



**GABON**

**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**

Gabon's population is estimated to be 1.42 million people, with an average life expectancy of 54.5 years. French is the official language of Gabon, which has an estimated literacy rate of 63.2%, unevenly distributed between men and women. Gabon enjoys a per capita income four times that of most of Sub-Saharan African nations. This has supported a sharp decline in extreme poverty; however, because of high income inequality, a large proportion of the population remains poor. Gabon depended on timber and manganese until oil was discovered offshore in the early 1970s. The oil sector now accounts for 50% of gross domestic product (GDP). The GDP per capita is \$7,000.

#### **HIV/AIDS Statistics**

The HIV prevalence rate in Gabon's general population is estimated at 7.9%. Gabon has approximately 60,000 individuals living with HIV/AIDS. The primary identified risk factor in the population is unprotected heterosexual contact.

#### **Military Statistics**

The Gabonese Armed Forces (GAF) is a small, professional military estimated at approximately 5000 members. Gabon allocates 3.4% of the GDP for military expenditures. In 2003, with funding from DHAPP, the first HIV surveillance for the GAF was conducted in Libreville, revealing a prevalence of 4.1%, half that of the general population.

### **PROGRAM RESPONSE**

#### **In-Country Ongoing Assistance**

The Johns Hopkins Cameroon Program (JHCP) has been providing technical assistance to the militaries of Central Africa (including Gabon) 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.

In April 2006, DHAPP staff conducted a field visit to Gabon on behalf of the DHAPP sponsored HIV/AIDS prevention program. Technical assistance was provided to the local military team in preparation for the official launching ceremony of the first activity on their action plan, at Moulia military base. During the visit: (1) assistance was provided to the military

HIV team for renovation and installation of equipment in the new HIV/AIDS information center at the military infirmary, and with training of the HIV/AIDS information center manager, (2) 41 troops and 15 family members were trained with the assistance from DHAPP staff during the peer education session.

### Foreign Military Financing Activities

Gabon was awarded Foreign Military Financing funding for the acquisition of laboratory and medical equipment. This award was allocated for fiscal year 2003 and 2005, and 2003 funding was released for expenditure during FY05. Although still in negotiation, the plan is to use FY03 funds to procure HIV test kits.



### Proposed Future Activities

DHAPP received a proposal from JHCP on behalf of the GAF 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 Príncipe.) 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 of 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**

### Prevention

The GAF reported early success with their new HIV prevention program. During the fiscal year, 731 troops were reached with comprehensive HIV prevention messages (546 men, 185 women). Fifty-six (56) troops were trained in the provision of these messages.

### Other

One indigenous organization was provided with technical assistance for both strategic information and institutional capacity building. Two (2) individuals were trained in capacity building, and another 56 were trained in community mobilization for HIV prevention, care, and treatment.