

P3.12. Sports for Life: Using Soccer to Promote Life Skills and Healthy Behaviors among Ivorian Youth - Régina Traore Serie, Center for Communications Programs (CCP), JHU; Ousmane Gbane, CCP JHU; Hope Hempstone, CCP JHU; Amélie Sow, CCP JHU; Nafissatou Diop, CCP JHU
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Background/Significance: After five years of civil war, Côte d'Ivoire is in an awkward stasis, with rebel forces occupying the northern half of the country while the government controls the rest. This situation has exacerbated certain pre-existing socio-economic trends, including unemployment, uneven educational enrolment, and transactional and intergenerational sex. In a national survey of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to HIV/AIDS conducted in 2005, the majority of Ivorian youth reported sexual debut before the age of 18; nearly 20% of young women had had sex by the age of 15, and 73% by the age of 18. In the same survey, only 18% of young women and 30% of young men were able to correctly cite two of the major methods of prevention; reject the most common local misconceptions; and recognize that a person in good health could be seropositive. These indicators reflect critical challenges to efforts to improve the sexual and reproductive health of Ivorian youth.

Intervention/Activity Tested: Sports for Life (SFL) is an HIV/AIDS prevention and care program for young people. Launched in 2004 by JHU/CCP under the Health Communication Partnership (HCP) project, SFL uses the excitement of soccer to create an environment in which young people can comfortably explore sensitive issues. The program, which centers on a series of interactive games, can quickly be adapted to diverse settings and cultures. SFL is currently being implemented in Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Namibia, and Burkina Faso.

Building on public enthusiasm for Cote d'Ivoire's qualification for the World Cup, JHU/CCP launched an SFL pilot program in the city of Abidjan in August 2006. The program, which JHU/CCP implements in collaboration with Cote d'Ivoire's Office of Social and Academic Partnership (DMOSS), local soccer training centers, and the Abidjan city government, is now active in 24 sites across Abidjan. In each site, JHU/CCP has trained staff from its partners to conduct SFL activities with school-based HIV/AIDS clubs and community soccer teams of boys and girls ages 10-15. SFL seeks to reduce HIV incidence among Ivorian youth, with intermediate improvements in a variety of individual and group-level indicators.

SFL comprises five core components:

1. *Group activities using a participatory life skills curriculum.* These activities provide young people an opportunity to practice communication, decision-making, and other life skills, as well as explore a variety of HIV-preventive behaviors.
2. *Individual activities in Extra Time, a workbook modeled on soccer magazines.* This workbook supports individual reflection and reinforcement of key behavior change messages.
3. *Community outreach activities.* In the course of the program, each youth "team" completes three outreach activities, which allow participants, to interface with their peers and parents through games, discussions, or other activities.
4. *Entertainment education and promotion of celebrity ambassadors through mass media.* JHU/CCP has developed a variety of mass media products promoting the core messages of SFL and modeling HIV-preventive behaviors.
5. *Tournaments that bring together youth "teams".* These tournaments, which are often sponsored by local businesses and heavily publicized, serve to enhance group identity among participants; promote healthy behaviors; and generate interest in the program.

Through SFL, JHU/CCP hopes not only to foster sustainable change among young people, but also to build the capacity of local partners through shared program planning; training; and technical assistance. These partners include not only the implementing partners, but also a broad network of collaborators and donors from Cote d'Ivoire's private sector,

Beginning in April 2008, JHU/CCP plans to expand SFL to two new cities –San Pedro and Abengourou.

Methodology: In order to strengthen SFL, JHU/CCP will conduct a qualitative process evaluation of program activities in November 2007. The evaluation will be conducted in four *communes* of Abidjan. The

research team will conduct twelve focus group discussions with SFL participants and four focus group discussions with SFL trainers. Furthermore, the team will conduct a series of eight in-depth interviews with key implementing partners. The results of this evaluation, together with an analysis of routine monitoring data, will provide a picture of SFL's current functioning, and inform future modifications to program strategy, materials, and implementation.

Lessons Learned: JHU/CCP anticipates that lessons of the evaluation will include:

- Sports can be an effective platform for introducing life skills and HIV/AIDS prevention messages to young people.
- Girls' involvement presents a key challenge in sports-based programming.
- Effective partnerships are essential to the implementation of multifaceted youth programs, particularly at scale.