

Targeting HIV Prevention to Botswana's Most-at-Risk Populations (MARPs)

The Cairo–Cape Town Highway snakes through Eastern Botswana, creating a hotbed for HIV transmission. Female sex workers from surrounding towns find clients in the transient populations traveling this route. Young females engage in sex with men of varying ages in exchange for cash or other amenities, creating a risky power dynamic when it comes to negotiating safer sex. HIV prevalence among girls 15–24 years old is nearly three times that for boys of the same age group. In Botswana, one quarter of adults are infected with HIV.

The Government of Botswana is committed to reducing the burden of the disease, but HIV prevention strategies have not sufficiently targeted MARPs—such as female sex workers and their clients, girls in transactional or cross-generational sex, or mobile populations—until now.

RTI is assisting the Government of Botswana to improve the quality and quantity of HIV prevention services for MARPs under the Support for the HIV Response in Botswana with the Civil Society for HIV Prevention that Targets Most-At-Risk Populations (MARPS) project. The 5-year project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development works along the highly trafficked corridor, primarily in the towns of Gaborone; Francistown; Kasane; Selebi-Phikwe; and Tlokweng, and aims to build the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) to deliver prevention services.

Designing Community-based Interventions

In conjunction with existing CSOs, the program is developing specific community-based interventions for each of the three targeted populations. RTI combines experience working on similar projects in South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia with local research to develop intervention models for female sex workers that could be scaled up as international best practices.



Interventions include preventive strategies such as helping vulnerable women avoid the sex trade, teaching condom negotiation skills, and introducing methods to assist women in exiting sex work. The project also brings services, such as voluntary counseling and testing, closer to target populations.

To ensure that HIV-positive clients receive a full continuum of prevention-to-care services, RTI is also working with local partners to leverage their relationships with national networks to identify, strengthen, or develop referral systems and linkages among CSOs and key government counterparts.

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