Bancadas — a people-to-people approach to building confidence and knowledge on HIV prevention in girls and young women in Angola

Creating the time and space for meaningful discussions on HIV prevention and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in Angola

Background

Angola's HIV prevalence is relatively low at 2%. But AGYW, who make up 25% of people recently infected with HIV, face a three-fold higher risk of HIV infection than young men. With 65% of the population under 24 and limited SRHR access, targeted prevention for AGYW is critical.

Method

ADPP Angola, a local NGO, has implemented "Bancadas" for in- and out-of school AGYW aged 10-24 since 2018. Bancadas is a community-based, AGYW-led movement focused on HIV prevention and SRHR. Concentrated in urban and suburban areas where HIV prevalence is highest, volunteer activists lead weekly Bancadas sessions— which take place in informal, accessible settings and include lessons, storytelling, music and role models— to provide comprehensive sexuality education, including HIV prevention, and offer safe spaces for SRHR discussions. The project is funded by UNDP, GF/UNFPA.

Lessons learned

In 2023, Bancadas reached 47,343 AGYW, approximately one third per age group: 10-14,15-19, and 20-24 years old. Twelve percent (12%) of Bacadas participants were young mothers. In 2023, 21,915 girls successfully completed the program, participating in over 70% of sessions and demonstrating correct knowledge of HIV/SRHR messages, outperforming the national average of 32.5% message awareness. All Bancadas participants were risk screened and 22,662 (82%) tested for HIV; 81 (0.4%) tested positive and all 81 (100%) initiated Antiretroviral Therapy.

Program data from 2018-2021 identified a 2.3% positivity rate (309/13,331) in a group comprising a 3:2 ratio of in-school to out-of-school AGYW highlighting the need to target both groups. A key lesson learned is that it takes time to build the confidence of AGYW. A full-year of Bancadas allows AGYW to acquire knowledge on HIV prevention, explore their own doubts, support each other, and become peer educators in their communities.

Bancadas program Overview

Format: sessions are led by a trained activist and one or more peer educators, typically ones who have graduated the Bancadas program.
Duration: A one-year program with 30 weekly sessions for groups of 25 AGYW.
Aim: builds the capacity of young people to take charge of their own health.
Focus: addresses all aspects of young people's SRHR needs.
Location: takes place in informal, accessible settings.
Community engagement: mobilizes families, health service providers and community leaders to encourage AGYW participation.

Service packages

Bancadas offers the following services:

- Peer educator training.
- Risk screening.
- HIV counselling and testing.
- Referral to HIV and/or antenatal services.

Initiation and follow-up on antiretroviral treatment and/or PMTCT.

- Treatment adherence support.

Bancadas curriculum

The 30-session, weekly curriculum covers topics such as:

- Adolescence: time to make decisions and build my life project
- Self-knowledge, self-esteem and empowerment from childhood to adulthood.
- Adolescence and vulnerability: dating, risks and mitigation
- My sexual health belongs to me.
- Taking care of your sexual and reproductive health.
- HIV/AIDS: what is it? Myths and truths, prejudices and stigmas.
- The ABC approach (abstain, be faithful, use a condom).
- How to negotiate condom use.
- Relationship between alcohol, drug use and STI/HIV.
- Is HIV/AIDS curable? What is antiretroviral treatment?
- Vertical transmission of HIV/AIDS. What precautions should I take?
- HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis coinfection.
- What is gender-based violence?
- Can you get pregnant the first time? Yes!
- Preventing an unplanned pregnancy.
- Responsible motherhood and fatherhood.
- How to be a voluntary health promoter in the fight against HIV-AIDS.

Conclusions/Next steps

We have found that employing a "people-to-people" approach involving young activists, peer educators, and Bancadas participants is a relatively low cost option to engage the broader community in discussions addressing HIV prevention, SRHR, stigma and discrimination. As more AGYW graduate and carry their messages to the community, ADPP will also monitor changes in message awareness within the broader community. Further study on the experience of male-only and mixed Bancadas is required to spearhead an inclusive, transformative movement.

ADPP stands for Development Aid from People to People. Established in 1986, we work in the areas of education, health, agriculture & environment, and integrated community development. In 2023, we reached two million people in Angola. ADPP is a co-founder and member of the Humana People to People Federation.

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