV/AIDS Unit in West Darfur. Peer education is a tool used to promote positive attitudes and skills toward abstinence and condom use. Photo by UNAMID HAU.

operational in West Darfur in 2008 with five members; it aimed at supporting people living with HIV and encouraging them to live a normal and productive life. Its current membership totals 70 people, some of whom have passed on due to AIDS since the last count.

In line with its vision of “Zero new infections, Zero discrimination, and Zero AIDS-related deaths,” and its aim of capacity building for SNAP and other such organizations, representatives of UNAMID HAU regularly guide these organisations so as to enable them to come up with informed decisions regarding challenges they may face.

Members of the PLWHA participate in HAU’s internal and external workshops; many of the association members share their experiences regarding their HIV+ status. “HAU helped build my confidence. At one of the external peer education training sessions I met a Darfur Regional Authority officer who was sympathetic toward people living with HIV/AIDS. After he learned my status, he helped me retire from active military service with full benefits and become an active member of PLWHA,” revealed an association member.

HAU has also been instrumental in helping link the association to other partners working in HIV programmes. Counseling and psychosocial support to handle the impact of stigma are other key areas of support provided by UNAMID HAU.

More than 10,000 students from different localities in West Darfur, including 3,160 women, have benefited from HAU interventions. The Ministries of Education, Social Welfare and Health have commended UNAMID HAU for their efforts to educate youth about HIV and have pledged to work together with HAU to minimize the effects of the disease on the youth in the region.





On 20 February 2014, a group of midwives are pictured at the concluding session of an awareness-raising training regarding HIV/AIDS at Zalingei Midwifery School, Central Darfur. Photo by UNAMID HAU.

A MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH TO HIV/AIDS PREVENTION

BY HAZVINEI JONGI

Many traditional health practices play an important role in the prevention of HIV/AIDS. In Sudan, the tradition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) prevalent in many communities across the region is inextricably intertwined with the battle against HIV/AIDS.

Putting an end to this harmful practice is a key goal of the Sudanese Ministry of Health. The African-Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), the Sudan National AIDS Program (SNAP) and the Office of the Governor of Central Darfur have embarked on a partnership to educate people about the harmful effects of FGM. All stakeholders understand the importance of safeguarding unborn children and ensuring general improvement in the health of the mothers through elimination of harmful traditional practices.

Since 2013, this three-way collaboration has resulted in more than 145 midwives, who are traditionally charged with the responsibility for circum-

cising young girls in Darfuri society, being trained at the Zalingei Midwifery School. Such training includes education regarding HIV/AIDS.

Additionally UNAMID regularly conducts training on Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT), Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) and other related topics at the Midwifery School. Another aspect that UNAMID has worked to raise awareness about is the prevention of occupational exposure to HIV. For example, FGM increases obstetric complications including fistula and post-partum hemorrhages which further accelerate the risk of HIV for midwives and caregivers during delivery. At a graduation ceremony held at the University of Zalingei for successful participants in these training sessions, UNAMID's contribution was highly appreciated.

UNAMID and the Dean of the Midwifery School have also identified two potential areas which could fall under UNAMID Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) section's Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)—the construction of a training hall and the provision of seats to the Zalingei Midwifery School. UNAMID's HIV AIDS Unit (HAU) is currently in talks with Mission management to push this project forward.

UNAMID HAU officials also advocate participating in research initiatives related to harmful health practices mandated by existing cultures. On 12 February 2014, HAU was part of a committee that presented the results of a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices survey (KAP) on the issue of child marriages. The survey, from July 2013, targeted six states (West, Central, South and East Darfur states, Khartoum and Gadaref) based on the Sudan Household Survey conducted in 2010. Results indicated that child marriage was prevalent among 55 per cent of the demographic covered by the survey. Child marriages contribute to the spread of HIV, other sexually transmitted infections and obstetric complications.

The event, chaired by the State Child Care Council, was held at the project hall in Jebel Marra. Government officials from Central Darfur state, women leaders, community leaders, institutional representatives, legislative council ministers, UN officials and representatives non-governmental organisations were present on the occasion. Following the announcement of the results, it was recommended that laws protecting children from forcible marriage at a very young age should be implemented and monitored.

Stakeholders such as SNAP indicated a special interest in the area of underage marriage and stressed on the need for mainstreaming cross-cutting health issues related to HIV/AIDS.

UNAMID's HAU in Zalingei, Central Darfur, with support from Mission authorities and collaborations with relevant partners and the Government of Sudan (GoS), thus, continues to make headway in implementing a multi-pronged approach in a bid to address risk factors associated with HIV/AIDS in the region.





Pictured here are Government of Sudan prison wardens participating in an HIV/AIDS awareness and sensitivity building workshop conducted by UNAMID's HIV/AIDS Unit in East Darfur.

UNAMID FACILITATES INCREASED ACCESS TO HIV/AIDS SERVICES IN EAST DARFUR

BY IRENE HAUROBI

The African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) set up its base in El Daein, East Darfur, following a Presidential decree in 2012 that mandated the creation of additional states in the Darfur region.

UNAMID's Sector East HIV and AIDS Unit (HAU), though recently established, is extremely vigilant in organizing and supporting relevant interventions and projects. All these ventures address issues related to social services as well as awareness-raising with regard to HIV/AIDS.

Being a relatively new state, East Darfur still lags behind other Darfur states in terms of availability and accessibility of social services, especially those related to health. Of the myriad health concerns, the low awareness



UNAMID's HIV/AIDS Unit officers from Sector East conduct sensitization programmes among the internally displaced community at Labado, East Darfur. Photo by UNAMID HAU.

regarding HIV, widespread myths and misconceptions about the disease and inadequate prevention and testing mechanisms are some of the challenges faced by the people of East Darfur.

One of the main actors in Darfur's battle to prevent HIV/AIDS is the Sudan National AIDS Program (SNAP) which provides support to expectant mothers, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and the Darfuri community at large. SNAP is also the single governmental body charged with coordination of HIV/AIDS interventions in the state. To combat the low levels of HIV/AIDS awareness in Central Darfur, UNAMID, in collaboration with SNAP and other similar stakeholders, has prioritized the increase of accurate knowledge about the disease; this includes educating people so that they have a more informed perception of the risk factors related to HIV/AIDS.

UNAMID HAU provides ongoing technical support to SNAP to enable it to accomplish its goals in diverse areas such as community awareness campaigns, enlightening Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) about HIV/AIDS, building basic healthcare capacity in prisons and educating prison staff, inmates and police personnel.

The workshops conducted by UNAMID HAU in prisons are targeted at training participants about the risk factors associated with HIV/AIDS, the kind of behaviours that could lead to the spread of the disease in prison settings, demolishing myths and stereotypes as well as establishing means and methods by which prisoners can be provided with access to adequate health services.

A participant in one such capacity building workshop revealed that he had

mistakenly believed training sessions on HIV/AIDS catered to only those who were affected by the virus. But after attending the session, he has decided to get himself and his wife tested.

UNAMID HAU's initiatives within the local communities and in the camps for the displaced have also received positive feedback. In general, attitudes with regard to sexuality and sexually transmitted infections have become enlightened and informed. There has also been a measurable increase at the community level for services such as Voluntary Confidential Counseling and Testing (VCCT) and Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT). Also, community members have become more open toward discussing concerns related to HIV/AIDS in public forums, such as seminars, designed for the purpose.

As mentioned earlier, infrastructure development has been a key priority in the partnership between UNAMID and the Government of Sudan (GoS). UNAMID Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) section's Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) have been instrumental in providing infrastructural support in Central Darfur. A number of QIPs in the health sector specifically support an integrated approach toward addressing HIV/AIDS and related health concerns such as VCCT and PMTC.

In the coming years, UNAMID HAU hopes to continue its partnerships in Central Darfur and bring about significant changes in the general health of the local populations in the region as well as provision of HIV/AIDS services to all.

Chief HIV/AIDS Unit Margaret Masenda-Simbi leads a focus group discussion at one of the newly constructed PMTCT/VCCT sites at El Daein Hospital, East Darfur. Photo by UNAMID HAU.



The Way Forward

UNAMID's HIV/AIDS Unit (HAU) has made significant progress in protecting civilians and serves as a catalyst to bring about peace and recovery in Darfur. Its unique initiatives, such as Peer Education, the establishment of Voluntary Confidential Counseling and Testing Centres across the region and the valuable work conducted in tandem with the Sudan National AIDS Programme (SNAP) regarding HIV Post Exposure Prophylactics (PEPs), is indicative of a deep-rooted commitment toward improving general health throughout this conflict-ridden area.

Challenges abound for any organization working in a politically sensitive environment. UNAMID HAU is no exception. But strategic partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including the Government of Sudan authorities, have resulted in greater access for HAU to perform its mandated tasks.

As the articles in this booklet indicate, HAU's work can be divided into three main areas: infrastructure rehabilitation, outreach and education, and testing and treatment. The way ahead for UNAMID HAU includes more interventions in each key area—increasing accessibility to VCCT for larger groups of those most at risk and conducting widespread sensitization activities that include government officials, IDPs, women, children and professionals across the region.

Despite its accomplishments, HAU has faced a fair share of challenges that, at times, hinder the implementation of its plans and decision-making process. These include the limited funds available for peer education of external partners; inadequate staff to respond efficiently to training needs of at-risk populations, monitor or supervise execution of projects and provide awareness, sensitization and psychosocial support to all those in need; and, finally, limited opportunities to avail of UNAMID's Quick Impact and Community-Based Labour Intensive Projects relevant to HIV/AIDS.

But despite these operational limitations, HAU remains committed to improving access to healthcare for Darfuris and, by extension, facilitating the Mission's core work such as peace-building and protection of civilians.

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