Burkina Faso has the second highest HIV/AIDS infection rate in West Africa. Poni Province is especially vulnerable because many young men migrate to neighboring Cote d’Ivoire to work on coffee and cocoa plantations, and sometimes return infected.

As part of a broader World Bank HIV/AIDS project worth $22 million, the World Bank launched an innovative community-driven effort in 2001 to stem the epidemic in Poni Province. The project undertook a massive social mobilization campaign to inform and engage local political, administrative and community leaders.

The project, which aimed to reach the entire province of 200,000 inhabitants, relied on local sources to provide training and technical support, and worked directly with community representatives rather than through local associations. It allowed communities to prepare, implement and monitor their own micro-projects, and manage funds put at their disposal.

Building on entrenched traditions of participatory approaches in Burkina Faso, participants were encouraged to diagnose and improve the community’s understanding of the HIV/AIDS situation. They identified areas in their communities where the largest numbers of sexual encounters occur, and proposed interventions without stigmatizing specific groups. Village committees prepared micro-projects and opened up local bank accounts, which gave the project credibility and inspired confidence among the local population.

The project reached 550 villages and some 50 organizations. In nine months, it funded almost 600 micro-projects worth $175,000, covering close to 95 percent of all villages. It also trained some 2,000 instructors from all segments of society throughout the province about HIV/AIDS issues.

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