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## Text at Work and Stay Healthy: HIV/AIDS Prevention in the Workplace

*Bringing safe sexual practices and HIV/AIDS prevention home through an innovative workplace-based text messaging program*

More than 120,000 people are estimated to be receiving ART in Uganda, and HIV/AIDS prevalence has plateaued at 5.4%. Despite tremendous success in treating the epidemic, HIV transmission continues unabated. Risky behaviors are common, and only 41.1% of youth with multiple partners report using a condom at last intercourse. Prevention programs are more important than ever, with safe sexual practices a cornerstone for halting the scourge of the disease. Through a pilot partnership with the Text to Change (TTC) initiative, HIPS is using an innovative tool to support companies in providing key prevention messages and education on HIV/AIDS to their employees and community networks – text messages. Early results are promising: the launch of the program resulted in a 40% increase in demand for sexual and reproductive health services from participant company clinics. Voluntary



Peer Educators perform a skit for the community and company staff during the launch of Text to Change at Kinyara Sugar. Kinyara Sugar employs approximately \_\_\_ people, and is closely linked to at least \_\_\_ out-growers in the region. In addition to the Text to Change initiative, Kinyara works to bring a number of services to employees such as VCT, HIV/AIDS prevention messaging, and health services through the company clinic.

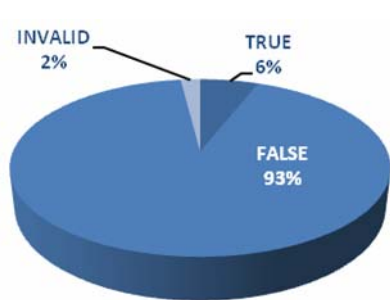
counseling and testing (VCT) outreaches have shown as much as a 200% increase in attendance when announced through the TTC initiative. Additionally, text responses have generated baseline data on knowledge, attitudes, and practices concerning safe sex, medical male circumcision (MMC), family planning, and HIV/AIDS transmission from 1,380 respondents in 3 partner companies.

### Uganda's First Workplace Health SMS Program

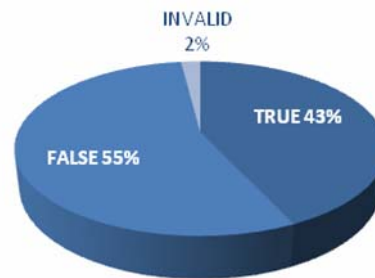
Text to Change is simple in concept, yet powerful in delivery. Participants opt-in to the program by sending an SMS to a four digit number and begin receiving daily texts, which are primarily interactive questions. The questions are designed to spark conversation and thought on both conventional and controversial topics, and include basic information such as age and gender. Participants are able to select whether they would like to receive texts in their local language or in English, and incentives such as mobile phones, air time, and T-shirts encourage



HIPS Chief of Party Barbara Addy, Text to Change Founder Bas Hoefman, and \_\_\_ from Kinyara Sugar look on as peer educators inform guests on the information available through Text to Change.



True or False: HIV can be transmitted through shaking hands and sharing things like cups.



True or False: Medical Male Circumcision is the same as traditional or religious male circumcision.

Results produced from the Text to Change campaign at Kakira Sugar Works shows that while knowledge around HIV/AIDS prevention is high, it is low when it comes to MMC and Long Term Family Planning. Says Marble Nabatanzi, a participant of the Kakira campaign, "The reason why I liked the questions... is that they helped me to realize how much I'm at a high risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. I answered each question honestly and I realized I should be more careful with my life by avoiding behaviors that put me at risk".

responses. Participants also receive messages on services available, such as company-sponsored VCT events. Peer educators raised awareness about Text to Change, and participated in focus groups to optimize question topics and formats.

Advantages of the initiative include:

**Knowledge Sharing:** Cell phone technology is highly engaging, and provides an immediate link to individuals. Interactive messaging stimulates participants to process issues of HIV/AIDS prevention and sexual behaviors, and can encourage discussion among sexual partners, colleagues, co-workers, and family members.

**Anonymity:** Text messaging is a comfortable forum to discuss sensitive issues such as sexual partners and practices, MMC, and barriers to safe sex. It is also a safe forum for those concerned about social or professional ramifications of their interest in sexual health.

**Program & Message Design:** Participant responses provide a tremendous amount of information on the Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) surrounding HIV/AIDS and other health issues, which can be used to design company health and prevention programs.

**Continuous Information Exchange:** As prevention approaches evolve to accommodate new discoveries, such as the value of MMC, it

can be passed on directly to the population through regular communication flows.

**Workplace Friendly Health Messaging:** Text messages are an affordable intervention for companies and can be sent and received anywhere, so they don't take employees away from the production line. The Text to Change system also builds a company database of phone numbers, providing a direct communication lifeline to its employees.

#### The Future of Health SMS in the Workplace

The HIPS and Text to Change pilot showed many interesting results and promise for health interventions. In addition to HIV/AIDS and family planning, workplace-based text messaging can be used to encourage healthy behaviors and treatment-seeking for malaria, tuberculosis, childhood illnesses, and others. Early experiences from initiative indicate the vast potential to expand health text messaging in the workplace and elsewhere. As HIPS and Text to Change work to scale up this initiative to include a total of ten company programs, lessons learned will be used to advocate for health text messaging throughout the country and East African region.