

## **UGANDA: USE OF THE POSITIVE DEVIANCE (PD) APPROACH FOR THE REINSERTION OF GIRL SOLDIERS**

In December 2007, the Positive Deviance Initiative (PDI), at the Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition, collaborated with Save the Children (SC) US in Uganda, on a project to address issues facing previously abducted girl soldiers from the Lords Resistance Army in their reintegration into the camps in Pader.

The objective of the project was to utilize the Positive Deviance (PD) approach to discover already existing solutions to seemingly “intractable problems” facing the girls, and the camp community. PD is based on the observation that in every community there are certain individuals or groups (the “positive deviants”) whose special practices or behaviors enable them to find a better solution to a prevalent problem than their neighbors who have access to the same resources.”

Save the Children (SC) Uganda had already utilized the PD approach to begin to successfully address issues such as income generation, and school attendance among vulnerable youth in the camps. The focus of the December PD workshop was to a) further hone the skills of the Save the Children staff in the PD approach, and b) find solutions to the wide-spread problem of unwanted pregnancies.

The skills of the SC staff were most impressive, as was their intuitive grasp of the PD process. During the week-long workshop, the staff met with a wide cross-section of the camp community (mothers, fathers, youth, local leaders, grandparents, aunts, and uncles) to define the problem. With unusual frankness, the community identified the problem of unwanted pregnancies as a major concern. It was clear at the first community meeting that the PD framing of the session as an opportunity to discover solutions rather than focusing on problems, served as a catalyst for open and enthusiastic participation.

After the problem was identified by community members as one they wished to address, the SC members met with stakeholders to articulate the key issues which impacted on unwanted pregnancies. These included peer pressure, (both from teenage girls as well as boys), economic need, condom use, disintegration of traditional parental and familial child-rearing roles, and ineffectual community leadership.

The SC team then interviewed a wide range of stakeholders to ascertain their common practices around these key issues. These included, for example, girls’ acquiescence to unprotected sex demands by their boyfriends, parental resignation to their loss of power and influence relating to their children’s behavior, leadership’s negation of responsibility on issues of sexual mores, etc.

Next the SC staff asked the community to identify individuals who had overcome the barriers and obstacles facing their neighbors in the context of the above issues; for example, girls who were able to successfully negotiate condom use, boys who routinely accessed and used condoms, parents with exceptional counseling skills who maintained a

strong influence over their adolescent children, and local leaders who exhibited uncommonly active roles in sexual mores and practices in their communities.

The SC staff then conducted in-depth interviews with the identified “positive deviants” to discover their uncommon practices. After the PD interviews the group reassembled to create a matrix of uncommon, but successful practices used by PD girls, boys, parents, and leaders. An illustrative example of these includes

- specific negotiating strategies used by girls around condom use*
- use by fathers of examples of dire consequence facing unwed mothers in the camp*
- entrusting girls to the care of grandmothers for guidance re behavior at time of menstrual cycle*
- boys use of sports and exercise as an outlet for excess sexual energy*
- boys avoiding sexually active cliques as principal peer group*
- Mothers providing daughters with a small allowance to buy things they need, thus avoiding temptation to participate in transactional sex*
- leaders creating support groups of girls to discuss risks and strategies to avoid unwanted pregnancy*

In the final step of the PD workshop the SC staff began to design, in collaboration with community members, opportunities to actually access and practice the identified PD behaviors. These included role-playing opportunities around advocacy skills, creation of peer support groups, identification of PD grandmothers willing to counsel girls without their own grandmothers, etc.

In just a week, it was clear that the use of the positive deviance approach provided a powerful tool to address some seemingly intractable problems facing the camps in the context of the disintegration of strong traditional roles and mores, overcrowding, and unemployment. The demonstrated skill of the SC staff in helping the community to discover their own solutions to these problems was most impressive. It is highly recommended that the PD approach continue to be utilized as an approach for protection programs and solving subsequent problems facing the camp, and that staff receive further training as well.