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The overall prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Somalia is estimated around 0.9%, which is considered to be low compared with the incidence in surrounding countries.

However, many factors could aggravate the situation. The current drought situation in South Central Somalia, and war and armed conflict, resulting in forced displacement, collapse of social structures and breakdown of rule of law put people at much greater risk of HIV infection. Moreover, Somali society is polygamous, and divorce and remarriage happen frequently.

Despite this, the existence of the problem is still denied, because HIV is associated with promiscuity, and the Somali society is reluctant to address issues of sexuality. Stigma and resistance are high, and families abandon their relatives once they know they are affected with HIV.

In addition, experience from other Sub-Saharan countries shows that when the rate exceed one percent, it can quickly double or triple in a relatively short period of time. For the Somali society, this can still be avoided if prompt and effective action is taken to limit the spread of the epidemic.

## **CISP's HIV/AIDS intervention in Central Somalia**

CISP's HIV/AIDS intervention in Somalia started in 2005, in the hospital of the coastal town of Ceel Dheer with Voluntary Confidential Counseling and Testing. "During the first three months, only 3 patients came in for voluntary testing. Now we have 700 patients per quarter and more than 20 thousand people have been tested up to now", says a CISP medical doctor.



During the first year, 10 cases were identified and referred to Merka hospital for treatment. Merka is located in the Shabelle region, 400km south of Ceel Dheer. None of the patients ever reached the hospital, and all of them were lost to follow up.

In view of the need for HIV/AIDS treatment and care to be provided in the area, CISP trained nurses and staff and provided medical supplies to Ceel Dheer hospital, which then became a regional referral centre for Anti Retroviral Therapy. In 2007, Xarardere hospital was also equipped to administer ART therapy and support to people living with HIV.

Nowadays, considering critical that HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care be mainstreamed into the overall health care assistance to the Somali people, CISP is promoting an expansion of the activities to the areas of Hobyo, Celgula and Dhusamareeb, Guriceel.