

## *Programme Area Summary*

**Country:** Cameroon

**Program Area Plan:** HIV & AIDS 2007-2009

### **What is the aim of the programme area?**

To improve the quality of life for people living in the rural communities of Cameroon's Northwest and Far North Provinces.

### **Why is VSO working in this particular programme area and region?**

The Northwest and Far North Provinces have been selected based on the following criteria:

- ability to build on VSO activities in the field of HIV and AIDS that have previously been carried out in these areas
- potential for a range of volunteer placements working with a range of partnerships
- opportunities for mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in both Education and Participation and Governance programme area plans.

The Far North Province is one of the poorest provinces in Cameroon. However, the HIV and AIDS prevalence is among the lowest. Culture in the Far North is very conservative, making it difficult to discuss issues such as reproductive health and HIV and AIDS. Consequently, stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV and AIDS is a very big problem, especially in rural communities. 35% of the population uses exclusively informal healthcare structures (traditional healers, self-medication from unauthorised medicine vendors) in preference to walking long distances to reach the nearest health centre.

The situation in the Northwest Province is drastically different with HIV and AIDS prevalence at a higher rate. The factors that exacerbate HIV and AIDS in the Northwest Province are ignorance, negative cultural practices, and poverty. Yet, unlike other provinces in Cameroon, rural communities in the Northwest Province are very dynamic. There are a number of interesting community-driven initiatives aimed at supporting families infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. These types of initiatives could serve as a good reference point for VSO's intervention in the Far North Province.

### **Key beneficiaries and partners**

Direct beneficiaries will include key staff of local partners: community based organisations, associations of people living with HIV and AIDS and the local health structures.

Ultimately, the program will benefit those people living with HIV and AIDS in rural communities of the Northwest and Far North Provinces of Cameroon. The benefits will become apparent with a better quality of life through improved provision and access to treatment, care, and support services. Women and girls will particularly benefit as they are most affected by the pandemic, not only because of infection but also because they carry the main psychosocial and physical burdens of caring for people living with HIV and AIDS.

These improvements and benefits are a collaborative effort between VSO Cameroon and our key partners who are community-based organisations, associations of people living with HIV and AIDS and local health structures.

### **Key objectives of the programme and the crosscutting themes**

- To strengthen community based care and support services to families infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, with particular focus on rural households headed by women

## *Programme Area Summary*

- To reduce stigma and discrimination through increased involvement of people living with HIV and AIDS in community programmes
- To support initiatives aimed at strengthening the capacities of local health care structures to provide improved clinical care services to people living with HIV and AIDS
- Increased mainstreaming of HIV and AIDS prevention and stigma practices for all parties involved in VSO Cameroon's programme

A crosscutting theme in the HIV and AIDS programme is Participation and Governance, thus ensuring that all parties involved in VSO Cameroon's HIV and AIDS programme adopt systems of transparency, participatory decision-making and accountability.

### **Current programme activities**

#### *Focus of International Volunteer Placements*

From April 2007 to March 2009, VSO Cameroon will provide 20 long-term volunteers for partnerships in the Far North Province or to work with national organizations and networks. The focus of the skills required will be placed on Organisational Development, Nutrition, Community Development, Volunteer Management, Palliative Care, Management, Behavioural Change Communications, Networking and Institutional Development, Management of Information Systems, Social Work, Clinical Medicine and/or Community Health, Gender and Advocacy.

Other interventions will include 3 short-term volunteer placements that will focus on developing baseline measurements to sustain future projects. 7 youth volunteer placements for the fiscal year 2007-2008 are also in place and will be supported by VSO Canada's CIDA IYIP Youth Programme (funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and filled by Canadian youth volunteers). Currently the programme has Volunteer Development placements created to support and develop the existing network of volunteering in Cameroon.

#### *Workshops, training and conferences*

- Language training for volunteers (French, Pidgin English and local languages)
- ICT and the inclusion of AIDS awareness sessions for all incoming volunteers
- Volunteer bi-annual conferences to discuss programme strategy, monitoring and evaluation
- Training on volunteer management for organisations working with community volunteer caregivers
- Skill share workshop for teachers to discuss challenges and best practices in teaching HIV and AIDS in school

#### *Research*

Stakeholder consultations were conducted in order to ascertain a representative view of the local political environment for HIV and AIDS activities in Cameroon. Methodologies included individual consultations, focus group discussions, literature reviews and causal mapping workshops involving government representatives, international agencies, civil society organizations (including representatives of people living with HIV and AIDS) and VSO volunteers.

## *Programme Area Summary*

### *Advocacy and Global Education*

- 2 national activities to mark International Volunteer Day (2007 and 2008)
- Capacity building support to local councils to mainstream HIV and AIDS in rural development projects
- Public engagement in Canada implemented by VSO Canada that will contribute to increased awareness, understanding and action of the Canadian public with respect to HIV and AIDS and international development

### *Partner exchange visits/study tours*

2 LINKS exchange visits are planned which will focus on learning about community volunteering and home-based care, advocacy and networking.

- APRICOM : since 2005 VSO Cameroon has been in partnership with CARE International-Cameroon and the Belgian Technical Cooperation to implement a European-Union funded project focused on promoting community home-based care for people infected and affected by and AIDS in the Far North Province.
- Change Makers Project: this is an innovative project aimed at changing traditional practices that promote gender inequality and increase risks of HIV and other sexually-transmitted infections, by engaging young men in meaningful activities that address gender, sexuality and HIV and AIDS, such as focus groups, sensitisation workshops and peer support activities. VSO is partnering with the Youth Outreach Program (in Cameroon) and Condomania (in Canada) and the project is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency.

### *Providing grants and / or equipment for partners*

VSO Cameroon will provide small scale funding to partner organisations to enable them to implement development activities related to the work of the volunteer, which may not otherwise have been funded (e.g. transport costs, stationary, workshops, etc.).

### *Other partnership activities*

- Programme Area Plan (PAP) meeting in fiscal year 2007-2008 bringing partners together to discuss progress in PAP implementation
- Programme area review in fiscal year 2008-2009
- Participatory partnership assessment (10 forecasted assessments with new partners between April and October 2007)
- Partnership reviews
- Advisory services to partners in developing internal workplace policies

### **What makes VSO's work in this programme area special?**

There is insufficient response to HIV and AIDS at rural level in terms of distribution of human, technical, and financial resources. VSO's HIV and AIDS programme is focused on addressing this issue by strengthening the capacities of existing rural health care and community structures to be able to function effectively in limited resource settings. Through our interventions, we expect to see an increase in access to quality treatment, care and support services for people living with HIV and AIDS in rural communities.