

*DoD HIV/AIDS Prevention Program
Status Report
May 2003 to September 2004*



Democratic Republic of the Congo



BACKGROUND

Introduction/General Information

The population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DROC) is estimated to be 56.6 million with a life expectancy of 49.1 years. French is the official language, with a literacy rate of 65.5%, disproportionately distributed between men and women. DROC is experiencing an internal war, which contributes to a weakened economy. Annual per capita income is approximately \$700.

Country HIV/AIDS Statistics and Risk Factors

HIV/AIDS prevalence in DROC is estimated at 4.2%, while the number of people believed to be living with AIDS is 1.1 million adults ages 15-49. Identified risk factors include blood transfusions, unprotected sex, heterosexual contact with multiple partners and commercial sex workers, and untreated sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Transmission of HIV is primarily through heterosexual activity, which accounts for 87% of cases in the country. The most affected groups are women ages 20-29 years and men ages 30-39 years. Commercial sex workers have HIV seroprevalence rates as high as 30%.

Military HIV/AIDS Information

The size of the Congolese Armed Forces (CAF) is estimated to be one million troops. Because the CAF has not performed forcewide testing, HIV seroprevalence rates

are unavailable but are believed to exceed the national average.

PROPOSED PROGRAM

The CAF continued efforts in the implementation of their HIV/AIDS prevention plan, which included the reduction of personnel vulnerability through awareness of HIV/AIDS/STI and related behavior change, improved access to and acceptance of condoms, increased awareness among senior military leaders, and expanded capacity of health care facilities for diagnosing and treating STI/HIV/AIDS.

PROGRAM RESPONSE

Military-to-Military

DHAPP funds supported DROC military medical personnel to attend the *AFNET: AIDS in the Military* conference and also to send a DROC representative to the *All-Africa Military HIV/AIDS Workshop* in Gaborone, Botswana.

Recently, DROC submitted a proposal to DHAPP requesting funding to establish a blood bank safety program. DHAPP is continuing discussions with the country team in an attempt to accomplish this objective within existing budgetary constraints.

Contractor-Based Assistance

The University of North Carolina (UNC), Chapel Hill, received a DHAPP contract to

develop a peer education program to encourage safer sex practices and proper condom use. UNC also planned to conduct an HIV surveillance survey in the Congolese military. However, deficiencies in the basic health care system made it impossible to carry out the proposed program. With the concurrence of the Congolese military, the UNC project shifted direction toward a general support of the health care system in two Congolese military camps. Two military health centers were refurbished and provided with basic equipment and supplies. In addition, 8 medical personnel from the 2 health centers were provided with training in syndromic management of STIs. This redirection of the contract was considered appropriate due to practical concerns; establishing functionality of 2 health centers helped to strengthen the military's health care system, thereby improving the general health and welfare of Congolese military personnel.

Clinical Provider Training

DHAPP funds supported DROC military medical personnel to attend the *AFNET: AIDS in the Military* conference.

Interoperability

None during this reporting period.

PROGRAM IMPACT

Master Trainers and Peer Educators

Under the UNC's program, 16 medical personnel completed courses and apprenticeships in syndromic management of STIs at Kinshasa's reference clinic for sexually transmitted diseases.

Number of Troops Trained

None during this reporting period.

Potential Number of Troops Affected

The potential number of troops affected by DHAPP-sponsored HIV/AIDS prevention in DROC is 1 million.

Counseling and Testing (CT)

None during this reporting period.

Laboratory Capability/Infrastructure

Two DROC military health clinics were refurbished and enhanced to enable syndromic management of STI/HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other infectious diseases.

Mass Awareness

None during this reporting period.