



SUCCESS STORY

Expanding the Bridge of Health(y) Communication Between Generations

Parents and youths learn to communicate effectively about HIV/AIDS and other health issues.



American Red Cross Society

"It's important to be open and listen when talking with youth," said Isa Ngaluluka. He is pictured above with his 18-year-old son, Amin Kassim, after having participated in a role play concerning his son and avoiding unintended pregnancy.

Daraja has helped over 1,000 adults and youths open their minds and begin to feel comfortable talking about sexual health.

In Tanzania, as in the most parts of the world, cultural norms and taboos prevent many parents or other trusted adults from talking with their children about sexual and reproductive health. Experts researching the link between youth behaviors and attitudes and family communication fear that this may encourage risky behavior in a country where more than one in 20 people are living with HIV.

To bridge the gulf in communications between parents and children, the American Red Cross now hosts a parent-child communication training called Daraja, which means "bridge" in Swahili.

Daraja was developed by the American and Tanzania Red Cross Societies through their Together We Can program, which is funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development. The Daraja program aims to reduce the incidence of HIV, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and unintended pregnancies by fostering improved knowledge, attitudes, and skills around these issues and adult-youth communication. Each three-day training targets 20 parents or other trusted adults on the first day, 20 children of the adults on the second day, and both groups on the third. In the training, adults and youth build knowledge about the transmission and prevention of HIV and STIs as well as the prevention of unintended pregnancy. Through role plays and discussions, the youth build self esteem, and both youth and adults practice their communication skills, explore values and attitudes, and learn how to communicate assertively and express their feelings and concerns.

First launched in 2007, Daraja has been refined and field-tested in partnership with Family Health International (FHI). Now available in the Tanzanian regions of Morogoro, Zanzibar, and Kigoma, Daraja has helped over 1,000 adults and youths open their minds and begin to feel comfortable talking with one another about sexual health.

Three months after attending the training, one youth participant said, "I couldn't talk to my parents about difficult issues before, but now I can, no matter how big the problem." Another shared, "I am now closer to my parents." Similarly, parents indicate that they feel more confident in communicating with their children and intend to "set aside time to talk with my child."

Building on these successes, the American Red Cross is working with the Tanzania Red Cross Society to expand the bridge of health(y) communication between youth and their trusted adults.