The use of Self Help Groups to enable families living with HIV to support each other in Ethiopia
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Background: In the last 3 years Irish Aid has funded, through Tearfund UK, a widespread and complex programme in Ethiopia and Malawi on HIV. 8 local NGO partners, working across more than 14 denominations, implemented a range of activities designed to build the capacity of churches to ‘respond more effectively, sustainably and holistically to HIV and AIDS’. Baseline and endline KAP surveys (nearly 2,000 household interviews) were used to generate evidence of programme effect. Methods: NGO partners adopted the model of Self Help Groups (SHGs) from India. Partners and associated churches have created a total of over 7,000 SHGs as part of their wider development and social mobilisation activities. The HIV programme facilitated 215 SHGs as a mechanism for mobilising support for families affected by AIDS. The process includes mobilising activities, training of facilitators, socio economic studies, and group formation.

Results: The programme has been successful in mobilising churches to address HIV/AIDS - although awareness of church based HIV activities increased from 73% to 92%, the proportion of community members actively involved rose from 30% to 44%.

Areas where the role of the church stands out is in improving knowledge and combatting stigma. 15% of respondents had a Comprehensive HIV knowledge (up from 8%), and this was linked to exposure to church activities. A fall in the proportion of respondents declaring multiple partners from 13% to 6% was also linked to churches (as well as media). Contact with churches has been particularly effective in promoting women's rights.
Conclusions: Although there have been widespread improvements in the HIV/AIDS context in the country, it was possible to link positive changes with exposure to various types of local church activities. This showed that sharing ideas, information, and experiences through talking to people, embodied in the SHG approach, was a particularly effective means of promoting positive change.

"yes" (% of respondents)