

Openness to Overcome Discrimination

LWF/WS-Eritrea Program has been engaged in the implementation of HIV and AIDS, and Reproductive Health and Rights Education Project in Mai Edaga village since October 2003. The main components of the project are education, advocacy and counselling.

Project implementation has been handled by the steering committee formed by the community of Mai Edaga. It has 9 voluntary members from Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Local Administration, National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, National Union of Eritrean Women and members of the community.

The project targets the community in general and adolescents, parents, religious leaders, traditional practitioners and Traditional Birth Attendants in particular.

When the project started, HIV and AIDS was a taboo in the community. The elderly, especially the women were not willing to participate in any discussions.

HIV and AIDS was seen as transgression and stigma. One example is, if the clergymen know that a person has died of

AIDS the formal prayers at the burial ceremony were not carried out.

The situation in Mai Edaga is different now. The community is no more reacting in this way. Individuals who are infected could come to meetings to openly talk with the community leaders.

Mr. Debretsion Hailai is infected with HIV. He said, "Community leaders open discussion about HIV and AIDS has created an environment for us to openly talk about our own infection."

"I have suffered a lot in trying to cover my status because I saw people being stigmatized because of the infection. I was so depressed."

"But now my community's attitude has changed. They have started to listen to us. This has enabled us to gain courage."

"I was rejected before but now I am accepted", said Mr. Debretsion. "I have been invited for meetings and discussions. This has given me a new courage to contribute more in fighting HIV and AIDS not only in my village but in the whole nation."



Mr. Debretsion Carrying out an Open Discussions with the Steering Committee in Mai Edaga Village