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**Marginalized Groups as Agents of Change
in HIV and AIDS: YOPAD - a story from
Dar es salaam – Tanzania**

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Tanzania and HIV and AIDS

Tanzania faces a generalized HIV/AIDS pandemic. There are over 2 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the country. The overall prevalence rate is 7%. Only 10% of persons of reproductive age know their HIV status. Over 1 million Tanzanians are estimated to be in need of immediate clinical HIV care and approximately 440,000 are believed to meet medical criteria for receiving anti-retroviral therapy (ART). Women are particularly susceptible to infection due to cultural norms regarding sexual relations.

There are over 2 million children in Tanzania who are orphaned and 4.5 million are estimated to be vulnerable, either because of the death or illness of a parent or due to extreme poverty.

Family roles are changing considerably under the pressure of AIDS. The capacity of social networks is undermined as they cannot absorb the ever-increasing demand for resources, or disintegrate as a result of stigma and discrimination. The burden of caring for sick family members and orphans lies heavily on the shoulders of the elderly, particularly of grandmothers.

Youth are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection. Extreme poverty, unemployment and little access to accurate and appropriate information lead to risky lifestyles, in turn leading to HIV infection.

What is PASADA?

PASADA is a community-based social service agency operating under the umbrella of the Catholic Archdiocese of Dar es salaam. The approach towards HIV and AIDS is holistic and the following services are provided:

- VCT and ongoing supportive counseling
- Medical Assistance (treatment of OIs and provision of ART)
- Home-Based Palliative Care
- TB diagnosis and treatment
- PMTCT
- Support to Orphans and Vulnerable Children
- Community HIV and AIDS Education Programme
- Support to HIV+ Women's Groups
- Training: HBC nurses, VCT counselors, clinical staff on ART
- Psycho-social support to PLWHA

What is the social situation?

- ❖ Poverty and unemployment lead to crime and marginalization particularly for youth
- ❖ Marginalized groups are at particular risk of HIV infection due to their lifestyle and lack of correct information
- ❖ This risk is exacerbated by low self-esteem, lack of skills and stigma and discrimination in the community
- ❖ Once infected, long term survival is unlikely

How do they survive?

- ❖ Youth without employment live in slum areas, in the open or in improvised shelters
- ❖ They survive on what they can steal, often with violence

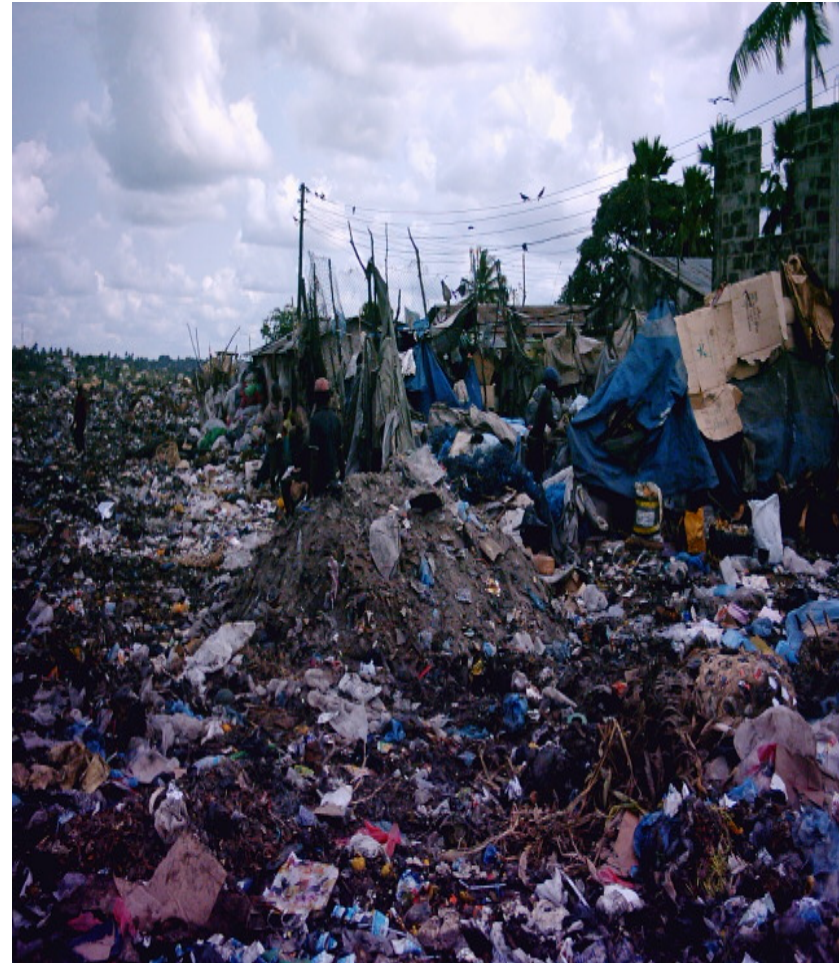


How does the community see them?

- Human rubbish
- Thieves
- Violent and dangerous
- Parasites
- Non productive

Results:

- Marginalization and isolation
- Discrimination
- Risks: irresponsible sexual behaviour, HIV infection, drug and alcohol abuse, prison, death



What has PASADA done?



- PASADA made first contact with a group of 50 young men and women living in a slum area of Dar es salaam.
- They were known as thieves, violent offenders and alcohol abusers.

However, as a group they had decided they wanted to change their lives!

Moving towards change: the first step.....!

- The group participated in a 4 week life skills programme called “Stepping Stones”
- They looked at the facts about HIV and AIDS, reviewed their individual and group life style and made positive decisions for the future



The second step.....



- The group formally came together as YOPAD (Youth of Paradise in Africa for Development)
- A plan for the future was decided based on:
 - Mediation with the community
 - HIV and AIDS awareness raising among youth in their community
 - Facilitating “Stepping Stones” workshops with other marginalized groups
 - Creation of income generating activities to improve their social conditions

Third step.....results!



The community has realized the change that has taken place and YOPAD members are now welcome to participate in community activities





They are now working with
orphans and.....



HIV and AIDS awareness
raising with youth



They are participating in
useful work in the
community

the construction of a
footbridge and
cleaning up the
community water
supply



Income-generating
activities:
cultivation and sale of tree
seedlings



What are the challenges in transforming marginalized groups into agents of change?



From isolation



.....to new growth and hope!

- Gaining their trust
- Involvement in life skills training
- Channeling energy and coping skills into more productive and sustainable activities
- Re-pacification with the community
- Providing them with facilitation skills to expand their knowledge and experience with other marginalized groups
- Identifying income-generating activities leading to economic independence and sustainability

The way forward for YOPAD and PASADA

- To join together in a project targeting HIV and AIDS awareness in other marginalized groups (including drug and alcohol abusers)
- YOPAD will facilitate Life Skills programmes for teenage orphans and vulnerable children at risk
- To initiate income-generating projects to guarantee livelihood and sustain changed lifestyle.

Recommendations



- To extend the project to other areas of urban and peri-urban Dar es salaam
- To lobby for government support of this project