



Module 4: Stakeholder Engagement in Formative Research Activities

Homework Assignment

Read the following case study and answer the questions below.

You are a part of a research team in Africa, working in a country where a recent seroincidence study showed high rates of HIV in men who have sex with men (MSM). Biomedical HIV prevention research has been fairly limited in your area up to now, but your team has just been chosen as one of four sites to conduct a phase II rectal microbicide trial. Yours is the only trial site in Africa, and this is the first time a rectal microbicide trial will be conducted anywhere outside the United States. This is also the first time your research team will recruit MSM for a clinical trial. The mentioned seroincidence study was conducted about a year ago, and recruited 950 MSM.

Although homosexuality is not criminalized in your setting, the country's government and religious leaders are known to be hostile to MSM communities. There have also been multiple reports of MSM communities experiencing stigma and discrimination by being linked to the mentioned seroincidence study, especially at the time that data were reported, given that HIV incidences reported for MSM was much higher than in the general population. You understand from former participants that they received high quality and non-judgmental services and counselling in the study, but that these types of services and attitudes would not be found outside of this specialized research setting. The country's denial and discrimination against MSM have also contributed to the increase in STIs and risk taking in the population, and have hindered their access to health care services and treatment options, making it difficult to reach them with HIV-prevention interventions.

Questions

What key information does your research team need to know about the target population and local context in order to plan and prepare for the rectal microbicide clinical trial?

1. How would you go about collecting and coordinating that information? Create a list of the formative research activities you would conduct. Be sure to note which activities are formal (for example, a study requiring IRB or other regulatory approval) and which are informal.
2. How would you identify key stakeholders to advise and/or be involved in your formative research activities? Which stakeholders would be the most important to partner with and why?

For each formative research activity you have described, identify the purpose or objective of engaging stakeholders; that is, what do you want achieve by receiving and incorporating stakeholder perspectives? Remember to be as specific and detailed as possible. For example, 'Consult with former participants in the seroincidence study to identify the social impacts they experienced, as well as effective mechanisms put in place by the research team to address any social harms.'