

## **Bruce Campbell to visit UNFPA projects in Hoa Binh Province**

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Bruce Campbell, UNFPA Representative in Viet Nam, finished today a two-day courtesy visit to Hoa Binh aiming to visit UNFPA funded interventions in the province and assess the challenges for the year.

On the first day of the monitoring trip, Campbell along with Bui Thi Hong, Assistant to the Representative and Dao Khanh Tung, Programme Officer, Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit, met with Hoa Binh Provincial People's Committee (PPC) and related departments, including the Department of Health, represented by the Director at the provincial level, Quach Dinh Thong, who debriefed on the goals of the Department in the area of Sexual and Reproductive Health.

As reported by Thong, the province is doing a great effort to increase the quality of services provided by Sexual and Reproductive Health workers. "We have established the models for emergency and obstetric care and the models for referral from the lowest to the highest level", he said.

Advocacy and Behaviour Change Communication activities are other priorities for the interventions, aiming to provide Reproductive Health information to community people including youth and adolescents via various channels. In this sense, local authorities highlighted a model under UNFPA support, the Youth Café.

Interventions for youth come in two sides: supply and demand. Regarding the supply, it includes youth friendly services provided in youth friendly corners at health facilities, youth pharmacies and youth counseling centers. The demand consists of youth friendly cafés, as the one supported by the Fund, community activities implemented by the provincial Youth Union, schools extra-curricular activities, and interactive theater among others.

Regarding other intervention models implemented by the UNFPA supported projects, the Director mentioned the Sharing Club. This club gathered around 50 people, some of them living with HIV, and their families. As referred by Thong, this is one of the best models implemented in Hoa Binh. "This place is for people living with HIV to share stories, and receive counseling. The accessibility of people living with HIV to health services is not easy. This center is helping them a lot", Thong stated.

To conclude his presentation, the Director of the Department of Health mentioned the educational centers managed by DOLISA. They provide aid to drug users and sex workers. According to Thong, there are 280 people living in the centers, 80 of whom are living with HIV, this means, 30 per cent of the total center population. Even though this center is under execution of DOLISA, it has a function of health care provision to the trainees including people living with HIV and AIDS. Therefore, the center has been linked to the health sector and received support of UNFPA funded HIV/AIDS activities.

### **The youth Café**

"When the Youth Union proposed me to turn my bar into a youth café, I hardly understood what it meant", explained Thanh Nguyen, the owner of the Youth Café, to UNFPA Representative. "This activity was new for me", he added.

After receiving all the information needed to understand the initiative, Thanh finally accepted the proposal. In September 2007 the Youth Club, funded by UNFPA, opened its doors as a point of reference for Adolescents Sexual and Reproductive Health information access. Since then, Information, Education, Communication (IEC)/Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) materials and more than 20,000 condoms have been mobilized to ensure safe sexual intercourses.

“Young people here do not have many other options to enjoy themselves but my cafe. They come to hang out every evening. Through this model, they can have access to information about sexual and reproductive health services while relaxing with their friends”, Nguyen said. “In the Café they can find publications on a topic that has a real impact in their lives. That is why they enjoy coming to the café”, he explained.

The Youth Café has demonstrated to be a very successful initiative. Around 150 customers on average go to the café, and some days, the figure can increase up to 300”. “Young people find it difficult to talk about sexual and reproductive health, they are too shy to go to the pharmacy to buy condoms”, he said.

Young people are most likely to use condoms to prevent unwanted pregnancies than to prevent Sexual Transmitted Infections (STI). Most common STI’s among young people is Gonorrhoea, but they also suffer dermatological problems.

### **Provincial hospital**

Hoa Binh Provincial Hospital was first built in 1960, in 2005, some alterations were made. Now, the Japanese Government has funded with 9,8 million USD the construction and the equipments for a new building. The new hospital, which has 450 beds, will offer services to around 84.000 people, the total population of the province. Currently there are 464 staff working at the hospital.

During the courtesy visit to the hospital, UNFPA Representative met the Hospital Deputy Director, Dr. Pham Thi Nhan, and the director of the Obstetric Unit, Dr. Lan. Even though improvements were made in the hospitals, the director of the Obstetric Unit referred to the challenges that should be faced in the near future. According to the physician, an ultrasound machine is required. “There is a lack of technology in the obstetric unit”, he said. The difficulties to deal with complications while giving birth, and the management of hemorrhages are, according to the doctor, other important challenges. Even if some trainings on emergency obstetric care, emergencies, BCC, Pediatric care or midwives, etc, have been organized, still there is room to improve. “We need more capable staff”, Lan said.

In 2007 doctors performed 87 abortions in the hospital. In 2008 this figure increased to 207. Total live births in 2008 went up to 2,334, meaning 6 childbirths on average every day. As reported by the Hospital’s Director, “No maternal deaths in the hospital were registered last year”. Nevertheless, when being asked about what happens when family members who do not want their relatives to die in a hospital, take the patients home when they find it is impossible for them to overcome, Hospital’s Director recognized these are not recorded as deaths by the hospital. The same source of information said that in 2008 twelve maternal deaths were reported, eight of them in district hospitals and the rest, four, at home. The delays in the referral system, from home to the commune health center and then from the commune health center to the district hospital explain many of these deaths.

Asked by Bruce Campbell on the initiatives that could be carried out to reduce maternal death, the director of the Obstetric Unit, Dr. Lan, said he would spend the money in training obstetric doctors at the district level in order for them to know the procedures for delivery and techniques to handle hemorrhages. “I would also buy ultrasound equipments for every single district hospital. This is very useful to examine pregnant women”, he explained.

After the meeting, UNFPA team visited the hospital facilities. Throughout the visit the delegation had the opportunity to see the delivery room and the newborn ward, equipped by UNFPA, and other parts of the new hospital.

## **Sharing Club**

The visit to the Sharing Club, where people living with HIV and AIDS and their families gather to meet each other and exchange information, put an end to the courtesy visit to Hoa Binh Province.

The club was established in 2006. Even though there were difficulties at the beginning because of stigma and discrimination against the members, the club is now in its third year.

“We are now 54 members, 20 living with HIV, and whenever it is possible we organize cultural exchange activities, we exchange information on how to prevent HIV, and we encourage people to be tested, apart from organizing other activities”, said Hien, one of the club members, who recognized that sometimes they find it difficult to find information on HIV and AIDS because they do not have a computer in the club, thereby, no access to the Internet.

As noticed by UNFPA Representative in the meeting with the members of the club, one thing that makes this club special is that families are part of it. “If only people living with HIV participated in this club there would be much more discrimination against the members. Luckily we also have family members. We feel there is a common sharing and we feel more optimistic”, he stated. Now, after three years of membership, she feels much more empowered.” I used to face a lot of discrimination. In my hometown, my neighbors told my family that if they kept me at home, I might transmit HIV to other people in the area. I was very depressed, but after I joined the club I started to share some BCC materials with some of the neighbors for them to know more about HIV”, he concluded.