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SDC Support for SolidarMed's Antiretroviral Treatment Project (SMART)



Capitalisation Series: SDC Supported Projects and Activities in HIV/AIDS

A fact sheet elaborated in the frame of the 2009 SDC Backstopping Mandate with support from the Swiss Centre for International Health of the Swiss Tropical Institute

Objectives

In view of the immense need for antiretroviral treatment (ART) in some of Africa's most affected countries, the Swiss NGO SolidarMed has added a treatment and care programme to its ongoing prevention work.

The Goal of the SMART (SolidarMed Antiretroviral Treatment) programme is to strengthen the local health systems of nine rural districts in Tanzania, Mozambique, Lesotho and Zimbabwe, as well as to integrate voluntary counselling and testing, antiretroviral treatment, activities to prevent HIV transmission from the mother to the child, and home based care into routine health service provision. SolidarMed builds on established partnerships and cooperation in these districts with local hospitals and health administrations.

Project Description

SMART was conceived as a three year pilot project. The beginning of SMART coincided with the launch of multi-level initiatives to improve care and treatment of HIV and AIDS. This has meant that the lessons learned from the pilot project could contribute to national programmes and vice-versa, with the national programmes in various cases adopting lessons learned from the project.

The provision of the continuum of care is a challenge to any health care system, especially relating to chronic diseases. Major contributions of the SMART project include the provision of nationally accredited training to health staff in testing, counselling, clinical assessment and prophylaxis for opportunistic infections, ART medication, the management of side effects, and treatment failures. The project has further provided commodities and infrastructure that have enabled SMART supported hospitals to establish their role as ART initiating and referral centres. SMART often stepped in to fill gaps in the early stages of establishing the government supply system for essential commodities such as lab reagents and test kits. Organizational development, strengthening of management systems and the involvement of local communities and people living with HIV and AIDS are other strategies promoted by SMART. Together with its partners, SMART explores ways to meet human resource challenges in rural areas, ensure ongoing, and quality treatment and care, and strengthen monitoring, and health metric systems. As in all disease-specific programmes, SMART seeks a balance between vertical interventions and horizontal health system strengthening. The project is now in its second and very challenging phase.

Outcomes and Achievements

Numerous patients are now benefiting from HIV treatment and prevention services, offered by SolidarMed's local partner institutions. The underlying impact hypothesis indicates an improvement of the disease burden and health situation in the intervention Districts. Capacities of all nine partner institutions have been strengthened to provide quality HIV prevention and treatment services. Numerous

community groups and village health workers have been trained to empower communities in HIV prevention. As a result, some 90'000 people were tested for HIV by December 2008. Of the 38'106 tested patients, 20,9% tested positive. At the same time, 4'100 patients were receiving ART, corresponding to 66% of all patients who began treatment within the programme.

The mortality rate of patients who began treatment with ART was at 10.3% at 12 months and at 13.4% at 24 months after treatment began. At the end of 2008, 16'000 patients had subscribed to the programmes. 600 HIV positive pregnant women have received PMTCT in 2008.

In addition to this, the programme has an important monitoring, analysis and knowledge management component, allowing for better understanding of various issues linked to the ARV roll out and HIV prevention in rural SSA, and enabling increased success on a wider level. To facilitate technical backstopping, quality analysis of lessons learned, and links to international research networks, the SMART pilot project has teamed up with the Institute for Infectious Diseases and Social Medicine/Epidemiology of Berne University (Inselspital). The participation of SMART within the research network IeDEA-sa enables local partners to build relevant South-South and South-North knowledge sharing networks. For scientific analyses and lessons learned on a broader level, visit <http://www.iedea-sa.org>.

SDC Partnership

SDC has funded a three year pilot phase of the SMART programme and currently contributes to a second phase in selected sites. SMART offers SDC a channel for "hands-on" experience from the grassroots level that contributes to the national HIV/AIDS policy dialogue. SMART also received funding from the Liechtenstein Development Cooperation (LED) and private donations.

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More about this project

SMART: www.solidarmed.ch/silvia/Laender/SolidarMed_HIVAids.pdf

IeDEA-sa: www.iedea-sa.org

Bulletin: www.solidarmed.ch/silvia/medien/0901_mmBulletin_HostAndParasite.pdf

The Evaluation: A balancing act:

www.solidarmed.ch/silvia/Laender/SolidarMed_ART_ProjectEvaluation.pdf