

## **Margaret Sanger Center International is providing trainings and building the capacity of local community-based organizations in Geuteng Province, South Africa to address gender-based violence and other human rights abuses, and their links to the spread of HIV**

### **Skills building training on Human Rights**

Margaret Sanger Center International (MSCI) conducted a four-day training workshop on 'Human Rights' with an emphasis on sexual and reproductive health (SRH), HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence (GBV) for 19 representatives of community-based organizations (CBO) partners from Soweto, Diepsloot, Orange Farm, and Kathlehong. During the training, participants shared their own understanding and experiences of human rights and human right violations in their communities; developed an understanding of the South African Constitution and international human rights instruments; and explored the challenges of translating the rights enshrined in the Constitution into practice. Lastly, they explored community strategies to build a culture of human rights at a community level that would protect citizens from human right violations. To do so, participants were given resource materials to assist them in their advocacy, awareness, and prevention work. These included: pocket size copies of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996; "My Rights, My Responsibilities – Respect, Responsibilities and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC);" SAHRC key rings with contact details of services offered; and SAHRC 2007 calendars.

### **Working on Human Rights: Key Challenges**

The workshop identified several key challenges to addressing human rights at the community level. Chief among these challenges are the lack of knowledge about human rights and the lack of resources to provide information and education to prevent discrimination and stigmatization in relation to HIV and AIDS. This situation is further compounded by lack of delivery of basic social services and the high levels of poverty. Consequently, many people living with HIV/AIDS are deprived of their right to medication, spend long hours on queues at health facilities often without proper documentation, and often live alone with no access to care and support. The workshop agreed that these challenges can be addressed through wider education on human rights with an emphasis on socio-economic rights and a clear strategy to ensure that communities can access their basic rights such as: housing, education, health care and services, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), contraception, health services, and respect within relationships. However, participants disagreed on many rights issues related to sexual orientation and choices relating to pregnancy. They expressed very different views and approaches to an understanding of gender-based violence (GBV) that appeared to be quite gendered within the workshop itself. For example, male participants had different understandings than female participants on whether a woman can be raped by her husband or men should use condoms with their wives. The workshop concluded that clearly there is a

need for more work in this area including greater male participation, involvement and dialog.

### **From Training to Action**

#### **“Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence”**

As a follow-up to the Human Rights training, MSCI and its South African partner organizations, Let Us Grow (Legrow) and Positive Concept Project (PECOP), implemented several activities to help create awareness and increase knowledge and skills of peer educators, young people, women, and men in Soweto and Orange Farm during the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV. In Orange Farm, Legrow Peer Educators conducted educational sessions in five primary schools. Topics addressed were mainly around GBV and HIV/AIDS prevention. Legrow also conducted a two-day training on Human Rights for 20 of its staff members, as well as staff from its partners. Legrow conducted a Women’s Imbizo (“women’s gathering”) reaching approximately 300 participants with messages on SRH, prevention of GBV, and human rights. In addition, Legrow carried out a door-to-door campaign on World Aids Day and a two-day Taxi Rank campaign reaching about 2500 community members.

In Soweto, PECOP conducted the first phase of a school debate marathon working with 80 students from 8 secondary schools. During this phase, students and educators participated in information and workshop sessions to familiarize themselves with key topics and messages on issues of GBV, HIV/AIDS, human rights, and on rights-based sexual and reproductive health. PECOP also conducted a two-day Men’s Imbizo, which reached 30 young men. These 30 young men then carried out ‘Boyz for Change’ that took anti-GBV messages to railway stations, beer halls, and street corners for 10 days during the “16 Days of Activism.” They collected 200 signatures in the form of a pledge from the community to ‘speak-out’ against GBV. Similarly, PECOP held a two-day Women’s Dialog for 30 women from its CBO partner organizations to increase their understanding of GBV and other human rights violations, and to develop strategies to support victims of such abuses. This dialog lead to a joint march on November 25 entitled ‘Bring Back the Night’ organized by the Johannesburg Local Municipality and other partners.

While there is a long way to go to achieve human rights for everyone, MSCI’s program to address GBV and HIV/AIDS in a human rights context has helped raise awareness of crucial issues in South Africa. By building on its efforts to create awareness and spread knowledge about the harmful effects of inequitable attitudes or practices, we can move toward a greater commitment to upholding human rights in South Africa.