



Preventing Infection Promoting Reproductive Health

UNFPA'S RESPONSE TO HIV/AIDS



UNFPA

United Nations
Population Fund



Preface

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has proclaimed HIV/AIDS his personal priority and has issued a call to action that requires a drastically and immediately scaled-up global response. At the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), we are focusing intensely on HIV prevention, supporting activities that promote a full spectrum of responses, from immediate prevention such as abstinence or condom use to long-term behavioural change.

The Secretary-General outlined five objectives for action at an April 2001 conference in Abuja, Nigeria. The first objective, he said, is prevention to halt and reverse the spread of the virus, and the second is prevention of mother-to-child transmission, along with access for mothers to testing and anti-retroviral therapy. The other top objectives are to put care and treatment within everyone's reach; to deliver scientific breakthroughs for a cure for HIV/AIDS or a vaccine against it; and to protect those made most vulnerable by the epidemic, especially orphans.

UNFPA support for HIV prevention has grown dramatically in the past decade, in line with the Secretary-General's objectives and the guidelines of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). The Fund has been working actively with partners in UNAIDS, governments, other international organizations and civil society to contain this global epidemic. HIV/AIDS is now an institutional priority and will be for years to come.

This is the tenth annual publication to provide information about UNFPA action to prevent HIV infection. Previously known as *AIDS Update*, it has been substantially revised to reach a wider audience as part of the UNFPA advocacy series. Since 1991, a questionnaire about HIV/AIDS activities has been sent each year to all UNFPA field offices and divisions at headquarters. Most of the examples in this publication are from the 2000 questionnaire.¹ They are especially valuable at a time when the expansion and replication of effective programmes is a priority for the international community. This booklet is intended to provide an overview of UNFPA action in HIV prevention and the issues of central concern as matters of reproductive and sexual health.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Thoraya A. Obaid'.

Thoraya A. Obaid
UNFPA Executive Director

¹ The *AIDS Update* survey methodology changed in 2000. Comparisons between figures from 2000 and previous years may be misleading. Responses were compiled by the HIV/AIDS team of the Technical Support Division, UNFPA New York.

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The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is the world's largest international source of population assistance. UNFPA helps developing countries and countries with economies in transition, at their request, to improve reproductive health and family planning services (including HIV prevention) and to formulate population policies and strategies in support of sustainable development. About a quarter of all population assistance from donor nations to developing countries is channelled through UNFPA. Since it began operations in 1969, the Fund has provided some \$5 billion in assistance.

I

Expanding on Experience

Prevention. This is a central objective of UNFPA in the global fight against HIV/AIDS. Among the many complex issues compounding the pandemic, prevention is the challenge that fits the agency best. For more than 30 years, UNFPA has supported a highly focused agenda to improve reproductive and sexual health.

The need for prevention is in the numbers:

- 5.3 million people were newly infected with HIV in 2000;
- Over half of new infections are among young people;
- More than 70 per cent of HIV infections worldwide occur via heterosexual sex;
- Young women are more vulnerable than young men—in some African countries, average rates in teenage girls are over five times higher than those in teenage boys;
- 95 per cent of all people infected with HIV live in developing countries. Africa is home

to 70 per cent of the adults and 80 per cent of the children living with HIV/AIDS in the world.²

Thoraya A. Obaid, UNFPA Executive Director, defines the Fund's role: "UNFPA is dedicating the very best it has to offer to the fight against HIV/AIDS. Our partners in UNAIDS, in governments, and in local schools and clinics each have their own strengths. Thirty years of experience in sexual and reproductive matters gives us our comparative advantage, a term that means: Here is what we can do best. The Fund will focus in particular on preventing HIV infection among young people and pregnant women through comprehensive programmes for prevention. Short-term interventions include abstinence, delaying the age of sexual activity, counselling to promote safe and healthy sexual behaviours, and condom use. Longer-term actions support lasting behaviour change. We will continue to be extensively involved in providing overall leadership and advocacy to assist other organizations."

"We already know enough to mount an effective prevention campaign."

² UNAIDS, *AIDS Epidemic Update: December 2000*.

— Thoraya A. Obaid, UNFPA Executive Director



*"We cannot and should not choose
between prevention and treatment.
We must do both."*

— Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General

Strategic directions

Preventing sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) has been a significant component of all reproductive health programmes supported by UNFPA since its founding in 1969. In the early 1990s, the Fund joined forces with UN agencies, governments and NGOs to fight the escalating HIV/AIDS pandemic. In 2000, UNFPA prepared to accelerate its activities at all levels and started to develop a guide for future action: *UNFPA Strategic Directions for the Prevention of HIV Infection*.

The new strategy expands on experience, defining a niche for UNFPA in three areas:

1. Preventing the sexual transmission of HIV, particularly through interventions that promote safe sexual behaviour among young people, including abstinence and delaying the age of sexual activity;
2. Condom programming to improve access to and use of condoms (male and female), taking into account user needs and perspectives;
3. Preventing HIV infection among pregnant women and its transmission to children and to HIV-negative partners.

It establishes for the first time a set of tools and guidelines for use in programme design and implementation within the Fund.

While other partners bring their comparative advantages to the care and treatment of people

living with HIV/AIDS, to children and to injecting drug users, for example, UNFPA is uniquely positioned to advance prevention. Elements of the UNFPA comparative advantage include:

- Existence of a strong network of partners and a strong country presence;
- HIV/AIDS advisers in regional, multi-disciplinary Country Technical Services Teams (CSTs);
- Expertise in negotiating with governments to guarantee access to reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health information, services and commodities;
- More than 30 years of programme experience addressing sensitive issues such as gender relations and sexuality in various sociocultural settings.

The strategy supports UNFPA's main objective: to help ensure universal access to high-quality reproductive health services to all couples and individuals by 2015. It also reflects the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the goals set at its five-year review (ICPD+5). The ICPD guides UNFPA and places responsibility on the Fund to provide leadership in matters of sexual and reproductive health. The Fund also contributes to the operationalization of the UNAIDS Framework for Global Leadership on HIV/AIDS.³

³ The UNAIDS Framework for Global Leadership on HIV/AIDS, December 2000, guides the development of the United Nations system strategic plan. The Framework endorses an "expanded response" to the pandemic, defined as one that simultaneously reduces risk, vulnerability and impact.

Current programming overview

In response to the annual HIV/AIDS questionnaire, UNFPA offices serving 132 countries described their activities in HIV prevention during 2000. They also provided examples of awareness campaigns in 78 countries, preventive counselling in 56 countries, HIV-related advocacy in 79 countries, prevention for young people in 78 countries and training programmes in 83 countries. Many additional activities also took place in these and other countries.

Currently, in addition to many other important activities made possible by donors, UNFPA is involved in the following HIV/AIDS-related initiatives:

- The African Youth Alliance, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and activities supported by Ted Turner's United Nations Foundation (see page 4);
 - International Partnership Against HIV/AIDS in Africa (IPAA) (see page 8);
 - Joint Advocacy Against HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa (see page 9);
 - European Commission/UNFPA Reproductive Health Initiative in Asia (see page 9);
 - Global Strategy for Reproductive Health Commodity Security (see page 17).
- By 2005 at least 90 per cent of young people aged 15 to 24, and 95 per cent by 2010, should have access to the means to prevent and control HIV/AIDS;
 - HIV infection rates in persons 15 to 24 years of age should be reduced by 25 per cent in the most-affected countries by 2005, and by 25 per cent globally by 2010.

As a cosponsor, the Fund works closely with UNAIDS, as it has done since this group of seven UN agencies was created in 1996 to strengthen and better coordinate the UN system's response to HIV/AIDS.⁴ The group mobilizes international action and resources and shares best practices worldwide. In 2000, UNFPA participated in UNAIDS Theme Groups in 86 countries, and in 25 of them it chaired these coordinating groups. From its unified budget of pooled resources, UNAIDS has provided approximately \$3.65 million for 2000-2001 to UNFPA to support HIV prevention at global and regional levels.

Goals

HIV/AIDS levels are more than 50 per cent higher than predicted 10 years ago. By the end of 2000, more than 36 million people were living with HIV/AIDS, including 25 million in Africa. With about 15,000 new infections per day in 2000, the escalating crisis demands intensified action. New goals were set in 1999 at the five-year review of progress on the ICPD Programme of Action (ICPD+5):

⁴ UNAIDS cosponsors currently include the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); UNFPA; the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP); the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the World Health Organization (WHO); and the World Bank.



Major foundation grants

\$57 million from Gates Foundation

Young people in four African countries are the focus of a \$57 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that will strengthen efforts to protect young people from HIV/AIDS. The Foundation is funding a five-year initiative to expand national campaigns in Botswana, Ghana, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania that will educate youth about preventing HIV/AIDS and ensure that they can protect themselves. Botswana is one of the hardest-hit countries; one in every three people of reproductive age is infected with the virus that causes AIDS—the highest rate in the world.

The government of each country will implement the initiative in partnership with UNFPA and two United States-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) and Pathfinder International. Together, the three are known as the African Youth Alliance (AYH). Local NGOs and other UN and international organizations will also participate in the initiative's activities, which will serve as models for other hard-hit countries and international aid efforts.

After a year of preparatory activities and building alliances with government agencies and youth organizations in each country, the Alliance is gearing up for a four-year implementation phase.

\$23 million from Ted Turner's United Nations Foundation

Ted Turner's United Nations Foundation awarded grants of \$23 million to UNFPA and several partners to support adolescent

reproductive health and prevent HIV infection among young people.

Teachers, parents and religious leaders will be involved in a Pacific Region project working with both in- and out-of-school youth to provide reproductive health information and services, and training in livelihood skills.

In Jordan, 42,000 girls aged 13-17 will receive training and education in reproductive health and life skills development, and hundreds of educators and school counsellors will upgrade their skills.

UNFPA, working with the Russian Family Planning Association, will reach up to 200,000 young people in the Russian Federation. Activities will support orphans, provide shelters for pregnant girls, provide reproductive health information in summer camps and vocational schools, and train medical staff and social workers on youth-friendly services.

A variety of HIV prevention projects will be supported throughout Africa, including the development of a provincial plan in Zambezi Province, Mozambique, and a youth-involvement project in Northern Province, South Africa.

In addition, grants will fund a project in Angola that engages young people in HIV and STD prevention, a joint national partnership to combat HIV transmission among adolescents and youth in Lesotho, and a project to develop regional capacity in Swaziland to prevent HIV infection among adolescents. Other projects for adolescent reproductive health will be implemented in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Sao Tome and Principe and Senegal.

“HIV will kill more than one third of the young adults of countries where it has its firmest hold, yet the global response is still just a fraction of what it could be. We need to respond to this crisis on a massively different scale from what has been done so far.”

— Dr. Peter Piot, UNAIDS Executive Director

UNFPA is working towards these goals while continuing to implement the ICPD Programme of Action approved by 179 countries in Cairo in 1994. In terms of HIV/AIDS, the ICPD recommends:

- Reproductive health programmes should “increase their efforts to prevent, detect and treat sexually transmitted diseases and other reproductive tract infections . . .” (paragraph 7.30).
- Other recommendations include the training of health-care providers in STDs, including HIV/AIDS; the provision in

reproductive health programmes of information, education and counselling on responsible sexual behaviour; and the promotion and reliable supply of high-quality condoms (paragraphs 7.31-7.33).

In 1999, governments affirmed their renewed commitment to the principles, goals and objectives of the ICPD and identified key future actions. The review added: “Governments should ensure that prevention of and services for sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS are an integral component of reproductive and sexual health programmes at the primary health-care level” (paragraph 68).

Figure 1: HIV/AIDS in 2000

