

## Hallelujah Moment from Senegal: Overcoming Taboos

by Dr. Aly Bashir

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Dr. Bashir consulting with patients at the Village Clinic. Image courtesy of Aly Bashir.

"I have been in the dark without knowing anything about myself," a young man told us in Diamniadio, where we were holding HIV education and testing. "There are no talks about sex in the home and I cannot even sit with my sisters."

In Senegal, more often than not, people are reluctant to openly tell others their stories, especially about anything intimate such as sex or family life. For that reason, someone sick from a sexually transmitted disease, such as syphilis or AIDS, would not expose him- or herself. Exposure would lead to being thrown out of the family for disgracing them.

After several meetings with this young man and giving him HIV/AIDS informational materials, as well as counselling on the topic itself, everything changed for him. After watching the stories of some people with AIDS and learning that the disease could infect anybody, no matter how sinful or holy one might be, he became an activist so that people would not be blindfolded, but educated and well-informed.

Initially it was difficult for him because of stigmatization, but with support of others from the project and other nongovernmental offices (NGOs), he became bold enough to speak publicly and is now even giving talks about AIDS on television and radio stations.

Now the young man from Diamniadio relates with conviction, "Out of ignorance and certain outmoded cultures and traditions, many people have died....I will do everything humanly possible to rectify those anomalies because the saying goes that 'he who conceals his sickness should not expect to be healed.'"

*Dr. Aly Bashir is a United Methodist person in mission, who serves as the wellness medical program director in the Senegal Mission Initiative in order to alleviate human suffering. Through consultations, education, and communication, he works to reduce preventable diseases while sharing the good news of the Bible.*

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