



**Poster Exhibition**

E77 - Economic strengthening initiatives (including micro-finance, health insurance, etc.)

**THPE0872 - 'Beyond Antiretroviral Therapy' (ART): agricultural skills and economic empowerment for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA) stabilised on ART - a strategy of Kitovu Mobile AIDS Organization, Masaka, Uganda**

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**Issues:** HIV health care workers (HCW) are skilled at treating sick patients. However due to illness - induced poverty and insecurity, dependency continues even when PLHA are in good health and stabilised on ART. A change in mind-set of HCWs and PLHA is needed to develop a strong 'work ethic' and independency.

**Description:** To address this issue Kitovu Mobile introduced an agricultural support project for 200 PLHA (151 F, 49 M) stabilised on ART in Jan 2009. (The project was supported by GORTA, Ireland) The initial economic status of the group was poor (average income - 10,000 UGX (< 4 euro) per month), minimal land cultivation, food shortages and poor saving ability was evident.

An agriculturalist and social worker joined the ART program. 10 groups of PLHA received teaching on basic agricultural skills, nutrition, credit and savings and small animal rearing. Spray pumps, hoes and seeds were distributed. All members started or expanded income generating activities (IGA).

The ART team monitored clinical status, CD4s and ART adherence while the agriculturalist and social worker supervised the projects.

**Outcomes:**

- Adherence to ART reached 98.6%
- 100% identified nutritional gaps in their diet
- 70% reported improved diet and food intake.
- 60% increase in land cultivation from .5 acre to 2- 3 acres per person.
- Good attendance at meetings, adherence to ART, and enthusiasm to work made these PLHA role models for other clients in general care.

**Lessons learned:** Integration of ART with agriculture improves health and economic status, boosts self esteem and reduces stigma. Group members are enthusiastic to work, save, register with local authorities and achieve independence. ART adherence is excellent.

**Next step:** Expand the IGAs. Disengage from groups by registering them locally. Seek assistance to enrol and empower other PLHA in similar activities.

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