



success story

The Red Card: A Gender Equity Tool to Stop Risky Behavior

Challenge

A young woman on a date cannot find the right words to say “wait!” Another stalls to buy time looking for the best moment to bring up a sensitive subject. Another wishes there was an easier way to communicate “back off.” Now there is a tool to help.

Response

Launched in October 2006 in Madagascar, the Red Card, a simple, scalable gender equity tool, continues to create “buzz” across the island. To date more than 1.5 million Red Cards have been distributed and over 2,000 Red Card clubs have been created in schools, churches and communities. The program has attracted enormous support and interest among young women who are experiencing the empowerment that the tool affords.

The concept behind the Red Card in the context of gender relations and HIV prevention programming is similar to that in soccer—a player who commits a penalty is “carded.” Early field tests demonstrated that young women will use the Red Card in a range of circumstances—from uncomfortable situations with friends and relatives to high risk encounters with aggressive men.

Funded by USAID and initiated by AED under HCP and continued under C-Change, the Red Card program is implemented by the Madagascar Comité National de Lutte contre le SIDA (CNLS) or National



HCP / Madagascar

Anti-AIDS Committee. Partners, in addition to Madagascar’s Ministry of Health, include UNICEF, Rotary International, and many local NGOs that are introducing the Red Card into dozens of programs in local youth clubs and schools.

Powerful mass media support was critical to the successful launch of the Red Card. An initial series of four television and radio spots modeled the transformation of women from uncertainty and doubt to pride once they had used the card. The second series of media spots portrayed women with a new sense of empowerment and confidence. The “buzz” created by the spots led to a ten-fold increase in calls to the HIV/AIDS hotline from individuals asking for copies of the card and from dozens of local NGOs who wanted to integrate the card into their activities.

There are hundreds of stories that demonstrate the effectiveness of the Red Card:

- A 15-year-old high school girl, Fanja, was being pressured by her boyfriend, Rivo, to have sex. After repeatedly trying to dissuade him and frustrated, she finally “carded” Rivo—slipped the Red Card into his hand. Rivo was surprised and

shocked. The couple broke up. Fanja, however, was pleased and said it was for the better.

- Sixteen-year-old Tina brought the Red Card home and showed her mother. For the first time, Tina and her mother had a heart-to-heart discussion about sex and high-risk situations. Tina's younger sister joined in.
- In a group of tenth-grade girls bantering in the school yard, one girl explained that, although she was going out with Fano, she wanted to date Alban, too. Her friend immediately replied, "That's a Red Card." Later the girls had a frank discussion about the risks of multiple partners.
- Many of these everyday stories amount to practice for high-risk situations. Take, for example, Ana, who carded a guy who stumbled up in a local bar and draped his arms around her. Ana's friends laughed and commented, "That was fast." To which Ana replied, "I have lots of practice."

Results

In Madagascar, as in most traditional societies, there is a natural reluctance to deal head-on with tough issues such as coercive or exploitative behaviors that can drive HIV transmission and alcohol abuse. Results indicate that the Red Card has the potential to go right to the heart of sensitive issues that might otherwise not be discussed. Men understand this language. The Red Card has become a symbol of self-assurance and self-esteem among a new generation of Malagasy women.

The simplicity and low cost of the card have made it easy to integrate into schools, youth clubs and programs for young women. A mere \$160 buys 10,000 cards, and a small NGO is ready to go. The CNLS and the Ministries of Health, Education and Youth all "own" the program and are introducing the Red Card to tens of thousands of young women every year.



A two-hour training session focuses on role plays that allow women to practice using the card in diverse situations. Young women are encouraged to give the cards to their friends along with a low-cost postcard that illustrates four typical Red Card situations. Also, an interactive "complete the story" comic book provides women the opportunity to finish a scenario with their own dialogue.

In 2009, the Ministry of Health will carry out a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the Red Card with support from C-Change. The evaluation will seek to understand exactly if and how the card has influenced social norms and to what extent any norms shift has impacted gender-related behaviors.

The C-Change program is USAID's flagship program to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of communication for behavior and social change as an integral part of development efforts. AED implements C-Change with US-based partners—CARE, Internews, Ohio University, University of Washington, and IDEO; and regional partners—Centre for Media Studies and New Concept Information Systems (both in India); Social Surveys and Soul City (both in South Africa); and Straight Talk, Uganda. For more information, please contact Sandra Kalscheur, Knowledge Management Advisor at skalscheur@aed.org, or visit www.c-changeprogram.org.