

# APPLICATION OF THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ENHANCEMENT METHODOLOGY FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN NAMIBIA

Joint Programme: Setting Things Right – Towards Equality and Equity

Thematic Window: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Main Participants: UN: UNDP (lead agency), UNESCO, FAO, UNFPA, UNICEF. Government agencies: Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Ministry of Youth National Service Sports and Culture, Ministry of Safety and Security, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Regional Local Government and Housing and Rural Development, National Planning Commission, Ministry of Education

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## 1. Introduction

Community Capacity Enhancement (CCE) through Community Conversations is a methodology used for mobilizing communities for action around HIV and AIDS built on trust, accountability and participation. It is based on a vision and recognition that communities have the capacity to prevent, change and sustain hope in the midst of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. It is an approach aimed at creating interactive spaces for facilitated conversations, reflections and applications based on relationships of trust and mutual respect.

The Community Conversation Enhancement was implemented by community facilitators who promoted dialogue on HIV and AIDS in the communities, and were able to stimulate community action on HIV and AIDS. The Programme also worked with Community Volunteers on issues of reproductive health especially for the Youth, and had direct reach to the communities in the agricultural interventions.

## 2. Initial Situation

Stigma, discrimination, cultural norms and practices remain the biggest challenges facing rural communities in Namibia, in relation to accessing treatment, care and support services. Multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships have been identified as key contributors to the high levels and rapid spread of HIV in Namibia.

Although Namibia is among the top five countries in terms of HIV prevalence in the world, the epidemic is now demonstrating a downward trend after peaking at 22 per cent in 2002. Routine antenatal surveillance measured an overall prevalence among pregnant women of 17.8 per cent in 2008. The epidemic has cut across all sectors of society and is severely affecting the population.

## 3. Strategy

The Programme has supported and strengthened the CCE, a UNDP-promoted initiative for responding to HIV and AIDS. The initiative aims to mitigate the negative impacts of HIV and AIDS at community

level, and scale up local responses. Other objectives of the Programme are to facilitate greater integration of community led initiatives through community capacity enhancement and community action, and to facilitate greater understanding of gender inequalities in the context of HIV and AIDS. The CCE facilitators held conversations with communities on matters such as gender-based violence (GBV), poverty, multiple partners, alcohol abuse, lack of information on basics of HIV and AIDS and several other issues of concern for the communities.

## 4. Progress and Results

Community Capacity Enhancement is providing an opportunity for communities to reflect on their cultural practices, norms and values. Communities in the five focus regions participated in awareness-raising sessions on GBV, HIV and AIDS and reproductive health. Results of the Programme included increased numbers of people going for Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) Services, increased use of condoms and opening new ground for discussion of “taboo” subjects such as sex, child abuse, gender issues, early pregnancy and HIV and AIDS stigma.

The CCE facilitators were very successful in engaging communities, raising social development issues and taking them up to the municipalities and regional councils for intervention. Increasingly, these have been including gender and HIV issues. The CCE facilitators confirmed that the solutions lie with and are generated from the community. For example, one community had passed a bylaw to regulate the hours of selling alcohol for all the business operators in the area. The community and local law enforcement officers enforce the bylaw. CCE has community, regional and national linkages and directly contributes to the National Strategy for HIV and AIDS.

The CCE Programme participants were educated to understand their rights and assert them. Where it was previously difficult and sometimes impossible for women’s voices to be heard, the CCE Programme created a platform for them to raise their concerns and engage men and to mutually propose the needed changes.

## 5. Lessons Learned and Challenges

- The CCE methodology is potentially very useful for entering into communities, particularly when introducing projects relatively new to the people and continual mobilization of community members around community projects. It was noted that projects mobilized by CCE facilitators performed better than those that were not.
- It is important for CCE facilitators to receive adequate gender training. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare and United Nations Country Team should work on a modality for engaging the Regional and Local Councils more in executing gender activities. CCE respondents in the field reported not receiving any or inadequate training in gender. Two gender-training workshops were reported to have been conducted for CCEs. Where the CCEs reported receiving the training, gender issues were also reported as being addressed as key issues in the focus group discussions, whilst where CCEs were not trained these were not highlighted as key issues.

## 6. Sustainability and Potential Application

The CCE has been supported by many Regional Councils, and in all the four study regions of Caprivi, Karas, Kunene and Ohangwena the CCE Coordinators have been absorbed into the Regional Council structures. In the Karas Region, CCE has been scaled up throughout the region already, at the expense of the Regional Government. The Karas Region is the first region to scale up CCE to all the local authorities in the region. It has been a very successful CCE region, due to the full engagement

of the Regional Government that supported 80 per cent of the 14 training and field visit activities the CCE were engaged in between 2009-2012. In Ohangwena, CCE is also being scaled up to constituencies and trainings for Chief Clerks to facilitate the expansion of the Programme.

Government partners mentioned that they would like to replicate the Programme to Regional Local Government Authorities. However, the government cannot afford to meet the standards set by UNDP in terms of financial contributions to CCE facilitators and would not manage the current staff structure which is parallel to the government structure. They would like UNDP to integrate the structure to operate within the government system, terms and conditions.

The CCE facilitators have potential to become lasting change agents in the communities, due to the rigorous and empowering methodology used in their training.

## 7. Main sources

Final MDG-F joint programme narrative report: Setting Things Right – Towards Gender Equality and Equity Programme, February 2013

Final Evaluation of Joint Programme of Thematic Window on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Setting Things Right – Towards Gender Equality and Equity, Chipso Mwetwa, Randolph Mouton, Consultants, August 2012

Mid-Term Evaluation of Joint Programme of Thematic Window on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Hope Kabuchu, Consultant, August 2010