

World AIDS Day, 2006

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The Secretary – General’s message on the occasion of World AIDS Day

In the 25 years since the first case was reported, AIDS has changed the world. It has killed 25 million people, and infected 40 million more. It has become the world’s leading cause of death among both women and men aged 15 to 59. It has inflicted the single greatest reversal in the history of human development. In other words, it has become the greatest challenge of our generation.

For far too long, the world was in denial. But over the past 10 years, attitudes have changed. The world has started to take the fight against AIDS as seriously as it deserves.

Financial resources are being committed like never before, people have access to antiretroviral treatment like never before, and several countries are managing to fight the spread like never before. Now, as the number of infections continues unabated, we need to mobilize political will like never before.

The creation of UNAIDS a decade ago, bringing together the strengths and resources of many different parts of the United

Nations family, was a milestone in transforming the way the world responds to AIDS. And five years ago, all UN Member States reached a new milestone by adopting the Declaration of Commitment -- containing a number of specific, far-reaching and time-bound targets for fighting the epidemic.

That same year, as I made HIV/AIDS a personal priority in my work as Secretary-General, I called for the creation of a “war-chest” of an additional seven to ten billion dollars a year. Today, I am deeply proud to be Patron of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, which has channelled almost three billion dollars to programmes across the globe. Recently, we have seen significant additional funding from bilateral donors, national treasuries, civil society and other sources. Annual investments in the response to AIDS in low- and middle-income countries now stand at more than eight billion dollars. Of course, much more is needed; by 2010 total needs for a comprehensive AIDS response will exceed 20 billion dollars a

year. But we have at least made a start on getting the resources and strategies in place.

Because the response has started to gain real momentum, the stakes are higher now than ever before. We cannot risk letting the advances that have been achieved unravel; we must not jeopardize the heroic efforts of so many. The challenge now is to deliver on all the promises that have been made -- including the Millennium Development Goal, agreed by all the world’s Governments, of halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV by 2015. Leaders at every level must recognize that halting the spread of AIDS is also a prerequisite for reaching most of the other Goals, which together form the international community’s agreed blueprint for building a better world in the 21st century. Leaders must hold themselves accountable -- and be held accountable by all of us.

Accountability -- the theme of this World AIDS Day -- requires every

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President and Prime Minister, every parliamentarian and politician, to decide and declare that "AIDS stops with me". It requires them to strengthen protection for all vulnerable groups -- whether people living with HIV, young people, sex workers, injecting drug users, or men who have sex with men. It requires them to work hand in hand with civil society groups, who are so crucial to the struggle. It requires them to work for real, positive change that will give more power and confidence to women and girls, and transform relations between women and men at all levels of society.

But accountability applies not only to those who hold positions of power. It also applies to all of us. It requires business leaders to work for HIV prevention in the workplace and in the wider community, and to care for affected workers and their families. It requires health workers, community leaders and faith-based groups to listen and care, without passing judgement. It requires fathers, husbands, sons and brothers to support and affirm the rights of women. It requires teachers to nurture the dreams and aspirations of girls. It requires men to help ensure that other men assume their responsibility -- and understand that real manhood means protecting

others from risk. And it requires every one of us help bring AIDS out of the shadows, and spread the message that silence is death.

I will soon be stepping down as Secretary-General of the United Nations. But as long as I have strength, I will keep spreading that message. That is why World AIDS Day will always be special to me. On this World AIDS Day, let us vow to keep the promise -- not only this day, or this year, or next year -- but every day, until the epidemic is conquered.

Source: <http://www.unaids.org/en/>

On World AIDS Day, UN leaders underline need for accountability

1 December 2006

Stressing this year's theme of accountability, senior officials from across the United Nations system have marked World AIDS Day with calls for international leaders to maintain recent momentum and make good on their promises to ensure greater access to treatment, prevention and support.

"The latest global AIDS figures give us reason for concern and for some hope," said Peter Piot, Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, (UNAIDS), in one of a series of messages today by the heads of UN organs and agencies.

Almost 40 million people live with HIV and another 4.3 million will be infected this year, while at least 25 million others have died from AIDS-related diseases in the 25 years since the first case was reported. The pandemic is now the leading cause of death among both men and women aged between 15 and 59.

Yet the number of countries providing antiretroviral (ARV) treatment to sufferers and the breadth of access to HIV testing, counselling services and health care have also continued to expand, including in sub-Saharan Africa, the region hardest hit by AIDS.

"However, we must increase the scale and impact of HIV prevention activities, including those directed at the drivers of the epidemic," Dr. Piot said. "New data show that HIV prevention programmes have better results if focused on reaching people most at risk and adapted to changing national epidemics."

General Assembly President Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa said the theme of accountability applied to everyone, from world leaders who have previously vowed to improve reproductive health care services and information, particularly for women, to individuals who can help establish healthy behaviour when their children are young.

"The challenge for all of us is to make good on our commitments and work in closer partnership towards our common goal. Civil society, NGOs [non-governmental organizations], the media, private sector and faith groups have an important role in promoting public awareness and holding leaders to account for their promises," she said.

Anders Nordström, Acting Director-General of the UN World Health Organization (WHO), said the international community had reached "a critical juncture" and needed to become smarter and more adaptable as it responded to HIV/AIDS.

"We have to be... aware of which approaches are successful, and flexible enough to adapt our resources accordingly," Dr. Nordström said. "We do not just need 'more.' We need to commit to clear-sightedness about what is working and what is not -- and quickly apply that knowledge."

Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), warned against the stigmatization and marginalization of people living with HIV/AIDS, especially women, young people, injecting drug users, prisoners and victims of human trafficking -- all groups that are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic.

The UN Population Fund's (UNFPA) Executive Director, Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, saw signs of hope among the young, noting that HIV prevalence rates among youth have fallen in several countries because of increased condom use and other behavioural changes.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour said it was vital that Member States are made to live up to their earlier commitments to eventually provide universal access to comprehensive prevention programmes, treatment, care and support by 2010.

Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said it was important to recognize that combating HIV/AIDS is linked to resolving other key global challenges, from promoting economic development and fighting poverty in poorer countries to encouraging gender equality to supporting environmental sustainability.

Numerous events are being staged around the world today to draw attention to the pandemic and to some of the ways that individuals can help to reduce or ameliorate its impact on communities.

In New York, Drawing IT Out, an exhibition of 300 cartoons drawn by artists, in 50 countries opened at UN Headquarters. The event is sponsored by UNAIDS, the Brazilian Ministry of Health and the International Planned Parenthood Federation/Western Hemisphere Region.

Source: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=20819&Cr=HIV&Cr1=AIDS>

Time for a rethink on AIDS campaigns – UNAIDS

PLUSNEWS

1 December 2006

Despite a boom in publicity campaigns on World AIDS Day, the disease continues to spread in Africa because basic details about the illness are not reaching the right people, UNAIDS has warned.

According to a report released last week by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), 4.3 million new HIV cases were registered in 2006 and 65 percent of them were in Africa. Some three million people met an early death because of HIV/AIDS in 2006, the report said.

In sub-Saharan Africa, there are 24.7 million people living with HIV/AIDS, five million more than in 2004.

A glimmer of hope comes from West Africa, where except for Mali the prevalence shows signs of stabilising, and in some cases even slowing.

Southern Africa remains the most affected region, but isolated Zimbabwe has nonetheless registered a drop in prevalence rates amongst pregnant

women, the report said.

Prevention is the key, according to UNAIDS.

"New data suggests that where HIV prevention programmes have not been sustained and/or adapted as epidemics have changed - infection rates are staying the same or going up," UNAIDS said in a statement at the report's release.

The report singled out Uganda as an example both of possibilities and pitfalls. Often praised for reducing its infection rate from 20 to six percent in 10 years, thanks to a voluntary prevention policy, Uganda is now showing a resurgence in HIV/AIDS infections.

"This is worrying - as we know increased HIV prevention programmes in these countries have shown progress in the past - Uganda being a prime example," said Dr Peter Piot, executive director of UNAIDS. "This means that countries are not moving at the same speed as their epidemics."

According to the UNAIDS report,

"People at highest risk - youths, women and girls, men who have sex with men, sex workers and their clients, injecting drug users and ethnic and cultural minorities - are not adequately reached through HIV prevention and treatment strategies because not enough is known about their particular situation."

The report did point towards healthier sexual behaviour among youths, which it said contributed to a decline in prevalence rates in youths between 2000 and 2005, especially in Rwanda, Burundi and urban areas in Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire.

But Piot said that is not enough. "Action must not only be increased dramatically, but must also be strategic, focused and sustainable to ensure that the money reaches those who need it most," he said.

Source: <http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSreport.asp?>

ReportID=6586&SelectRegion=East_Africa,%20Southern_Africa,%20West_Africa&SelectCountry=AFRICA

Zim: Govt to introduce cheaper ARVs

GOVERNMENT is working on plans to introduce cheaper medical tests to enable more people living with HIV and AIDS to get access to antiretroviral drugs, the Minister of Health and Child Welfare, Dr David Parirenyatwa said yesterday.

Dr Parirenyatwa was speaking during the World Aids Day commemoration at White City Stadium in Bulawayo. He said the expensive tests done before a person could start taking antiretroviral drugs had prohibited many people from accessing treatment hence the need to find cheaper alternatives.

"One of the challenges in terms of increasing the number of people on ARVs is that the tests done before one can access ARVs are very expensive, hence the need to find cheaper alternatives," he said. Dr Parirenyatwa said Government will work with its partners to find a solution to the problem. He said Government was working on achieving universal access to treatment and prevention of HIV and AIDS. He said Government wanted to ensure that by 2010 all people who require ARVs had

access to the drugs.

Dr Parirenyatwa said encouraging was the fact that the country was witnessing a general delay in the age of "sexual debut" by girls.

"According to this year's Demographic Health Survey, the age of sexual debut by girls has moved from 15 years to 15 years and nine months. This is an indication of a positive behaviour change," he said. The minister urged young people to delay their "sexual debut" as this reduces their chances of contracting HIV and AIDS. About 50 000 people are taking ARVs yet more than 300 000 are in urgent need of the life prolonging drugs.

The drugs cost \$50 at Government health institutions.

The cost of ARVs continues to rise with a month's course costing more than \$30 000 at pharmacies.

Dr Parirenyatwa said he was disappointed to note that the private sector was not rolling out ARVs for its workers.

"The private sector is not doing enough to ensure that workers have access to treatment. Some faith healers are also abusing their clients and this is contributing to the

spread of the pandemic."

"I am also disappointed with students at universities and colleges as indications are that they have not changed their behaviour," he said.

Dr Parirenyatwa also commended the Minister of Finance, Dr Herbert Murerwa for allocating 70 percent of the National Aids Trust Fund (NATF) towards the procurement of ARVs and drugs for opportunistic infections. Speaking during the same occasion, the National Aids Council's board chairman, Reverend Murombedzi Kuchera said there was need for accountability at all levels of society.

"Our situation calls for accountability at all levels of society, including Government, youths, PLWA, married people as well as the general community in order to fight the pandemic," he said.

Dr Kuchera said NAC was spending \$250 000 monthly on the procurement of ARVs, although this was only 45 percent of the NATF as the rest of the money was sourced from its partners.

Source: <http://www1.chronicle.co.zw/inside.aspx?>

sectid=1730&cat=1&livedate=12/2/2006

Government outlines new AIDS strategy

PLUSNEWS

1 December 2006

SOUTH AFRICA - The South African government marked World AIDS Day with the release of a broad framework for its HIV/AIDS strategy over the next five years.

The nine-page document listed as key targets a 50 percent reduction in the rate of new HIV infections by 2011, and the provision of treatment, care and support to 80 percent of HIV-infected South Africans. Youth were identified as "a special target group" that would receive particular focus in the new plan. A monitoring and evaluation framework, an element acknowledged as largely missing in the previous plan, was also identified as a priority.

The framework's release coincided with publication of guidelines for the restructuring of the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC), much criticised in the past as ineffectual and non-inclusive. Poor coordination by the country's national AIDS body was identified in the framework as a major weakness of the 2000-2005 National Strategic Plan.

A new and improved SANAC will consist of high-level representatives from the business, religious, NGO, academic, media and human rights sectors, as well as a number of government departments. A technical committee charged with monitoring implementation of the national strategic plan is to meet at least four times a year. Another committee, "linked to but separate from SANAC", will be responsible for financial management, including grants from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Several elements of the framework and the SANAC guidelines seemed to reinforce recent moves by the South African government to work more closely with civil society in its AIDS response. A commitment to involve all government departments and civil society sectors appeared first in a list of principles underpinning the framework. The SANAC document concludes: "If we work together, AIDS can be beaten. South Africa is uniting in its efforts to combat the epidemic and from now on, SANAC will embody that unity and purpose."

Government bowed to pressure from activists and medical experts last week to delay the launch of the full National Strategic Plan for 2007-2011, originally intended for release on Friday.

"It was largely a matter of a need for broader consultation," explained the health department's chief director for HIV/AIDS, Dr Nomonde Xundu. Input from a technical task team over the next three months will culminate in a conference in March 2007, at which representatives from the various sectors will adopt a final version of the plan. A first meet-

ing of the newly formed SANAC is expected to take place shortly after the conference.

AIDS activists and experts who have seen drafts of the strategic plan welcomed the delay. "ARV [antiretroviral] treatment is the most complex health initiative ever undertaken in this country," said president of the Southern African HIV Clinicians Society, Dr Francois Venter. "We need this plan to be fantastic and, at the moment, it's not even close."

Xundu described the draft plan as in need of "fine-tuning", but AIDS Law Project head Mark Heywood said it contained serious shortcomings, including the lack of a thorough assessment of the previous strategic plan, the absence of a budget, and the lack of engagement with the recommendations that emerged from a civil society conference in October.

"There hasn't been much consultation with stakeholders who have the most immediate relevance, in particular the medical community - the health professionals and the health researchers," Heywood said.

The latest draft, dated November 2006, set a goal of increasing provision of treatment by 100,000 a year to adults, to reach a target of 650,000 by 2011 (the target figure for children was 100,000). The targets have been widely criticised as too conservative, considering that an estimated 800,000 people need treatment now and an additional 500,000 HIV-positive people are expected to need treatment every

year, according to the Southern African HIV Clinicians Society. "We need to scale up much faster," said Venter, pointing out that the draft targets would meet only about 20 percent of the need.

The broad framework released on Friday contained no target figures for treatment, but Xundu confirmed that the figures in the draft would be reviewed in the coming months. She also made the distinction between the strategic plan and a yet to be developed operational plan.

"This is a statement of what needs to be done and should be used as a guide," she told PlusNews. Local and national government departments will use it as a basis for developing implementation plans.

At a World AIDS Day event in Mpumalanga Province on Friday, Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka called on all South Africans to work together in fighting the HIV and AIDS pandemic. "If we focus our energies on conflicting with one another and on differences between us, we will lose sight of our shared goals, and weaken collective resolve and effort to implement this plan. We have a lot more that unites us."

Source: http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSreport.asp?ReportID=6585&SelectRegion=Southern_Africa&SelectCountry=SOUTH_AFRICA

18 Years into AIDS Day

By Michael Liswaniso
New Era

4 December 2006

Friday last week marked the 18th anniversary of World AIDS Day, which this year was officially hosted at national level by Kunene's regional capital, Opuwo.

The day, which was commemorated under the international theme: "Stop AIDS-Keep the Promise", saw Namibia adopt its own national sub-theme: "Zero tolerance to new HIV infections among the youth".

A chain of cultural performances by local groups featured on the entertainment list, together with netball and football tournaments which ended yesterday.

The Minister of Education, Nangolo Mbumba, delivered the keynote address on behalf of Prime Minister Nahas Angula.

Other prominent figures who delivered brief remarks were the Gender Equality and Child welfare Deputy Minister Angelika Muharukua, United Nations' Resident Coordinator

Simon Nhongo, Senior Traditional Councilor of the Vita Thom Royal House Mika Muhenje and as well as the Minister of Health and Social Services, Dr Richard Kamwi, who gave the public an overview of the acceleration of HIV prevention.

Everyone spoke about the negative impacts that the disease has on the country and called for teamwork and other support, given the current governmental and global support at hand.

Opuwo Mayor Peter de Villiers, who delivered the vote of thanks, reiterated Governor Dudu Murorua's welcoming remarks by thanking the government for its support and for choosing Opuwo as the official host of the national day that was also commemorated in other parts of the country.

The international day is commemorated on the 1st of December each year with the aim to increase awareness, fight discrimination and improve education.

Source: <http://www.newera.com.na/page.php?id=319>

HIV/AIDS still running amok - report

PLUSNEWS

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HIV/AIDS continues to wreak havoc in South Africa, with the nation's youth appearing to be hardest hit, researchers said on 1 December, World AIDS Day.

The nation's 15-year-olds now had a 56 percent chance of dying before the age of 60, compared to a 29 percent chance of dying of an AIDS-related illness in 1990, according to 'The Demographic Impact of HIV/AIDS in South Africa: National and Provincial Indicators for 2006', a joint study issued every two years by the Actuarial Society of South Africa (ASSA) and the Medical Research Council (MRC).

Leigh Johnson, a senior ASSA researcher, warned that the youth were facing a bleak future, and much still had to be done to protect and support this vulnerable group. "Even with current youth-directed prevention campaigns being rolled out, approximately 250,000 of all new infection this past year occurred among the 15 to 24 age group," he told IRIN/PlusNews.

Overall, in 2006 there were 950 AIDS-related deaths per day in South Africa, and approximately 1,400 new HIV infections

daily - a total of 530,000 new infections per year. Johnson said there was an urgent need to strengthen existing efforts to respond to the epidemic.

The government's anti-AIDS strategy, often at the centre of international criticism for its snail-paced approach to tackling the pandemic, has been revamped, with the Health Department emphasising that the key to success in the fight against AIDS was reducing the number of new infections among young people, while promoting delayed initiation of sex among youth aged 14 to 17 years.

Doctor Francois Venter, an HIV specialist at the University of Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg, warned that abstinence and delayed sexual debut might not be the most effective approaches to addressing the needs of adolescents.

"The greatest challenge is to develop new strategies for preventing HIV transmission, not just among youths but the population in general, and what is needed is for us [government and civil society]: to all go back to the drawing board on our current approaches," Venter said.

ASSA suggested that high rates of

AIDS mortality would persist in South Africa for at least the next decade, although projections were sensitive to assumptions regarding future access to antiretroviral (ARV) treatment. "That's why it is vital for the government to rapidly expand its ARV rollout programme to reach all people in need of immediate treatment," Johnson added.

A further challenge would be the provision of care and support to growing numbers of orphans, expected to double between 2006 and 2015 to an estimated 2.5 million children.

Venter and Johnson agreed that the recent reformation of the South African National AIDS Council and the restored spirit of co-operation between government and civil society would go a long way to addressing the points of concern highlighted in the report.

Source: <http://www.plusnews.org/aidsreport.asp?reportid=6583>

Men Don't Pitch for Testing

By Petronella Sibeene

4 December 2006

New Era

President Hifikepunye Pohamba has expressed concern over Namibian men's reluctance to accompany their partners to prevention-of-mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) programmes at clinics, in order for them to be tested and counselled as well.

He called on Namibian men to accompany their female partners to these clinics that are open countrywide. Pohamba was speaking at the World AIDS Day commemoration in the Oshana Region over the weekend.

According to the 2005/6 statistics for Oshakati Hospital, out of 40 000 expectant mothers who attended PMTCT clinics, only 805 were accompanied by their partners.

"I am calling on all our male compatriots to accompany their partners. This will enable those who are HIV-positive to access care and treatment and in so doing protect the most valuable assets of Namibia, our children," he said.

PMTCT services are provided to expectant women when they attend antenatal care clinics. These services are available at state hospitals and currently approximately 70 percent of pregnant women have access to these services.

Pohamba further commended all those who have been tested for HIV, saying

these people are in a better position to protect themselves and their loved ones.

Namibia is ranked among the countries in the world with the highest HIV infection rates. Its impact due to the loss of lives, orphans and the loss of social and economic productivity is devastating.

Given the current situation, the President appealed to all Namibians to go for HIV testing, saying this will be the only way they will participate in the programmes available at health centres.

"There is hope even if you have tested HIV positive," the President encouraged.

Namibia has 34 state hospitals that provide antiretroviral treatment, and the number of patients at present are about 30 000.

"Not too long ago, before the antiretroviral treatment was available, having HIV was synonymous with a death sentence. Today, more than 95 percent of patients receiving treatment have become socially and economically productive."

While the number of patients receiving ARVs could be impressive, one of the challenges facing patients is the lack of access to adequate and nutritional food. Pohamba acknowledged that people living with HIV are particularly vulnerable because without sufficient food to meet their nutritional needs, they are prone to other life-threatening infections and cannot sustain good health.

While this problem has been pending

for some time, Pohamba says government recognizes the need for people with HIV/AIDS to have access to food and thus he recently met with cabinet members and instructed relevant ministries to submit recommendations on the best strategies to ensure food availability for people living with this disease, especially those receiving ARVs.

The government through its Ministry of Health and Social Services is in the process of subcontracting the Namibia Red Cross to assist in the distribution of nutritious cereal based porridge, E-pap.

Besides, the Ministry of Health and Social Services recently launched the Namibian national Guidelines on Nutritional Management for People Living with HIV/AIDS. This, he added, was developed to provide health workers with basic skills and practices in nutrition for HIV-infected people.

"This nutritional book is indeed essential and should reach all our communities to ensure that our people living with HIV/AIDS receive appropriate nutritional care," said Pohamba. The president reiterated the need for all Namibians to go for HIV testing and to ensure that stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS is ended.

Source: <http://www.newera.com.na/page.php?id=320>

Has Swaziland turned the corner in the fight against AIDS?

MBABANE, 5 December (PLUSNEWS) - The Swazi government expressed cautious optimism after a survey found that 39.2 percent of women visiting antenatal clinics tested positive for HIV, indicating that the infection rate was dropping.

Medical data from pregnant women is used as a barometer of HIV/AIDS prevalence among the country's about one million people and although the figure was above the 38.6 percent recorded in 2002, it was down from the 42.6 percent reached in 2004.

The Sero-Surveillance Survey, conducted every two years, has charted the rise of the disease that now infects a third of the sexually active population aged between 15 and 49. It began in 1992 and in its first year found HIV prevalence of 4 percent among pregnant women.

Prime Minister Themba Dlamini presented the new figures on 1 December, World AIDS Day, to the country that now records the highest percentage of infection in the world, making the disease an uncomfortable international issue. Government spokesman Percy Simelane has disputed the relevance of earlier antenatal surveys, saying it was the government's position that because only sexually active women were included in the survey, the results were not representative.

Countries worldwide use the Sero-Surveillance Survey as a statistical basis

for measuring the presence of HIV/AIDS, but Swaziland's health workers believe a more accurate picture will be provided by a Demographic Health Study (DHS).

The study, now being conducted by UNAIDS and the National Emergency Response Council on HIV/AIDS (NERCHA), uses a research base that randomly selects Swazi households and then conducts face-to-face interviews and voluntary, anonymous blood tests of household members.

"The true prevalence rate for the country will probably lie above the DHS but below the Sero-Surveillance study of pregnant women," said Patti Whitely, of UNAIDS in Swaziland, which put the national HIV infection rate among those between the ages of 15 and 49 at an estimated 33.4 percent in 2005.

Of the 2,467 pregnant women aged 15 to 49 who participated in the 2006 Sero-Surveillance Study, 966 tested positive for HIV.

The decline in HIV infections was recorded in urban and rural areas in all four regions of Swaziland and in all age groups, with the sharpest reduction occurring among those aged 25 to 29 years, from 56 percent in 2004 to 48 percent in 2006.

People aged 15 to 24, considered one of the age brackets most vulnerable to new infections, saw the prevalence rate fall

from 39.4 percent in 2004 to 34.8 percent in 2006, a reduction the Ministry of Health described as significant.

"We are cautiously optimistic that this decline demonstrates that our prevention strategies are beginning to take hold," NERCHA director Derek von Wissell said. "We need to step up our fight against this disease and push even harder to continue the prevalence rate decline."

The survey found that pregnant girls in the age bracket from 15 to 19 years experienced a drop in HIV infections from 29.3 percent to 26 percent between 2004 and 2006.

In his World AIDS Day statement the prime minister stressed caution in assuming that the corner had been turned in the fight against new infections. "This is not time to celebrate and relax. We must now renew our vigour and intensify our efforts to bring this disease to an end in the country."

However, a spokesperson for the Swaziland AIDS Support Organisation (SASO), the country's first support group for people living with HIV and AIDS, disputed the new figures. "We do not believe that HIV in this country has decreased because the behaviour has not changed one bit."

Source: <http://www.plusnews.org/aidsreport.asp?reportid=6594>

Musicians should beat the drum about HIV/AIDS

BY MOSES KABAILA Jr
Times of Zambia

With World AIDS Day, behind us, it is only important to check ourselves and see who has and who has not "Stopped AIDS, not kept the promise of fighting the disease. Has it been the scribe, the lawyer, the doctor, the teacher or musician?

HIV/AIDS is a national problem that no longer needs pointing fingers but instead needs reminding ourselves of the roles we can play to stop the virus.

There is an adage in Bemba that says "komafye pakalile ingoma" (until drums are played) this saying could mean that

somebody will only act when drums have been played to sound alarm.

HIV/AIDS the disease that is stinging the human race needs to be stopped any which way. Some ways like condoms have received praises and at the same time curses, Anti Retroviral (ARVs) Drugs have not been spared either as they have been received with mixed feelings.

Abstinence, the only best and sure way out to avoid HIV/AIDS cannot come without a lot of preaching regarding it.

Abstinence can only be achieved if there is a constant reminder about the epidemic and the advantages of abstaining

are made.

Though there are so many ways of conveying the message, one of the sure effective ways is through music.

Like the sound of the drum that is played to change course of a person, the music which is a drum can change course of people's attitude towards the issue of HIV/AIDS.

It is so sad and petrifying to hear our local musicians sing about love or should I say relationships without touching on the subject of the AIDS, instead of songs advocating morals, most of their songs are about love and sex.

There are some artistes who have

vowed never to sing about love songs, whatever their reasons are; our local singers should know that their songs have to balance like a news story. If they sing about relationships and love let them preach the safe ways of engaging in affairs and avoiding the killer disease, let them write songs that convey messages of morality to avoid sexually transmitted diseases.

Respect should be given to some local musicians who are fighting the disease through their songs but the question has again fallen on the consistence of their fight, how constant have their messages been?

Musicians should be challenged if what they have done is enough to effortlessly address the HIV/AIDS or other STIs? There has been a habit by most of our musicians that every time they release an album there is always a gospel track on it. How about including one song about HIV/AIDS on the same albums?

Music is everywhere; churches, bars, hospitals, vehicles, schools to mention but a few, meaning that it can be used as a weapon to convey a strong message, why let your music carry a mes-

sage that is destroying and not building? Nobody is ashamed to listen to music that is educative.

Recently, some of our local musicians were given a contract by the Electoral Commission of Zambia to sensitise the electorate, the musicians did the job with full force and the intended message was conveyed without much difficulty at all.

If that was possible to achieve, how could it be impossible and unachievable on the issue of HIV/AIDS. The same urge and vigor that our artistes had during elections should drive them to save this generation from the disease.

Kanji, musician and lawyer who did a hit duet with General' Ozzy "Chi Daddy" said: " Lets encourage one another to do the right thing because life isn't just about you but the whole lot of others who are infected and affected by HIV/AIDS".

listening to Danny's song "Joni" funny as it sounds, it carries a strong message about HIV/AIDS and it makes one wonder that if many more musicians were to sing about the disease, several people will think twice before engaging in life gambling games.

If you are a musician out there, get a

pen and start writing a song about HIV/AIDS right now, you have got no idea how many lives you are going to save with your message in your lyrics.

Ackim Simukonda sang about the disease just before he died, Michael Kumwenda from The Burning Youth also sang about the disease; talk of Chris Chali from Amayenge. Wherever they are, there is no doubt that they are happy that they added something to the fight against the disease.

Are you going to emulate them by singing one song before you die? We all have friends and relatives who have died or are dying from AIDS, why not sing about their experiences and regrets, their illness, and the visitations in hospitals.

Remember if you are not infected then you are affected, sing about that too. Lets stop AIDS by keeping this promise of reminding one another about the disease.

Source: <http://www.times.co.zm/news/viewnews.cgi?category=8&id=1165049315>

SAfAIDS Comment: Accountability stressed at this year's World AIDS Day Commemorations

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to make a difference.*



This year's World AIDS Day marks the quarter century of the discovery of AIDS. Frighteningly, statistics still reveal an unabating growth of the epidemic, particularly in Africa, where approximately 65% of all new HIV cases are recorded.

This means that more and more, the role of personal, societal and governmental accountability needs to be highlighted. Accountability was indeed the global theme of this year's WAD commemorations, with the slogan remaining "Stop AIDS. Keep The Promise." In his message on the occasion, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, stated that one of the challenges that the world currently faces is to deliver on promises previously made such as the Millennium Development Goal to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV by 2015.

And it seems that African governments are heeding this call. South

Africa's government, long thought to hold controversial views on HIV and AIDS mitigation, has used this year's occasion of WAD to release the framework for a five-year strategy to combat the disease. At national WAD commemorations, Zimbabwean health minister reiterated government's commitment to providing wider access to testing and treatment.

Men's role in curbing the epidemic was also emphasised as Namibian president, Hifikepunye Pohamba, encouraged his countrymen to become more involved in counseling and testing services.

As this issue shows, commemorations of World AIDS Day reflected diverse and country-specific needs. However, accountability of all involved in the fight against HIV and AIDS formed the crux of the commemorations.