

FACILITATOR GUIDE FOR GROUP ART PREPARATION SESSION #1

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

- Welcome participants, thank them for coming, and introduce yourself.
- Encourage active participation and discuss confidentiality.
- Give an overview of the topics that will be covered in the session.

2. HIV AND AIDS BASICS

? Ask and discuss: *What is HIV? What is AIDS?*

🔑 Key Points:

- **HIV** is the virus that gets into our bodies.
- A person who is **HIV-infected** might not have any signs of illness for a long time, but they can pass the virus to others. The only way to know if a person has HIV is through a blood test.
- **AIDS** is the term we use when the HIV weakens the body so much that we get other serious infections and illnesses. There is no cure for AIDS, but there are medicines that help PLHIV live long, healthy lives.

? Ask and discuss: *What does HIV do in our bodies? Why is our CD4 cell count important?*

🔑 Key Points:

- The immune system is our body's own natural way to fight off diseases.
- A type of cell called the CD4 cell (or T-cell) helps our bodies fight infections.
- HIV attacks and kills the CD4 cells in our bodies.
- The more CD4 cells we have, the better. It is important to know your CD4 cell count and to get a CD4 test done at least every 6 months.
- Eventually, HIV attacks so many of our CD4 cells, that there are not enough to fight infections and illnesses that usually would not make us sick. **Opportunistic infections (or OIs)** take advantage of this weakness, attack us, and make us sick. Common OIs include pneumonia, tuberculosis, diarrhea, skin problems, and other infections.

3. HIV TRANSMISSION AND PREVENTION

? Ask and discuss: *How does a person get HIV?*

🔑 Key Points:

- HIV is in these body fluids: semen, vaginal fluids, blood, birthing fluids, and breastmilk.
- A person can get HIV through:
 - Unprotected sexual intercourse with an HIV-infected person.
 - Mother-to-child transmission - during pregnancy, labor and delivery, or breastfeeding.
 - Being exposed to infected blood - through an unsafe blood transfusion or being cut or pricked with a razor, needle, knife, or other sharp object.
- HIV is NOT spread by sharing food and drinks, hugging, kissing, shaking hands, coughing, sneezing, sharing toilets, mosquitoes, or being around PLHIV.

? Ask and discuss: *How we make sure we do not pass HIV to other people?*

🔑 Key Points:

- These are the ways we can prevent the spread of HIV from person to person:
 - Not having sex at all (not always realistic).
 - Be faithful to your sexual partner and know your own and your partners' HIV status.
 - Use a new male or female condom every time you have sex.
 - Get early treatment if you or your sex partner(s) have any sexually transmitted infections.
 - Prevent unwanted pregnancies (and the risk of MTCT of HIV).
 - Pregnant women should get early antenatal care and PMTCT services, including ARVs.
 - Not sharing blades, knives, needles, or other sharp things (or cleaning them with a bleach solution).

4. POSITIVE LIVING

? Ask and discuss: *What can we do to stay healthy and “live positively” with HIV?*

Key Points:

- Prevent and treat OIs. This includes taking cotrimoxazole and preventing and treating tuberculosis.
- Practice safe sex – this means using a new male or female condom every time you have sex.
- Ask your partner to be tested for HIV. If your partner is an HIV-negative man, he can help reduce his risk of infection by getting circumcised.
- Eat enough, healthy foods from all of the food groups – energy giving (starches), protective (fruits and vegetables) and body building (legumes, meat, and other proteins).
- Stay away from immune boosters – they cost a lot of money, do not work, and may interact with ARVs.
- Find social support, including having a treatment supporter and joining a support group.
- Try to disclose your HIV status to someone you trust and someone who can give you support.
- Get enough rest and try to get some exercise every day – even a short walk will help.
- Stay away from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

5. HIV CARE AND TREATMENT

? Ask and discuss: *What kind of care and treatment do PLHIV need?*

Key Points:

- All PLHIV (pre-ART and on ART) need to be enrolled in care and treatment for life.
- Coming back to the same clinic often is very important. This includes appointments for:
 - Baseline blood tests to check that it is safe to start ART and a check-up by the doctor
 - 2 group education sessions and at least 1 individual counseling session
 - A 2-week check-up after you start ART
 - Monthly refills of your medicines. Always bring all of your tablets to the clinic.
 - On-going adherence counseling and emotional support
 - Check-ups with the doctor or nurse – every 1 month at first, then every 3-6 months
 - Lab tests (CD4 and others) – at least every 6 months
- The clinic needs to know your correct home address and contact information. If you agree, the clinic will call you or have a VHW visit you at home if you miss an appointment or if you need more support.

6. ART BASICS

? Ask and discuss: *What is ART? What is important to know about ART?*

Key Points:

- Antiretrovirals (ARVs) are medicines that help lower the amount of HIV in the body. When we take different ARVs at the same time (usually 3 different kinds), we call this antiretroviral therapy, or ART.
- ART does not cure HIV, but it can make us live longer and improve our quality of life.
- ART is not just for very sick people. PLHIV need to start taking ART if:
 - They have a low CD4 cell count (less than 200)
 - They have certain OI's (no matter what their CD4 cell count)
 - They are pregnant and have a CD4 cell count less than 350
 - They are an HIV-infected child under 1 year old, or a child who the doctor says should be on ART
- ART is taken every day, at the same times, for your whole life. It is a lifetime commitment!
- Side effects (such as nausea, dizziness, dry mouth, headache, diarrhea, and feeling tired) usually go away within a couple of weeks. Always come to the clinic if you have a rash or if side effects do not go away.
- Never stop taking ART without consulting the doctor. Also never share ART with other people.
- You should take your ART even if you do not have a lot of food to eat.
- ART does not cure HIV. This means that you can still pass HIV to others and should practice safe sex.

7. SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS AND CLOSING

- Ask participants if they can recall some of the key points of the session.
- Answer any questions and remind participants that individual counseling is always available.
- Announce the date, time, and location of group session #2. Thank participants for coming.