



*Ilboudo Ousseni and Asma  
Photo: #EAWA*

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## A Wife Wins Over Her Husband for HIV Index Testing by Trusting a Trained Frontline Health Care Worker

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### #EAWA PROJECT SUCCESS STORY

Asma's story is one of many at #EAWA-supported health care sites in Burkina Faso.

Asma\*, a housewife in her early 40s who lives with her husband and three children in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, discovered she was HIV positive in 2007. The diagnosis was very hard on her. After learning about the importance of treatment from a community health worker, she quickly began antiretroviral therapy (ART). For years she lived in fear of disclosing her HIV status and regularly lied to her husband and children about her absences when she went to the health clinic for viral load (VL) testing or for getting her medication refill. It was also very challenging for her to keep the medication hidden from her husband.

During an HIV group discussion at the health care clinic in 2021, she learned about index testing which involves a person living with HIV (PLHIV) – the index client -- voluntarily listing sexual and drug-injecting partners and biological children and working with a trained counselor to identify the best way to refer these individuals for HIV testing. She wanted to speak to her husband about her own status while motivating him to get tested for HIV but did not know how to start the conversation.

\*Pseudonym

Looking for answers, she went to Ilboudo Ousseni, a health care worker with the Ending AIDS in West Africa (#EAWA) project, for advice. The project is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

Ilboudo, 35, is a trained index testing focal point person in his clinic. Training focal point individuals is an #EAWA project innovation. They ensure that index testing is offered to all PLHIV clients upon enrollment in care at the facility and monitor implementation to ensure testing is done safely and ethically according to quality standards. Asma's concerns raised alert signs of intimate partner violence (IPV) risk so Ilboudo was cautious. The first thing he did was ask her about IPV to understand whether it would be safe for Asma to disclose her HIV status to her husband.

Every PLHIV's decision about how, when, and with whom to disclose is influenced by a complex set of social and cultural factors.



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For a woman experiencing domestic violence, the stakes are high. Disclosure may result in an escalation of violence, putting her at risk of additional harm. In Asma's case, no violence was reported so Ilboudo and Asma began discussing potential strategies to encourage her husband to come for testing.

Ilboudo tried various strategies to help Asma find the optimal way of disclosure to her husband and to get him tested. As a first step, she talked to the husband to see whether he would accept being tested. But that created some tensions at home. So Ilboudo changed tactic and, with Asma's permission, took the responsibility of getting in touch with her husband. He asked Asma for details about her husband's habits and the best time to make the phone call. Through their conversation, Ilboudo was able to convince Asma's husband to get tested.

"I made sure to be at the clinic when her husband arrived to make him comfortable about getting an HIV test. Results showed that he was positive for HIV, and he agreed to start HIV treatment immediately," Ilboudo recalled.

Asma's husband had some symptoms for several years, like fatigue, painful skin rash and pruritic skin, which can be among signs of HIV infection. But he did not suspect they might be signs of HIV and avoided Asma's suggestions to get tested.

"Asma and her husband decided to bring all three children for HIV tests and, happily, all were negative. This was a very interesting case because I had to find the best way to ensure that Asma's husband came for index testing only after I was satisfied that she would not be at any risk of IPV afterwards," he said.

"They take good care of each other now. In my office, we role-played a scenario of how a husband and wife can be supportive toward each other when they are both on HIV treatment. Asma also provides him with well-informed support based on her experience as a PLHIV. She is convinced of the necessity of regular VL testing and regular adherence to ART," he added.

Ilboudo has had many such successes because of his exceptional counseling skills and empathetic nature. "I must say that the #EAWA index testing course was extremely interesting and helped us to understand better all the possible strategies we could use to successfully approach clients while protecting confidentiality," he said.

**For more information about the #EAWA project, please email [eawainfo@fhi360.org](mailto:eawainfo@fhi360.org)**

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