

Final Evolution Report

Short version

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Funded in Arua (West Nile Region, Uganda) in 1994, NACWOLA-Arua (National Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS) contributes to the fight against HIV/AIDS in a country where the national prevalence rate reach 7,4% and in a region where the prevalence is lower but constantly increasing. The population of Arua is generally dependent of the subsistence economy, therefore, the infected people, especially the women, are even more vulnerable when they have to cope with the negative consequences brought by the HIV/AIDS. In 2007, with the support of medicusmundi, an intervention was launched to carry out a prevention process and to improve the quality of life of the infected women and their families. The activities offered were implemented by NACWOLA and were completed with several trainings. The project “Empowerment of HIV positive women and families in the rural communities of the District of Arua, 2012-2015” is the last phase of a long term intervention over 8 years.

The purpose of this evaluation is the last phase and the overall intervention both pursuing the same goals and objective. This final evaluation work was structured in three phases carried out between the 24th of February and the 30th of April 2016, including 10 days of field research in Arua. The investigation tools have been multiple (participatory workshops, individual interviews, survey, etc.) and many stockholders have been involved: 77 members of NACWOLA (69 women and 8 men) from 8 support groups, 8 community leaders, 3 health workers as well as 99 anonymous inhabitant interviewed in the streets of Arua and of 3 villages. This evaluation responds to the "request of evaluation" of the executing organization, medicusmundi (MMNAM, Spain), supported by its donor, the City Council of Burlada (Spain). The evaluation work aims to assess the performance of the project, moreover, it is the opportunity to capitalize the experience extracting the lessons learned and suggest future lines of action.

Strengthened, NACWOLA has increased its capacity to create a strong positive dynamics aimed at reducing the multidimensional vulnerability of its members. The announcement of the seropositivity is a shock for all the people infected and their families; however, they are now accompanied in their process of a psychological, social and economical resilience. All the activities and training offered by NACWOLA are very accessible to the members, and they respond to their needs. Thanks to the commitment of NACWOLA, the community is more aware and informed and therefore people are less likely to stigmatize the HIV positive people. Moreover, the inhabitants are better able to protect themselves from an HIV infection. Although some overall meaningful improvements have been analyzed, on the one hand, the situation of the members, in particular the women, is still precarious. On the other hand the knowledge and behaviour of the people still have to improve to avoid more infections.

I. The main findings of the evaluation

This evaluation of the intervention of “Empowerment of HIV positive women and families in the rural communities of the District of Arua” aimed to analyze its relevance, coverage, effectiveness, efficiency, effects, development impacts and sustainability.

The assessment of the **relevance** shows that the project is in line with the national and regional health plans. The overall designed strategy -to create support groups, to empower women, to include men and to sensitize the population- enable the project to achieve its results. The identified activities match with the needs of the beneficiaries of the project. Some non-beneficiaries are reacting positively (imitation) or negatively (jealousy) which shows the adaptation to the local needs.

Compared with the forecasts, the achievement rate of the project’s activities is generally very satisfactory, that is the proof of the **effectiveness** of the project. The study of the **coverage** shows that the involved beneficiaries are very satisfied with the activities both for their access and quality. **Efficiency** reveals a good fit of the budget with the needs to carry out the activities. NACWOLA team and the members are fairly satisfied with the available resources.

The project has several short-term **effects** that have been verified in each of its three pillars (organizational strengthening; individual well-being and community awareness; socio-economic empowerment). The support groups are fairly well managed and are experiencing the practice of the governance. Many groups have strongly empowered leaders who guide and motivate them. NACWOLA has managed to sensitize about HIV the community as well as its community leaders. Members provide “home base care” to numerous HIV+ patients of their neighborhood, reaching beyond the scope of the health centers and ensuring that the weakest people living with HIV can access to the public health services. Thanks to the

"Counseling", "Children's Day" and "Memory book", women now manage to better communicate with their children and families. On the other hand, HIV positive women have developed their technical skills to start new income-generating activities. Especially, the organic farming has convinced almost all the members because it helps them to increase the productivity of their plots and gives them the opportunity to generate more food and income. The handcraft activity allows the most motivated and skilled women to diversify their sources of income. Those who benefited from the training in "Small Business Management" have developed an entrepreneurship mind and managed to fairly improve their small business. The VSLAs is a unique opportunity for the women to save money, to benefit from a loan and also to generate a few interests. Therefore, the performance of the project is very good because the proven effects have generated the expected results.

This long term initiative has created lot of measurable **impacts** that are matching quite well with the planned objectives. On the one hand, the sensitization of the population contributes strongly to the prevention effort done by the public health services. More than the half of people randomly interviewed in Arua have a correct knowledge of the HIV infection routes and they all claim to use at least one protection method to protect themselves and the other from the HIV. First, they choose the HIV test then being faithful, using condom and being abstinent. Almost all the inhabitants interviewed have already done a HIV test and they are ready to make one right now. On the other hand, women are less vulnerable because their quality of life has improved thanks to the synergy of several factors: solidarity between seropositive people, increased community tolerance, new social recognition, improved psychological and physical health, better respect of their rights, family acceptance as well as a better satisfaction of the basic needs and strategic interests. Women have developed different skills of resilience after the chaos caused by the HIV for themselves inwardly and the people around. Despite being still quite vulnerable, now the women can better provide for their food security and the education of their children, as well as cope a bit more with the risks of life. Nevertheless, the approach is not sufficiently gender sensitive in order to ensure that the changes brought into the traditional gender relationships do not bring imbalances unfavorable for women. The women have to work even harder than before, because of the new IGA. Many men disengage themselves a bit more with their responsibilities, expecting that the women ensure even more the basic needs of the household.

The research shows the **sustainability** of the project from different perspectives: technical, economic, human (motivation) and external. Also, evidences of continuity have been gathered. That said, it should be mentioned that an extension of the intervention would be appropriate to correct some weaknesses, consolidate the positive aspects already achieved and to ensure the continuity of the positive dynamic created.

Therefore, it would be pertinent to carry on strengthening the capabilities of the stakeholders involved, informing the public and empowering the women in their self-sufficiency process. The successful activities should continue in the same way (home care, etc.) and also it would be interesting to find some way to go beyond in order to target highest goals (organic farming, group dynamics, VSLAs or sensitizations). Some activities have a great potential but did not achieve the expected effects or impact, so they may be refocused (like the data management system, literacy, and advocacy). It is advisable to undertake new activities to consolidate the achievements (training on gender relations).

II. Lessons learned

The intervention has generated good practices that led to the positive effects and impacts as presented above. The most important lessons learned from the project are:

- At the level of the organization

1. **The manageable expansion of the organization.** With the project, the organization has created 6 new branches called "support groups". Because the expansion was limited to 6 groups, the central team of NACWOLA was able to ensure a good follow up. This opening to the inhabitants of the river (fishing belt) has allowed NACWOLA to renew itself and bring vitality. The new members have different profiles and they are quite more dynamic than those of the groups of origin.
2. **The opening to men for more gender equality.** Opening up to new groups, NACWOLA has accepted a lot of men as "associate members". This term may be controversial because it may reflect a kind of discrimination against men. However, NACWOLA argues this measure helps to ensure that men do not attempt to take the control over the groups,

because culturally they have a position of power over women. Having a woman as group leader reduce this potential risk. On the other hand, involving the HIV+ men in “sensitization” and “home base care” make definitively more effective the fight against HIV/AIDS and its consequences. Also, the women of Arua do not live in a closed world exclusively female, especially for those who have male partners; it is why it is import to consider the women into their whole environment. Providing an opportunity for men to empower themselves as well, the project has helped to prevent gender based violence and also it can potentially promote more gender equality. The members of one of the two studied groups say that when the men are sensitize they are more involved in the the household tasks, both productive and reproductive. That being said, in the other group the men are less involved and in both groups they except that the women cover the basic needs.

3. **An information management system too complex.** The system as it has been implemented with Epidata is too complicated and perhaps unnecessarily detailed. Therefore, the system does not allow the current team of NACWOLA to generate data and use the information.

- At the level of well-being and awareness

4. **The involvement of the community leaders.** The creation of strong links with the community leaders at various administrative levels (subcounty to villages) ensures advantages to the support group (like free meeting spaces) and can brings some support to the members (for instance an easier access to some social protection or the possibility to get small grants handled by the leaders). The trainings give a great opportunity to the leaders to improve their understanding of the HIV/AIDS challenges and their empathy to the seropositive people. It was interesting to ask to the most involved leader to participate to the radio talk shows, because it is a good way to disseminate the best practices implemented at the different levels.

5. **The multiform and horizontal sensitization effort.** The message of NACWOLA is particularly strong because it is spread horizontally within the community and comes from the infected people themselves. The message has been spread in many places – different public events, radio talk shows, and sessions in health centers, children's day -. Also, it takes different forms: the drama is considered as an entertainment while the testimonies are touching. For all these reasons, the message does draw attention to different audiences and widely sensitize the population: NACWOLA is well known by the 75% of the population according to the survey done and 62% of them consider NACWOLA as one of their source of information, just after the health structures.

- At the level of the empowerment

6. **The introduction of new techniques to improve an activity already known.** The agriculture is the most common activity in the subsistence economy of the beneficiaries. With a few simple improvements, but so far unknown to them (such as the compost), the members have experienced a higher productivity of their plots. Also, the training in “small businesses management” has permitted them to expand and improve their existing businesses to make them more profitable. Therefore, it has been easy and successful to bring some improvements into activities that they were essential and well known by the members.

7. **The offer of some activities previously prohibited because of the HIV+ status.** Some groups VSLAs already existed in the community but members had no access, since they were infected by the HIV/AIDS the others did not trust them. The VSLA was a system that worked in the area and the discriminated members were eager to access them. Being able to manage their own community fund, they have shown their abilities to the whole community and this has enabled some members to integrate other VSLAs groups within the community.

8. **The peer-to-peer knowledge and skill transfers.** The trainings in simple organic farming techniques or basic knowledge in VSLAs have allowed the members to transmit smoothly the knowledge and skills to each other. For these two activities, a strong multiplier effect has been launched internally and currently, almost the 100% of the members have developed the required knowledge or skills. That said, other activities more technical were not really transferable like the “small business management” or the handcraft.

9. **The combination of training and activities.** Combining practical and theoretical training generate some great synergy effects. For example, the training in nutrition was positively combined with the training in organic agriculture, the

members are now aware about the importance of introducing in their diet some green leaves that they can cultivate themselves. Similarly, thanks to the VSLA system the members can get a loan to develop their business the way they learned to do during the training in “small business management”.

III. Recommendation to make the impacts sustainable

Coming to the end of this evaluation giving an overview of the strengths and weakness of the intervention, it is possible to make some recommendations for NACWOLA and to suggest some feasible futures lines of action in order to insure continuity of the positive impacts.

- At the level of the organization

1. **To simplify the information management system.** The way the information management system was designed is quite technical and complex and therefore it is not anymore used. It would be necessary to simplify the data collection format and to make the collection more systematic. It is recommended to use Excel as it probably the easiest system and the most widely known for organizing the data. A short training of the technical team would help to use it in a more efficient way. It would also be useful to design a report format to be generated monthly and annually. The technical team would have to push and support the groups to fill the form on time and also to verify randomly that the data reported is accurate.
2. **To organize exchange visits between groups for experience sharing.** As it has been already demonstrated, some groups work better than others because they have implemented some good management practices. Some leaders have required organizing exchange visits to other groups to share the difficulties that they are facing and to exchange about the solution and good practices that worked for them. To prepare and structure the exchange visit, it would be necessary to prepare the visit and to establish a form to be filled by each group.
3. **To train on good governance practices.** The training in “group dynamics” is an introductory training so that the new members can understand the way the groups are organized. Now, it would be interesting to go further, suggesting good governance practices to make sure that all members can participate effectively in the decision making process of the group (for instance regarding the budget). Consequently, this has to increase the ownership of the group by the members.
4. **To develop the potential of lobbying at the levels of the district and subcounty.** NACWOLA could be more involved in the strategic planning meetings at the district level to make sure that the planning is in line with the interest of the organization and the people living with HIV. The problem is that these meetings are held only every 5 years and the next event will take place in 2019. But they are many others occasion to share information with the politic and community leaders who claim their willingness to strengthen the relationship with NACWOLA. For instance, it would be interesting to organizing an annual meeting to present the achievements of NACWOLA and to inform them about the coming activities. On the other hand, it would be relevant that the support group and NACWOLA-Arua push for the creation of subcounty HIV/AIDS coordination committees. This is required by the Uganda AIDS Commission since 2001 (see the UAC, 2002, guidelines report), but, so far these committees are not implemented because they are not budgeted by the subcounty.
5. **To develop innovative ways to generate income at the level of the support groups.** Nowadays, the groups manage a little found made up of the annual membership contribution, but they are very limited and they do not allow the group to carry out the activities that require some budget (like the home base care, Children's Day, etc.). The groups should be guided to look for innovative ways (for instance: community farming, VSLAs interest, individual contributions, paid animation services, etc...) in order to generate a community fund making the group more autonomous. For instance, the new incomes could be used to buy some products like medical glove in order to make sure that every member provides a hygienic Home Base Care.

- At the level of well-being and awareness

6. **To continue the training of community leaders (including the technical staff).** The training of community leaders in 2012 was very successful and contributes to create strong links with NACWOLA; furthermore an annual session would enable every community leader to be involved. It would be very relevant to sensitize all the Community Development

Officer (CDO) at the sub county level; because they have a key role in the protection of the HIV + children and adults victims of abuse or injustice.

7. **To continue with the multidimensional sessions of sensitization and search new media.** It is crucial that NACWOLA and its members continue their commitment for the awareness of the population. Keeping catching the inhabitants' attention during the sensitization sessions, they can reach all type of people with their messages of prevention and non-discrimination. The sensitization work must continue to insure that the correct knowledge of the transmission routes are well spread, that the use of the condom turns to be more automatic, that adherence of the treatment becomes an evidence for all and that the false beliefs disappear. Although, the drama show and the testimony speech given by the infected people themselves are powerful and well received, it would be necessary to find new formats to continue drawing attention. For instance, one of the community leaders proposed the diffusion of videos that could be possible where there are televisions available (at the subcounty offices, in health centers, at NACWOLA center, etc). Despite the fact that some video are already made, it might be even more interesting that the members make their own participative video to share their testimony locally with their own language and vocabulary. To help in that project, it would be necessary to request the participation of an association or NGO specialized in making this kind of participative video.

8. **To seek alliances to strengthen the training about human rights related to HIV.** The trainings about human right had lot of success, therefore the members want to refresh and develop their knowledge, especially related to women's rights. NACWOLA could seek alliances with some of the organizations specializing in human rights and HIV / AIDS to be informed of the latest information.

- At the level of the empowerment

9. **To reoriented the literacy classes.** The way the literacy classes were designed did not show convincing effects during this evaluation. In most of the groups, the weekly lessons given during 6 month by a professional were not followed by the peer-to-peer lessons with the women trained. As a result, they did not manage to effectively make the women literate. Most of the women only manage to read and write his name, although, it is already a huge change for them, the scope of progress is still important. It would be necessary to find solutions to improve the focus of these classes. For instance, a local consultant in literacy could form over a short time (like a month) some literacy trainers for each group (involving some men). Then, during a longer time (a year or two), the consultant could ensure a close follow-up (at least 2 or 3 time a month) to the classes done twice a week by the trained members. The consultant would be able to follow both the method of the literacy trainers and the progress of the "students". Also, it could be pertinent to make 2-3 classes per group according to the level of knowledge. That way, even the members who have some literacy basis will be included to strengthen their capacity to become fully literate. Thanks to this method, into every group more women should become literate and the shifts of literacy trainers will be possible.

10. **To raise awareness for more gender balance within the households.** In the groups including men, it would be interesting to organize training regarding to the gender equality. This training would sensitize the men about the importance of the participation of both partners in the food security within the household as well as the daily needs. For instance, for the organic agriculture, the women members need help for the physical works, especially the heavy ones, and therefore it would be necessary to sensitize their husbands and sons (plus daughters) about the importance of their contribution to this task. To involve them, it could work to increase their interest by training them in organic techniques.

11. **To search a common market for the handicrafts and agricultural products.** A major problem is the lack of market for the craft products and for this reason NACWOLA thinks that it would be beneficial to organize the selling of the products in Kampala. As well for agricultural products, for higher incomes, NACWOLA is thinking of a system that allows them to store together some agricultural products in the NACWOLA's center (members do not have the capacity to do it at home) and then to sell the products in the market when there is more scarce (the selling price is raising and therefore the benefit is greater). Also, they want to contact the buyers together to increase their power of negotiation and not being forced to always accept the given price.

12. **To develop alternative farming techniques.** To further enhance the organic farming, it would be interesting to investigate the capacities available locally to teach other organic techniques or other alternative farming techniques. For instance, the agro-ecology supposes the understanding of the whole ecosystem for a more efficient farming. Into its center,

NACWOLA would like to install an irrigation system (with a solar pump, for example) to not depend anymore on the rains and to take advantage of the river located down the field during the long dry season. This could allow NACWOLA to get some extra income selling the products and also to provide healthy food to women. However, it could not serve as an example a mechanic irrigation system could not really be installed in the fields of the member.

13. **To upgrade the VSLAs to "Village bank"**. Although the VSLAs system could continue the way it is now, it would be interesting to develop it further making it more profitable. It would be the right moment because the members are now familiar with the system and they appreciate it very much. Currently, the members collect all the invested funds at the end of the year, but NACWOLA believes that it could be transformed into a small village bank. This system would allow the members to deposit into the "bank" a part of their savings for some longer-term benefits. To put into practice this idea, NACWOLA need to look for some training to give to the members the keys of these new methods.

14. **To extend the training in "small business management"**. The training was a success but all the members did not have the chance to benefit it. In addition, NACWOLA suggest introducing some modules about how to process the raw products to get added value and consequently to generate higher incomes.

15. **To introduce a mentorship system to helps the members to carry out their personal projects**. A peer-to-peer mentorship system would be beneficial to encourage and guide the members in the realization of their business projects or other personal dreams. The motivated members would need a specific training to develop their coaching capacities.