

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

DHAPP

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE HIV/AIDS
PREVENTION PROGRAM

REDUCING THE INCIDENCE OF HIV/AIDS
AMONG UNIFORMED PERSONNEL IN
SELECTED AFRICAN NATIONS AND BEYOND

WINNING BATTLES IN THE WAR AGAINST HIV/AIDS

BACKGROUND

Country Statistics

The Democratic Republic of the Congo population is estimated to be 62.6 million people, with an average life expectancy of 51.46 years. French is the official language of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has an estimated literacy rate of 65.5%, unevenly distributed between men and women. The economy of this nation of potential wealth has declined drastically since the mid-1980s. The war, which began in August 1998, dramatically reduced national output and government revenue. In 2005, renewed activity in the mining sector boosted Kinshasa's fiscal position and growth. Business and economic prospects are expected to improve once a new government is installed after elections. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$700.

HIV/AIDS Statistics

The HIV prevalence rate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo general population is estimated at 3.2%, with approximately 1 million individuals living with HIV/AIDS. The primary identified risk factor in the population is unprotected heterosexual contact.



Military Statistics

The Congolese Armed Forces are estimated at approximately 3000 members. This military, rebuilding after the end of the war in 2003, is one of the most unstable in the region. The armed forces are composed of 97,800 active-duty troops, with Army, Navy, and Air Force branches. The Democratic Republic of the Congo allocates 1.0% of the GDP for military expenditures. No official HIV surveillance has been conducted in the military; however, results from a behavioral sentinel surveillance study conducted among military personnel in 2005 revealed that 13% of them were infected with a sexually transmitted infection.

PROGRAM RESPONSE

In-Country Ongoing Assistance

The Johns Hopkins Cameroon Program (JHCP) has been providing technical assistance to the militaries of Central Africa in the implementation of HIV prevention and surveillance activities. Evaluation from the first four countries in the region to work with JHCP (Cameroon, Gabon, Chad, and Republic of Congo) shows considerable progress in education, training, and surveillance, as well as development of a more sustainable approach to preventing infectious diseases among troops and their families.

Foreign Military Financing Assistance

The Democratic Republic of the Congo was awarded Foreign Military Financing funding for the acquisition of laboratory and medical equipment. This award was allocated for fiscal year 2005 and has not yet been released for expenditure. Although still in negotiation, the plan is to use these funds to procure HIV diagnostic equipment and supplies.



Proposed Future Activities

DHAPP received a proposal from JHCP on behalf of the Congolese Armed Forces for activities during FY07. The application included eight countries in the Central African region, and built on the successful work accomplished by JHCP in the region over the past 4 years, aiming to develop a more comprehensive strategy for fighting HIV/AIDS in the region's militaries. Specifically, funding was requested to extend the ongoing program into four additional central African countries (Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Sao Tomé and Principe.) Continuous efforts were proposed to monitor the rate of HIV in the already established countries (Cameroon, Gabon, Chad, and Republic of Congo), as well as to conduct refresher training for trained peer educators in these four countries. Using the same survey methodology already established in these four countries, will provide, for the first time, the ability to reliably compare military HIV rates across all eight countries in the region.

The proposal was reviewed by a scientific review board and will be submitted to the DHAPP Board of Directors for funding decisions.

OUTCOMES & IMPACT

Early in the fiscal year, contact with local military collaborators was established, and the first site visit was completed in October 2005. The strategic plan for prevention activities was approved by the military high command. Field activities began with expansion of the HIV surveillance protocol, which would be used to conduct the surveillance among the militaries based in Kinshasa.

During the final quarter of the year, the Ministry of Defense submitted the HIV surveillance protocol was submitted by to the national ethics committee and clearance was received from this Committee. Study forms were finalized and contract was signed with the national AIDS reference laboratory in Kinshasa to conduct laboratory testing of all collected samples. Active field surveillance is slated to begin early next year after country has returned to normal business following the presidential election.

