



International  
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## Street vendors lead the HIV response in Mozambique's markets

When Maria Jacinto Siteo became pregnant and the hospital told her she was HIV-positive, her husband kicked her out. "He said I was guilty, that I had committed adultery and he abandoned me," she says. "Since then I have been working in the market. I sell second-hand clothes and other small articles."

Around 85 per cent of Mozambique's workforce make their living like Maria in the informal economy. It is a hard life with poor working conditions, low wages, little or inadequate social protection and usually no means of representation or public voice. They are particularly vulnerable to HIV because of lack of knowledge, choices and resources to fall back on. Their situation is of great concern to the Associação de Operadores e Trabalhadores do Sector Informal (ASSOTSI), a Mozambican association that represents 48,000 informal sector workers countrywide.

"HIV is a major concern to informal sector traders, particularly the effects of stigma and discrimination," says Maria da Glória, Coordinator of HIV/AIDS activities for ASSOTSI. "In the markets it is common to see vendors just giving up their stalls because they can no longer face the exclusion and discrimination from their

colleagues. With no job and no money, they and their families face so many problems. Often the children leave school to live on the streets because there is no food and they can't pay for transport. Many times we hear of abuse against them."

As part of a wider national programme set up by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), ASSOTSI started running a range of HIV/AIDS activities in 2006 to help give its members the skills and knowledge to prevent HIV and to cope with its impact on their lives. It started when two staff members from ASSOTSI were trained by the project, and they in turn passed on their expertise to 30 informal sector operators (17 men and 13 women) who became HIV peer educators.

Between them they cover 27 informal markets in the capital city of Maputo, carrying out HIV activities on a regular basis. They focus on HIV prevention, strategies to fight discrimination and exclusion, and access to services such as condoms, ART and VCT. In two years they have reached about 6,000 people, including vendors and clients. Similar programmes are being implemented in Manica and Sofala provinces with support from the ONE UN Fund.

"The kindness and support of the peer educators in this market has helped me to recover my self-esteem because they have given me and other people living with HIV the information and will to live positively," says Maria. "My colleagues in the market do not stigmatize me, they understand my situation and they help. They eat with me and socialize with me."

A key component of the ILO programme is to help vendors increase their profits so that they are less financially vulnerable to the effects of HIV. In the markets the project is running training sessions on small business management that have so far involved 60 people (40 women and 20 men). These are very popular and the benefits offered by the training also help to make the HIV activities more attractive to



*Mr. Ramos Marrengula, the President of ASSOTSI in the market of Xipamanine*

workers who can't easily afford to take time off from earning a living.

Outside Maputo, the project is supporting micro-credit schemes to help people set up small businesses, again with the aim of reducing their vulnerability to HIV. Pilot groups have been set up in Beira, Nhamatanda and Dondo districts mostly involving women members. One pilot project on the outskirts of the capital involves a group of 45 families affected by HIV, who have started a chicken breeding business. The project has managed to access free antiretrovirals through the local hospital and is involved in many HIV sensitization activities.

The ILO/Sida programme is run in partnership with the Mozambiquan government, employers and trade unions, and is working with a wide range of cooperatives and small enterprises over a three-year period. Using dialogue, training and tailored materials, the goal is to build local capacity and empower informal sector organizations such as ASSOTSI to tackle HIV/AIDS in the workplace. ILO staff report high levels of commitment and ownership of the project by the beneficiaries.

"We have noticed many changes in behaviour as a result of the ASSOTSI HIV programme," says Maria

da Glória. "Many vendors have gone for voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) and some are now enrolled in treatment. There are a lot of people using condoms and we distribute plenty of materials about HIV and AIDS."

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