

## **NAP+WA leading PLHIV association support in the region and beyond**

The Network of African People Living with HIV/AIDS' dream to have effective and functional secretariats in the sub-region and strong country networks of PLHIV associations is becoming a reality. Since its creation in Mombassa in 1994 until 2003, NAP+ had only 2 functional sub-regional networks in East Africa and South Africa. The West and Central Africa regions were struggling to put in place operational secretariats and collaboration and exchange between countries were limited to ambassadors of hope missions.

Until 2004, the West Africa branch of the Network of African People Living with HIV/AIDS was operating from the offices of a PLHIV association in Côte d'Ivoire. Since 2004, AWARE-HIV/AIDS supported the network to set up a fully equipped Executive Secretariat, to develop governance and management tools e.g. (1) the constitution of NAP+WA, (2) NAP+WA strategic plan for 2006 to 2009, (3) administrative and financial manual (4) marketing plan and tools, etc. and set different bodies to be able to respond to its country membership needs.

Through its increased capacity, NAP+WA worked to expand its membership within the region from 6 in 2003 to 14 in 2007 by playing a leading role in facilitating efforts of various PLHIV associations in some West Africa Countries including Ghana, Niger, Mali, Guinea, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania, to form a network. AWARE-HIV/AIDS sponsored working visits of NAP+WA members of strong networks to these countries to assist with the creation of a national PLHIV networks. During these visits, General Assemblies were organized resulting in the election of an Executive Board and the development of the network first action plan.

NAP+WA played a key role for the creation of the NAP+ Central Africa branch. The internship of NAP+CA Executive Secretary at NAP+WA Executive Secretariat allowed him to initiate the process of the creation of a network in his sub-region. NAP+WA also played a key role in facilitating the delegates' conference in this sub-region. During the meeting, the constitution of the network was adopted and the board and the Executive Committees were set up.

NAP+WA is also providing assistance to network countries to mobilize internal resources and conduct sensitization campaign against stigma and discrimination against PLHIV. Sensitization campaigns were organized in Niger, Burkina and preparation is on-going in Mauritania, Togo and Guinea-Bissau.

AWARE-HIV/AIDS supported NAP+WA to develop and conduct a leadership and management program for leaders of PLHIV associations to enhance their understanding of the challenges and complexity of setting up and running PLHIV associations in hostile environment that perpetuate stigma, denial and silence. It was also to provide those leaders the opportunity to enhance their leadership skills in order to increase organizational effectiveness, and leverage their influence in the response to HIV/AIDS. The program which started in March 2007 has already benefited more than 40 PLHIV associations in Niger and Burkina and it is being rolled out in Mauritania and Gambia.

AWARE-HIV/AIDS has through its capacity development agenda, increased the visibility and credibility of the NAP+WA as a collaborating partner and as such, a number of institutions like Open Society Institute for West Africa (OSIWA) and development partners like UNAIDS, UNDP and the

Corridor Project which is now being funded by the Global Fund, are all collaborating with NAP+WA to implement its planned activities in the region.

The AWARE-HIV/AIDS project has supported 8 countries in the region to establish their own PLWHA networks within a short time. This approach has been based on promoting South-South collaboration within the region. As a result, Niger, Mali, Gambia, Mauritania, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso are now working together to reinforce regional advocacy and harmonize HIV policy.



*The Niger network of PLHIV during one of their capacity building workshop in Niamey, Niger*