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Combination  
Prevention for HIV  
Central America and Mexico



## Combination Prevention with the Fishermen of La Pirraya: Reaching the most inaccessible areas of El Salvador

*“Doing the test in front of the other fishermen helped them to do it too.”*



“The other fishermen don’t want to be tested because they’re afraid, but sure, test me, I get tested every year,” says José Luis Figueroa, a fisherman who lives on the island of La Pirraya, (located 100 kilometers from San Salvador, south of Usulután in El Salvador). The island is renowned for being one of the most difficult places to access in the country, both for traders and the general public. “Our grandfathers and our fathers, they have dedicated their lives to fishing here and so have we. It wouldn’t be easy for us to leave,” adds José Luis, when asked about his way of life.

José, due to his occupation, is considered to be a man at-risk for HIV under the USAID Combination Prevention Program for HIV, whose implementing partner, the Pan American Social Marketing Organization (PASMO) and other partners, seek to reach under a strategy known as “sweeping the zone”. This strategy works through multidisciplinary teams who identify, map and target specific geographical “high-risk” areas or regions of the country to reach most at-risk and vulnerable populations with the complete essential or minimum package of combination prevention services. In El Salvador, only 45% of at-risk men use condoms, while 35% engage in casual sexual relationships.<sup>1</sup>

The sweeping the zone strategy seeks to ensure access of target populations to the essential or minimum package of services which include behavioral interventions that promote behavior change, access to biomedical services such as HIV testing and counseling and the diagnosis of other sexually transmitted infections, and the referral to structural or complementary services such as treatment for drug and alcohol abuse, among others. When an individual has participated in the complete minimum package, he or she is considered to have completed a combination prevention “cycle”, and sweeping the zone is a successful strategy to link at-risk populations to these essential health services.

The island of La Pirraya is only accessible by boat, and in the words of José: “Here it is difficult to find condoms, no one cared about our sexual health.”

During the Program’s sweeping the zone activities in La Pirraya, and after seeing José’s willingness to take the HIV test, seven more fishermen, who moments ago had flatly refused to be tested on account of having already done the test before, agreed to participate.

By realizing the importance of getting tested and being willing to get tested himself, José had the satisfaction of saying: “Doing the test in front of the other fishermen helped them to do it too.”

In FY2013 alone, the Combination Prevention Program reached 5,661 men at-risk for HIV in El Salvador, of which one in every seven closed combination the combination prevention cycle. Additionally, during the 2012 round of quantitative surveys known as Tracking Results Continuously (TRaC), an analysis of the data using a coarsened exact matching method, found that men at-risk for HIV were 2.16 times more likely to use condoms consistently with any partner, and 7.45 more like to take an HIV test and receive its results when exposed to any Combination Prevention Program activity.

<sup>1</sup> Source: TRaC Study, 2012-2013 Conducted by the Pan-American Social Marketing Organization (PASMO), San Salvador, El Salvador.

