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Extracts

A new approach to evaluating a peer education programme for sex workers

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Two years ago, a peer education programme was developed in Nepal to equip urban sex workers with the skills to help their fellow workers practise safer sex, to update their own knowledge on risks from unsafe sex and to provide a forum for sex workers to discuss imaginative approaches to safer sex beyond the condom. Initially 18 sex workers, all women, attended and this number has increased as the programme has developed. The women are keen to become peer educators because they are interested to learn about health issues and enjoy increased status among their peers because they give out condoms and assist other sex workers in the use of local services for sexually transmitted diseases.

While some of the sex workers who attended were able to read and write, the majority were illiterate or semi-literate. In the spirit of good participation, the workshop was adapted accordingly, using picture codes, symbols and stories to promote communication. However, one problem remained. How could we evaluate the success of the programme with regard to the desired objective of reducing risky sexual behaviour? Furthermore, how could the women evaluate their success as peer educators? Diaries were out of the question because of limited literacy, and besides, if discovered, they could be incriminating for women whose occupation was a secret from their loved ones. Verbal accounts were likely to be inaccurate and forgotten and women could not be expected to report to the programme on a daily or even weekly basis.

Mala

As a result, we developed an innovative and attractive alternative: the ‘Mala’ system. ‘Mala’ means necklace and is a popular accessory for all women. We decided to provide each participant with a set of different coloured beads, and during the workshop, and, in consultation with the group, allocated different colours to different activities relating to their role as peer educators as well as their own sexual practice. The activity relating to each colour is listed below.

- Red; asked a client to use a condom and he agreed.
- Green; accompanied a girl to the clinic.
- White; asked a client to use condoms and he refused.
- Yellow; gave a fellow worker condoms.
- Black; avoided intercourse, had safer sex.
- Blue; had sex without a condom.

The idea was that after each activity, women would thread the appropriate colour on to their mala. Each month the situation would be reviewed.

Figure 1. Diagram of a ‘Mala’



At the monthly review meetings, project outreach workers sit with the peer educators individually and look at their necklaces checking that the colours represent the agreed activities. Since the sex workers/peer educators themselves allocate the colours and activities, this has not proved too difficult. Results and queries are noted in the record book and subsequently discussed with all the peer educators together.

Impact

The Mala is a unique self assessment tool which has helped women to monitor both their own activities as commercial sex workers as well as their role as peer educators. Because it is highly visual, patterns and trends are easy to identify. There has, for example been a marked increase in condom use among the peer educators and their peer sex workers over the monitoring period. However there are usually several blue beads where women have sex with regular clients and/or boyfriends and do not wish to use condoms. Non penetrative sex initially never occurred, although in the last 6 months it has appeared in two women's necklaces.

Monitoring of the system has been increased in the last 6 months and it has become clear that, with regular support and supervision, the Mala system can be an effective, attractive and enjoyable way of evaluating an otherwise difficult field of work. Not only can sex workers measure their own success and activities, but they also have an attractive accessory at the end which can be understood by no-one, other than their fellow peer educators and project supervisors.

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The communication linkage matrix

Neela Mukherjee

The Agricultural Resources Conservation and Development project, funded by IFAD/UNDP/UNOPS at Dong Hoi, Vietnam, was recently engaged in organising and conducting a series of basic PRA training-workshops for senior officials of the project and representatives from peoples' organisations in Participatory Micro Planning and Design.

One innovation from the training which I would like to share is the communication-linkage matrix. In this method, village groups first explain their relationship with different institutions using a Venn diagram. They then analyse their communication linkages with each institution. This enables a communication-linkage matrix to be completed (see Table 1), providing villagers with the opportunity to analyse aspects of their communication with different organisations. Selected criteria for discussion include the relationship between the villagers and the institution ('behaviour'), 'timeliness of service', 'information exchange', and suggestions for improving communication.

Assessment

The communication linkage matrix can be a powerful tool for local community members to assess services provided by different service providers and other developmental agencies. Through the matrix, community members can assess institutional strengths and weaknesses and make their own performance assessment by adding new columns to the matrix.

Table 1. Communication-linkage matrix for village households raising livestock

Institutions	Behaviour	Timeliness of service	Information exchange	Suggestions
HH-Extension Service	Strong bond	Regular	Receive information from villagers	More training courses required
HH-Veterinary Service	Good linkage	Frequent	Fast, punctual	Provision of medicine should be on time
HH-People's Committee of Village	Strong bond	Regular	Fast	Can provide information on good techniques, disease and its treatment, marketing
HH-People's Committee of Commune	Good linkage	Irregular	Fast	Officials must visit HH more often on a regular basis
HH-Commune Farmers' Association	Strong bond	Regular	Fast, punctual	Can provide regular information on economic benefit of farmers
HH-Village Farmers' Association	Strong, co-operative bond	Regular	Good linkage	
HH-Women's Association	Good linkage	Regular	Fast	Awareness creation on ways of livestock raising and application of new techniques required
HH-District Agriculture Unit	Weak bond	irregular	slow	Livestock raising programme inputs should be provided in time

Note. HH stands for households raising livestock in village ThonTrung in Vo Ninh Commune, Quang Ninh District, Vietnam.

When preceded by Venn diagramming, the communication-linkage matrix helps to focus discussions on organisations and their role and significance to villagers. The method helps in the comparative analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, constraints and opportunities of different service providers. As a 'visual' method, the communication-linkage matrix facilitates the cross-checking of views, open-ended analysis and consensus building. Field experience shows that villagers, both women and men, enjoy constructing and analysing the communication-linkage matrix.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author was associated as trainer-facilitator, participatory approaches, to the IFAD/UNDP/UNOPS project on Agricultural Resources Conservation and Development at Hong Doi, Vietnam. Thanks are due to Ms. Thu, Mr. Haong Hung, Mr. Jayaraman, Mr. Omer Zafar, Mr. Nguyen Tien Phong, Ms. Marjoline Nicod, Mr. Vu, Mr. Ashok Saikia and Ms. Ann for their support and encouragement. The participants who completed basic training-workshops include Mr. Vu, Ms Han, Ms. Yen, Ms. Biem, Mr. Lam, Mr. Sinh, Mr. Thang, Mr. Trung, Mr. Sy, Mr. Min, Mr. Do, Mr. Doan, Mr. Que, Mr.Nien, Mr. Toan, Mr. Trung, Mr. Tuyen, Mr. Yen, Mr. Hoa, Ms. Hong, Mr. Hung, Mr. Soa, Mr. Ngoc, Mr. Thanh, Mr. Cuoc, Mr. Cu and Mr. An.