



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

*Eritrea*



## **BACKGROUND**

### **Introduction/General Information**

The population of Eritrea is estimated to be 4.45 million people, with a life expectancy of 52.7 years. Eritrea has several regional languages (Afar, Arabic, Tigre, Kunama, and Tigrinya), with an estimated literacy rate of 58.6%. The economy is based primarily in subsistence agriculture, with 80% of the population involved in farming or herding. Annual per capita income is \$700.

### **Country HIV/AIDS Statistics and Risk Factors**

HIV/AIDS prevalence in Eritrea is estimated at 5%, while the number of people living with AIDS is 60,000. Identified risk factors include high-risk heterosexual contact with multiple partners, perinatal transmission, and transmission through blood and blood products.

### **Military HIV/AIDS Information**

The Eritrean Defense Force (EDF) is estimated to have 300,000 active duty personnel. The HIV prevalence rate in the military is estimated to be 5%, which is consistent with the national average

## **PROPOSED PROGRAM**

The EDF continued efforts in the implementation of their DHAPP HIV/AIDS prevention plan, which included the development of an HIV prevention program

emphasizing behavior change communication, ensuring an adequate supply and distribution of condoms, training peer educators in sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV prevention, establishing counseling and testing (CT) and medical/psychosocial care for persons living with AIDS.

## **PROGRAM RESPONSE**

### **Military-to-Military**

DHAPP purchased HIV test kits to initiate a sentinel surveillance program. Additionally, Eritrea has been approved to receive foreign military financing grant funds to procure durable medical equipment and supplies.

### **Contractor-Based Assistance**

Population Services International (PSI) was awarded a DHAPP contract to implement many of the EDF goals for prevention and care in the military. Their work in mass awareness campaigns and train-the-trainer battalion-level education was very successful. In a follow-on subcontract awarded to PSI, goals included the following activities:

- Continue to stock condoms, service condom vending machines, and produce additional personal condom carriers,
- Disseminate information about HIV/AIDS via radio programs, mobile video presentations, condom use demonstrations, music/drama presentations, and testimonials of HIV-positive people, and

- Incorporate information about Counseling and Testing (CT) into their existing interpersonal communication activities.

PSI continued to capitalize on the mobile video units (MVUs) to reach troops in remote locations. Another feature film was introduced titled *Off Guard*, which was used as part of the mobile video presentations. Other activities included condom demonstrations, condom and condom pouch distribution, a discussion about the importance of CT, music and drama presentations, and a testimonial by a woman living with AIDS.

### **Clinical Provider Training**

None during this reporting period.

### **Interoperability**

DHAPP facilitated liaison between the EDF and the following organizations: The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Family Health International and the United States Agency for International Development.

## **PROGRAM IMPACT**

Using an event impact survey to measure the effectiveness of MVU presentations, PSI demonstrated that HIV educational programs were having significant positive effects. For instance:

- The number of respondents who felt they were at high risk of getting HIV increased by 2.4% (from 2.5% to 4.9%).
- The number who felt at moderate risk of getting HIV increased by 12.7% (from 10.0% to 22.7%), and those who felt at low risk of getting HIV increased by 1.6% (from 27.0% to 28.6%).
- There was also a decrease by 14.5% (from 41.0% to 26.5 %) in the number of people who said they had no chance of getting HIV.

- The number of people who did not know their chances of getting infected with HIV decreased by 1.9% (from 17% to 15.1%).
- Knowledge that people can protect themselves from HIV by using a condom increased by 7.7% (from 81.5% to 89.2%).

PSI has reached the majority of Eritrean military with its HIV/AIDS education and prevention messages.



Mobile video units (MVUs) make it possible for HIV/AIDS prevention trainers to reach troops in remote locations.

### **Master Trainers and Peer Educators**

DHAPP sponsored training for 120 HIV prevention master trainers and 430 HIV peer educators. PSI continued to utilize the previously trained staff and added to it by training 10 performers for drama group presentations.

### **Number of Troops Trained**

More than 300,000 troops and recruits have been trained in STI/HIV/AIDS prevention. All EDF nurses, nurse assistants, and paramedics received training on universal precautions against HIV/AIDS in occupational settings.

### **Potential Number of Troops Affected**

DHAPP-sponsored HIV/AIDS prevention programs reach 300,000 active troops.

### **Counseling and Testing (CT)**

Four CT centers have been established and 8 counselors have been trained. Demand for CT services increased substantially following HIV awareness campaigns. CT centers screen about 800 individuals a month.

### **Laboratory Capability/Infrastructure**

Four laboratory technicians were trained to operate enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) equipment. In addition, a DHAPP logistician procured and arranged for the installation and networking of 4 desktop computers to a wireless local area network at the Ministry of Defense Health Services Unit.

### **Mass Awareness**

PSI conducted 55 MVU presentations, 59 HIV/AIDS music and dance shows, distributed 17,000 HIV/AIDS brochures in 3 languages, dispensed 5 million condoms, added 320 condom outlets, and distributed 30,000 condom pouches.



An Eritrean soldier displays the condom pouch that has become a standard part of the uniform.