

# Increasing the Uptake of HIV Testing and Counseling Services Among Couples in East Central Uganda

Simon Kabogoza, Titus Ojulong, Francis Kazibwe, Tonny Odong, Alex Mugume, Denis Businge, Samson Kironde  
 JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI)/Strengthening TB and HIV&AIDS Responses in East Central Uganda (STAR-EC)

## Issue

Recent studies on HIV&AIDS indicate a shift of the epidemic from the youth and persons in monogamous casual relationships to those in long-term concurrent relationships. The Modes of Transmission study by the Uganda AIDS Commission and UNAIDS (March 2009) indicate 43% of new HIV infections were in persons in long term relationships of which 64% were among persons reporting multiple concurrent partnerships. This therefore implies that HIV is high among couples in both cohabiting and formal marital relationships.

The Strengthening TB and HIV&AIDS Responses in East Central Uganda (STAR-EC) program, with funding from USAID has continued to contribute towards HIV&AIDS and TB prevention, care and treatment initiatives in East Central Uganda. In response STAR-EC utilized the 'Know your Epidemic, Know your Response' paradigm and supported lower level partners to conduct a quarterly Couple HIV Testing and Counseling (CHTC) campaign.

## Description

In order to increase the uptake of CHTC, STAR-EC adapted the Ministry of Health initiative of the Couple HTC campaign. STAR-EC supports the nine districts and civil society organizations in the East Central Uganda to run a week-long CHTC campaign every quarter (referred to as the 'Couple Week') to provide HTC at both static sites and during outreaches. During this campaign those who test as individuals are not denied the service and the opportunity is utilized to screen for TB and referral for other services. Those who test as couples are given certificates of recognition where they also sign committing themselves to keep each other healthy regardless of the HIV status.

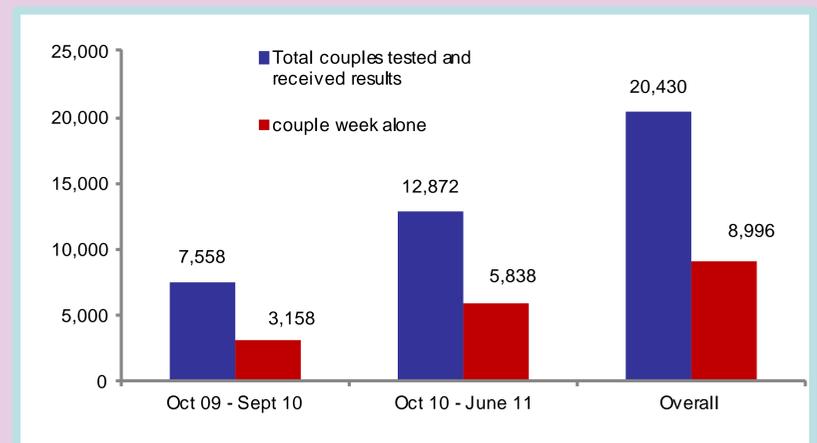


A couple receiving HTC services during an outreach in Namayingo District

Multimedia channels including involvement of influential community members like local leaders, village health team (VHT) members, model couples and peer educators mobilise their communities on a one on one basis directing them to outreach sites and health facilities.

Mobile trucks with public address systems are also utilized to mobilize communities for the outreaches. CHTC signposts have been placed at health facilities providing the service and manila papers with messages directing community members to outreach sites are put at public places and trading centres. One hour interactive radio programs are dedicated to CHTC every Monday for two weeks and radio announcements directing community members to service centres are aired during the campaign period.

## Couples tested and received results in nine districts supported by STAR-EC



About 44% of couples tested from October 2009 to June 2011 were attributed to the week long CHTC campaign.

## Lessons Learned

- Working with influential community members like local leaders, model couples (peers), religious leaders and VHTs encourages community members to test for HIV
- Utilization of certificates of recognition motivates more people to test as couples
- Moving the services closer to the community through outreaches and application of multi-pronged mobilization strategies results in increased number of couples accessing HTC services

## Next Steps

With lessons learned from increasing access to couple HTC, STAR-EC will continue utilizing multi-pronged mobilization approaches for TB and HIV&AIDS services in the East Central region.