



## AgriAids Newsletter no 9 July 2009

After signing of the contract in January 2009 with Right to Care, our grant manager appointed by USAID, AgriAids was able to start implementing its mission:

***“The empowerment of farm workers to be responsible for their own wellness, through organising HIV and other life improving programmes on farms and farming communities”.***

### **New office and staff:**

First we started selecting an office and staff.

Our new office is in 795 Park Street, Arcadia, Pretoria, (contact details, see below) which is close to Loftus, the well known rugby and soccer stadium. Let us hope that the soccer world cup 2010 will not cause too much inconvenience. The confederation cup already resulted in a bit of a struggle to enter the office.

Ms. Monene Mamabolo has been appointed as our Programme Manager. Monene is well experienced with programme management in health and social related areas, and together with the AgriAids team, she has already made a positive impact in AgriAids with the implementation of several programmes on selected farms.

### **Networking and new partners**

During the past three months we managed to build partnerships with several service providers and organizations.

Partners are needed to build together the chain of activities necessary to put a sustainable HIV/Aids programme in place for farm workers.

For the awareness activities we work together with Choice Trust and the Building of Hope Foundation;

For the Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT), we work with the Foundation for Professional Development (FPD);

For treatment and care, we work with public health care clinics, trained and staffed by the FPD.

This is however not enough. A major challenge is to build trust amongst farmers and their workers, as this is crucial for the willingness of farm workers to participate in HIV/Aids programmes in a sustainable way.

## Results so far:

We conducted pre-programme meetings at 5 farms in Mookgopong and 11 farms in Brits, with the owners of the farms and the farm workers. This resulted in willingness at all the farms to participate in an HIV/Aids program. Awareness sessions were held on all participating farms, during which an experienced trainer and/or our Programme Manager provided farm workers with information on HIV/Aids, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's), and prevention methods, such as condoms. The awareness sessions are followed by VCT's, conducted by FPD- mobile clinics, well-trained nurses and counselors. Most of the farm workers that attended the awareness sessions went for the VCT.

AgriAids developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), indicating the roles of the farm owner and of AgriAids. All the farmers attending the awareness and advocacy sessions signed this MoU.

## Experiences:

One of the most important questions of farm workers is the fear to be fired if tested positive. Another concern is confidentiality, notably related to the stigma. Farm workers don't want the farmer or their peers to know their status. We mentioned the non-retrenchment as a commitment of the farmer in the MoU. Before starting awareness sessions for the farm workers, the farmer will speak to his workers, indicating his commitment and stipulating his assurance that people will not be fired. He is not interested in knowing peoples personal status but does want to know the prevalence of HIV at his farm. By implementing an HIV program he hopes that his workers are more knowledgeable about the importance of a healthy life style.



***( The policy of confidentiality is not enough for farm workers to be 100% ensured that the 'boss' will never get to know their status and is furthermore the main reason why most farm workers don't want to appoint peer educators out of fear that colleagues get to know their status)***

During these awareness sessions we experience a great openness of the people. Men as well as woman are not shy to ask questions and are both eager for information. We also experience quite some differences between farms. The nationality of the farm workers and their living conditions (living on the farm, living alone or with their families etc) have an impact on the 'culture' of the farm and therefore e.g. their willingness to appoint peer educators/farm based carers. The reality is diverse and dynamic. This makes us believe that 'one model fits all' does not always apply.

The programmes on the farms in Mookgopong and Brits will be implemented in July and August 2009. The results of the programs in these two districts and other events in the near future will be published in future newsletters.

### ***Personal experiences from the field:***

*What is happening during a field day? How do people experience such an event?*

*It is amazing to see the different responses and reactions of people.*

*Let us give you a few examples:*

*"Mosima" is 47 years old originally from Limpopo; she has been working on the farm for the past 15 years. She goes home twice a year and most of the time she spends in and around the farm. She is living with her colleagues in a woman compounds where she shares a small room with 2 other women. She wakes up at 5.00 am to prepare to go to work. The transport picks them up at 6.00 am. Mosima has 4 children and all her children live in Limpopo with her sister, who looks after her own and her sister's children, altogether 9 children and 3 grandchildren. All the money Mosima receives she sends home to support her 4 children. She has never been married.*

*Health education has motivated her and she will share this experience with her family. She is glad that myths on sexuality were dealt with and she appreciates it that their farmer has given them the opportunity to get tested and to learn and understand their body and rights when it comes to sexuality. Mosima has an old grandmother who made her understand HIV/AIDS issues and what it means to look after an infected family member.*



*Mosima showing her test results.*

**A grandmother** "confessing" that she doesn't have sex anymore, but she wants to go for the Voluntary Counseling and Testing, VCT, for 2 reasons.

1. Maybe she was infected previously 2. She wants to give an example for her children and grandchildren and show them how important it is to use this opportunity as a learning life-experience.

This motivation of this grandmother is an indication that we are all affected, even not being infected ourselves. We need these people and their beliefs to convince other people and to prevent more unnecessarily deaths.

**A young woman**, 35 years old, but looking 16, who tested positive and had already developed a full blown aids and most probably will not be able to recover any more. All our people felt so sorry for this woman who could not walk anymore. It is unfortunately confirming the impression that HIV is a deadly disease. People are indeed asking to "show" to them HIV++ people living a more or less a normal life, to get themselves convinced.

(In the next newsletter we will be sharing more personalized stories from the farm workers post awareness and VCT process "how people have experienced the process and the implication to their lives")



## **Challenges:**

The stigma, different misconceptions and the fear to die alone if diagnosed with HIV, especially in rural settings, necessitate that a HIV/Aids policy needs to be built upon trust and confidence amongst all the players/stakeholders. Involvement of all stakeholders in an early stage helps building the necessary team approach.

The information provided at the awareness sessions, together with the assurance of confidentiality are crucial components in this process. The bridging of the gap between the VCT and the follow-up treatment for the positive tested people, especially in rural areas has to be addressed in the coming year.

## **What else?**

We have appointed a programme facilitator in Brits (a dedicated female farmer) to facilitate and monitor the farms and to keep us posted on developments. We are in the process of appointing a facilitator in Mookgopong as well.

In August we will submit the results of the current programmes, together with project plans for the next year, for approval by our funder. The outcome is also dependant on the results of the targets as set for this year. We are confident that our targets set for this year will be met.

For the latest news we refer you to our website: **www. agri aids.org.za**  
In a few weeks time, the website will have a complete new look.

Kind regards,

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