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# Innovative Methods to Promote Couples HIV Counseling and Testing: A Case Study of Utilizing Certificates of Recognition in East Central Uganda

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## Background

Recent studies in Uganda indicate 43% of new HIV infections are found amongst married or cohabiting couples of which 64% are involved in multiple sexual relationships. The studies also reveal high rates of discordance, prompting the Ministry of Health to launch a campaign named '*Go together; Know together*' aimed at encouraging couples to test and get their results together.

The Strengthening TB and HIV&AIDS Responses in East Central Uganda (STAR-EC) program implemented by JSI, with funding from USAID aims at increasing access to, coverage of, and utilization of quality and comprehensive HIV&AIDS and TB prevention, care and treatment services within district health facilities and communities in nine districts of East Central Uganda. The program replicated the '*Go together; Know together*' campaign in East Central Uganda in 2010.

## Methods

Under the auspices of the '*know your epidemic, know your response, context and cost*' paradigm, the STAR-EC program scaled up the couple HIV counseling and testing (CHCT) campaign in East Central Uganda. A certificate of recognition is awarded to a couple that tests and receives their results together during the campaign. The couple signs a commitment to shared values that include correct and consistent use of condoms in discordant relationships and talking openly about HIV.

Multi-pronged approaches are also used to mobilize couples for CHCT services during the week-long campaign. These include one-on-one sessions by lay volunteers (model couples and village health team members), health worker talks with clients, use of radio, and health messaging using mobile trucks with public address systems.

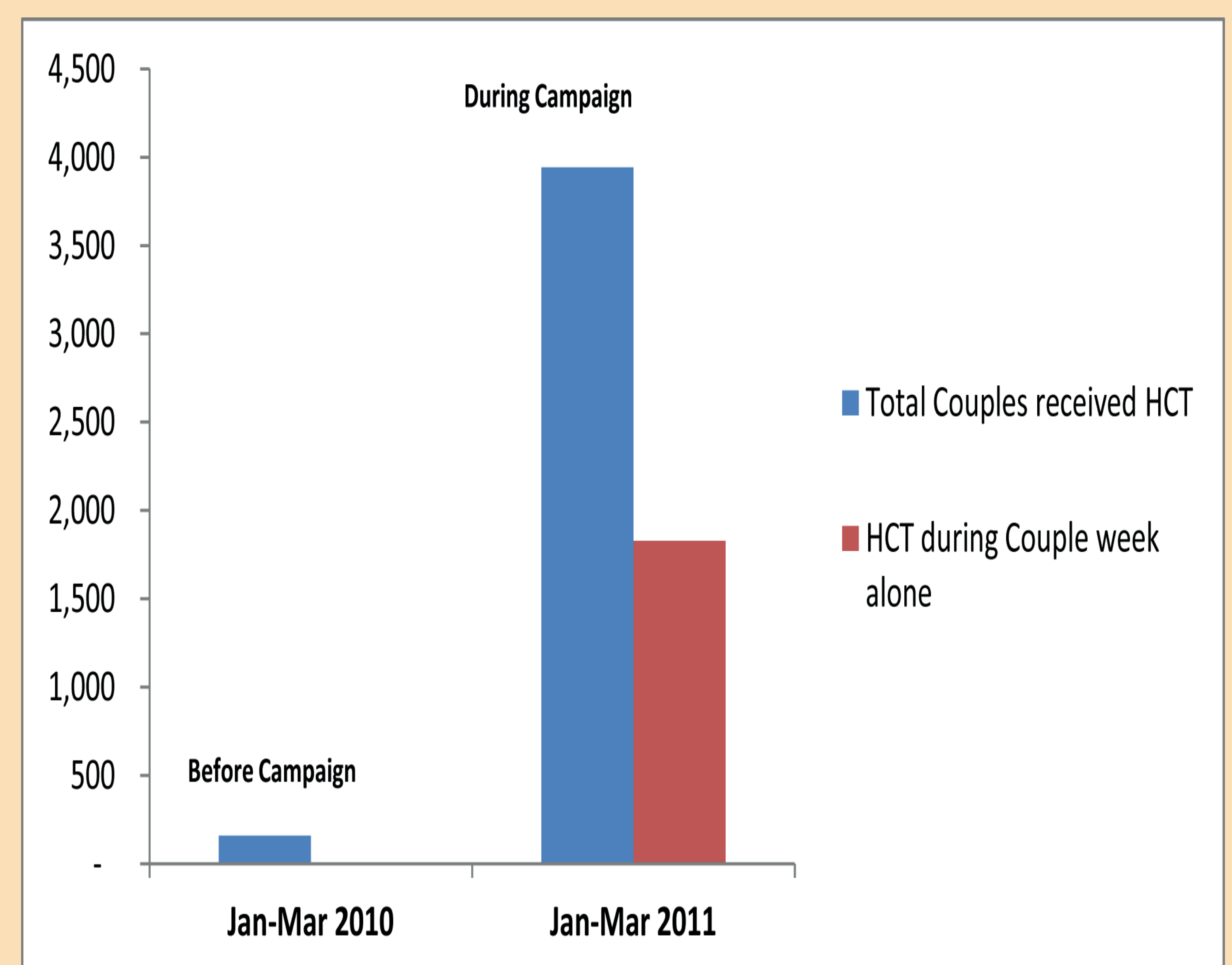


A couple receives a certificate after HTC services during an outreach in East Central Uganda

## Results

Prior to initiation of the CHCT campaign, only 158 couples had been tested during the period from January – March 2010 compared to 3,942 couples tested during the same period in 2011. 46% of the 3,942 couples tested did so in direct response to the week-long CHCT campaign. Many couples testified during the campaign that they were motivated to test together because they expected to get a certificate.

**Couples tested and received results in nine districts supported by STAR-EC during Jan – Mar 2010 and Jan – Mar 2011**



## Conclusion

The Ugandan Ministry of Health '*Go together; Know together*' CHCT campaign model combines simple motivators like couples certificates with multi-pronged mobilization approaches, which motivate individuals to test for HIV and receive their results as couples. The expectation is that when couples get tested and receive results together and commit to safer sex practices, HIV transmission in sero-discordant couples is mitigated.

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