

# THE GAMBIA

# 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 population of The Gambia is estimated to be 1.64 million people, with an average life expectancy of 54.1 years. English is the official language of The Gambia, which has an estimated literacy rate of 40.1%, unevenly distributed between men and women. The Gambia has no significant mineral or natural resource deposits and has a limited agricultural base. About 75% of the population depends on crops and livestock for its livelihood. Small-scale manufacturing activity features the processing of peanuts, fish, and hides. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$1,900.

#### HIV/AIDS Statistics

The HIV prevalence rate in The Gambia's general population is estimated at 2.4%, with approximately 20,000 individuals living with HIV/AIDS. The predominant mode of HIV transmission in The Gambia is heterosexual contact, with women being the most affected.



#### Military Statistics

The Gambian Armed Forces (GAF) consists of approximately 2500 active-duty members. The Gambia expends 0.4% of its GDP for military purposes. Because The Gambia's military does not conduct force-wide testing, the overall prevalence rate for the military is unknown. However, HIV prevalence in the military is estimated at 2.1%. GAF medical unit consists of approximately 50 persons, both medical and non-medical. These include 2 doctors, 5 registered nurses, 15 enrolled nurses, 6 laboratory technicians, 2 pharmacy technicians, and 22 nurse assistants.

### PROGRAM RESPONSE

#### In-Country Ongoing Assistance

Prior to the launch of The Gambian Armed Forces HIV/AIDS Prevention Program sponsored by the US Department of Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP), the National AIDS Secretariat (NAS) carried out minimal HIV/AIDS preventive education in the military. The two programs have successfully cooperated, when NAS has available funds. During the first year of the DHAPP activities, over 500 soldiers and 50 officers have participated in HIV/AIDS sensitization training events, as well as 240 wives of soldiers, and 50 civilians working in GAF. Thirty (30) soldiers have been trained to act as counselors for the counseling and testing (CT) center that is near completion at Yundum Barracks. The GAF took the initiative to construct the necessary infrastructure and DHAPP is providing the equipment to produce

a fully functional CT center to reach the goal of 100% testing within the military. In addition to this, the GAF has installed 6 HIV awareness billboards throughout the country and produced a cassette tape with music and lyrics written by the GAF military band to raise HIV understanding within the military.

### Proposed Future Activities

DHAPP received a proposal for fiscal year 2007 activities directly from the GAF. The objectives of the proposal include increased HIV/AIDS awareness of military personnel and their dependants through sensitization workshops, distribution of Information, Education, Communication and behavior change communication materials and mass awareness programs; increased use of condoms by service members by increasing condom availability; human capacity building involving master trainers, CT counselors and supervisors, laboratory technicians, nurses and doctors, including attendance at the Infectious Diseases Institute training in Uganda; increased use of CT center at Yundum Barracks by military personnel and their dependants by ensuring adequate supplies of laboratory equipment and consumables are available at the sole military CT center; increased testing of all military personnel through formulation of appropriate policies encouraging all categories of military personnel to go for CT; and provision of equitable treatment, care, and support for people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS in a conducive and favorable environment.

The proposal was reviewed by a scientific panel and will be submitted to the DHAPP Board of Directors.

## OUTCOMES & IMPACT

### Prevention

During the year, 600 GAF troops were reached with comprehensive prevention messages (409 men, 191 women). The GAF supported 39 targeted condom service outlets.

### Care

Nineteen (19) service outlets provided HIV-related palliative care for troops and families. Thirty (30) military medical and lay personnel were trained in the provision of CT services.

### Other

Three hundred (300) GAF personnel received training in the reduction of stigma and discrimination, as well as in the mobilization of HIV-related community resources for prevention, care, and treatment. Fifty (50) GAF senior officers participated in a 2-day HIV awareness building event. The event included presentations by peer educators previously trained using DHAPP funds, discussions with NAS representatives and question/answer sessions with representatives from a local nongovernmental organization that cares for people living with HIV/AIDS and provides CT services.

