



SUCCESS STORY

Theater Empowers Afro-Honduran Women in HIV Battle

Women take center stage to get out HIV prevention messages.



Avrardo, Honduras Location Technical Assistance Unit for Health Project

Yilian David onstage during a theater performance

By establishing community theater groups in Honduras, USAID has contributed to strengthening women’s leadership and reducing HIV/AIDS prevalence in Garifuna communities.

Yilian David, a Garifuna from Corozal, Honduras, is no ordinary homemaker. While she may appear to fit this traditional role at first glance – cleaning house, cooking meals, and watching children – she is much more than that. She is also a member of a new group of female leaders who are powerful HIV prevention advocates in their communities.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has worked to prevent HIV in Garifuna communities for 12 years. In the last five, the Agency, as part of the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, has helped create community theater groups to spread HIV prevention messages throughout the north coast of Honduras.

With USAID support, theater group participants studied acting and script writing. Now, they perform in a variety of shows, including three radio soap operas that target HIV prevention messages to youth. Through their performances, the theater groups raise awareness of HIV and give community members, especially women, an opportunity to discuss prevention in comfortable settings.

In 12 years, HIV prevalence within the Garifuna population has declined from 8.4 percent to 4.5 percent, and HIV awareness has become a platform for developing women’s leadership.

“I became part of the theater group when I was very young,” Yilian said. “The program taught me not to sit with my arms crossed waiting for something better to come along, but rather to go out there and make it happen.” She continued, “The Garifuna have a strong oral tradition, so theater is a great way to get information out to people. In the last few years, we’ve used theater to deal with other issues as well, like environmental problems and keeping kids in school and away from drugs.”

Yilian has won several national theater awards and is a celebrity among the Garifuna. A widely recognized role model in her community, she fully understands the importance of positively influencing and inspiring others: “I believe that people know they can make a difference because I have shown them they can.”

Since starting her participation in theater, Yilian has received a vocational degree. She still volunteers in her community, spreading HIV prevention messages, organizing community development groups, and using theater to address other important social and political issues.