



## Newsletter no 10 Special

### **Farmers exchange meeting in Paarl**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2009 a farmer's exchange meeting took place in Paarl.

It was the first time that farmers from all over the country had an opportunity to meet and discuss with each other the difficulties and successes of implementing an HIV/Aids programme on their farms and also what it meant to them.

Together with farm owners we also invited some farm workers to share their experiences with us.

This meeting was the initiative of Dr Melinda Wilson of USAID, who came up with the idea to organise such a meeting where farmers benefitting from USAID funding, could exchange their experiences, meet and talk to each other.

AgriAids was tasked to organise this event.

### **Background and purpose of this meeting**

The meeting focused on practical exchange of experiences encountered on a daily practice when implementing an HIV policy on farms. This gave an opportunity for farmers to reflect on:

#### **What went right, what went wrong and why?**

The implementation of an HIV programme generally entails certain steps to be taken from awareness- raising, VCT-sessions to follow up by the (public) health care on treatment and adherence to medication.

We decided to make a programme for this day where all these steps, after a short introduction, were discussed. The main focus was the contribution of the participants to be able to get a good picture of pitfalls, failures, best practices and successes.

### **The meeting:**

Not less than 60+ people attended, mostly farmers, but also farm workers and people from different NGO's working in farming communities. Whereas the time-schedule was tight, we started at 8.30 AM on the dot because we had to finalise at 3.00 PM to make it possible for everybody to catch the plane back home.

An excellent facilitator, AgriAids' chairperson, guided us through this tight programme, so we were able to finalise the programme on time.

After the welcome and opening by USAID the programme started with Kallie Schoeman, one of the first farmers who implemented an HIV/Aids programme on his farm. A personal experience with one of his staff members had motivated him. His farm was one of the farms selected by AgriAids in their so called farm projects. His motto is quite simple:

*"No farm worker will die on my farm anymore due to HIV/Aids related illnesses"*, and he succeeded in doing that for the last 4 years.

This was of course an excellent motivational key message.



During the day different issues were discussed, like

- The role and involvement of the farmer (and their wives)
- How to get a balance between empathy and sympathy in dealing with HIV
- In how far are we as NGO's supporting the stigma ourselves
- How to coordinate better the different role of service providers which all their own policies and messages
- What has worked for the farm worker and what does he need?

When the facilitator asked a farm worker about his experiences disclosing his status on the farm he was working, he reacted as follows:

*"What really helped me was the support of my farm manager, who was always there for me and kept telling me that being HIV positive was not the end of the world and that she just loved me being the person I was. People should be just a little bit kind and understanding towards HIV positive people, which would already help a lot to cope."*

**Some new ideas:**

- **More celebration from time to time**

Interesting to hear was that instead of always focusing on HIV/Aids as an unpleasant part of life to present it from time to time with a pleasant touch, like showing a movie and watch it together or celebrate 1 December, World Aids Day, in a relaxed environment with some food and candles.

- **Adherence cube**

The presentation around the cube on HIV/Aids will be followed up, hopefully with another cube on adherence to help people better understand why they need to take the medication for life.



“Proof” of having an HIV/Aids programme on the farm.

### **Follow up**

The meeting did not focus on exchange of experiences only. A working group was appointed at the end of this meeting and tasked with an operational plan, taking into consideration the mutual experiences so far.

### **The way forward**

Depending on the outcomes, we are planning to repeat session like this in the future, where we also will discuss the outcome of the operational plan, maybe more in the different regions/provinces.

On the short term, we will try to bring into practice one of the ideas that came up during this session, which is to say: “A celebration from time to time”.

1<sup>st</sup> of December, World Aids Day, is a good opportunity. We ordered mobile units for doing the VCT. That is always a nerve racking event for people. By organising a special day we hope to contribute to de-stigmatise HIV.

Kind regards,

AgriAids team.

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