Introduction

The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) made a strategic commitment to scale up efforts in HIV and AIDS at the 2001 Red Cross General Assembly. The Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society (TTRCS) started a fully operational HIV and AIDS department in 2003. This department was set up with support from REPSOL, an oil company in Madrid, Spain through an agreement with the Spanish Red Cross who acted as a conduit.

2003 marked the onset of a Public Private partnership between a corporate oil and gas entity and a Red Cross National Society. Marked with the challenge of managing a programme from both sides of the Atlantic, the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross implemented programmes aimed at educating the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago on HIV and AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Infections.

The funding received from REPSOL has afforded the TTRCS to take care of operations whilst allowing the organisation to mobilise resources to attract further funding to bridge important programming gaps.

Overall Implementation Strategy

Owing much to the flexibility in programming offered by the partnership with REPSOL, it has facilitated the use of a decentralised volunteer model of implementation through its three member branches. They are strategically located in the geographic areas of San Fernando (South Trinidad), Port of Spain (North Trinidad) and Sao Nicolau (Tobago) and essentially covers the entire geographic landscape in zones that overlap. The programme works principally to address core thematic areas that hold significance to comprehensive programming, prevention focused on young people to reduce their risk behaviours, persons both young and mature who are incarcerated by the state, providing them with risk reduction and personal health negotiation strategies, people living with HIV to lead healthy lifestyles and provision of social and psychosocial support. Further our programme works with vulnerable communities, including sex workers and men who have sex with men, who require efforts to support their access to health and capacity building services. Taking Trinidad and Tobago’s unique and dynamic cultural landscape into account, prevention efforts including commodity distribution are tailored to patrons of Carnival and Tobago Heritage festivities thought to be two of the largest cultural events in the Caribbean Region.

Materials and methods

The strategy is aimed at the development of a partnership rather than a typical donor/recipient relationship. The Spanish Red Cross provided intermediary support since in our movement, funds sought externally has to be channeled through that country’s Red Cross. Since its commencement in 2003, we secured 3 grants which facilitated activities based on 3 strategic themes: HIV Prevention, Treatment, Care and Support with necessary operational costs being covered in subsequent activities.

Some of the key programme initiatives were: “Project Life” (Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV), “Together We Care” (Youth Peer Education), Social Awareness Campaigns especially focused on our diverse and unique cultural celebration namely Tobago Heritage Festival and Trinidad Carnival, Prison Outreach for both juvenile and adult males, Capacity building for People Living with HIV & AIDS and their support organizations as well as Communication Campaigns.

We utilize the efforts of volunteers who work on the frontline in communities and with different stakeholder groups of the Red Cross. As a result we invest heavily in building the capacity of staff, volunteers and community partners.

Results

In 2010 the TTRCS joined the Red Cross Global Alliance on HIV which means we would benefit from a global framework that would engender the strategic alignment of the programme to other key stakeholders locally, regionally and globally. As demonstrated the quality of our data collection procedure, with female reporting and disaggregation over the years since 2003 and was pegged against the fact that reporting systems were concurrently being developed. The flexibility of the donor in understanding the complexity of the work of the Red Cross was critical in facilitating the development of the organization’s capacity to respond.

The grants secured over the years reflect the changes in the development of the programme. i.e. the measure of reach was not streamlined initially since the epidemic in Trinidad and Tobago for a number of years was classified as a generalized epidemic. The data collection from 2003 – 2009 reflected this as much reach was counted as the total number of persons reached. From 2010 to present the data collected reflected the need to disaggregate data in keeping with the classification of our national HIV epidemic. As the data below shows mass numbers reached seemed to have steadily declined but that reflects our ability to engage with specific groups of people rather than the entire public.

Conclusions

This partnership was landmark for both REPSOL and TTRCS; it represents the first time REPSOL was funding an HIV and AIDS programme which signaled it as a new-social responsibility priority for them in Trinidad and Tobago and one for the TTRCS. Consequently we charted new territory utilizing our strong community experiences and knowledge to develop programming documents and unique tools. This was the genesis of an entirely new department which was utilized as a pilot model for the creation of other departments at TTRCS. We have reached over 80% of our entire population annually; over 80% of our beneficiaries being female. Some unique approaches included working with PLHIV, prison inmates and youth in school. In 2009 our programme was highlighted at the International Petroleum Conference as REPSOL’s model corporate social responsibility programme globally. This partnership has offered us the understanding that for change to be effected uncharted public-private partnership territories need to be explored and ultimately address legitimate community needs and concerns.

Acknowledgments

Gratitude is extended to REPSOL for their continued support to the programme. The support from the Caribbean Regional Representation Office, Spanish Red Cross and the Management of the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross is highly appreciated. Lastly but more significantly is to forever indebted to our Volunteers who have given their free service full of sacrifice to make this program a success.