

SUDAN

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

Sudan has been engaged in two prolonged civil wars during most of the second half of the 20th century. A separate conflict that broke out in the western region of Darfur in 2003 has resulted in at least 200,000 deaths and nearly 2 million displaced. Peacekeeping troops continue to attempt to stabilize the situation. Sudan also has faced large refugee influxes from neighboring countries, primarily Ethiopia and Chad, and armed conflict, poor transport infrastructure, and lack of government support have chronically obstructed the provision of humanitarian assistance. The population of Sudan is estimated to be 41.2 million people, with an average life expectancy of 58.9 years. Arabic is the official language of Sudan, which has an estimated literacy rate of 61%, unevenly distributed between men and women. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$2,100, with 40% of the population of Sudan living below the poverty line.

HIV/AIDS Statistics

The HIV prevalence rate in the Sudan general population is estimated at 1.6%. Very little information is known about risk factors in this population.

Military Statistics

The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) began as a rebel force but is now the recognized military of the autonomous region. The SPLA plays a central role in the government, with influence extending through all layers of a highly militarized society. Sudan expends 3% of the GDP on military purposes. The exact numbers of troops in the SPLA and prevalence numbers are both unknown at this time, but SPLA personnel may be at higher risk for infection because of their history as an irregular or rebel force, with limited access to medical or HIV preventive services and low education and literacy levels.

The SPLA has a significant role to play in efforts to reduce the impact of HIV in Southern Sudan. SPLA soldiers come from all over southern Sudan, as well as some transitional areas in the north. Many of these soldiers will return to their home areas after demobilization. Therefore, if the SPLA creates an effective HIV program, adopting proven and progressive models from other settings, the benefits could extend well beyond the ranks of military personnel and their families.



PROGRAM RESPONSE

In-Country Ongoing Assistance

As part of its overall strategy to promote peace-building efforts, the US Government is supporting SPLA initiatives to reduce size as part of post-conflict demobilization, reintegrating former combatants into civilian life and developing remaining troops into a professional military force. The US Government supports the institutional development of the SPLA through DynCorp, a State Department contractor implementing an infrastructure program with some training components. In addition, the United States is providing funding to the Kenyan Department of Defense to provide bilateral military-to-military assistance to the SPLA.



In addition, Sudan has been named as a participating country in the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), beginning in fiscal year 2007. DHAPP staff members are working closely in Sudan with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ensure that the SPLA is represented in country team plans for next year. As part of this effort, in January 2006, DHAPP staff members were invited to participate in the comprehensive HIV/AIDS program planning workshop in Rumbeck, southern Sudan. During the workshop, technical assistance was provided to (1) establish a policy-making framework for HIV/AIDS issues within the SPLA, and (2) facilitate exchanges between the SPLA and international agencies working in the field of HIV/AIDS.

Proposed Future Activities

With its new status under PEPFAR, the country team in Sudan is working with DHAPP staff members to create a proposed path for prevention efforts in the SPLA. In particular, the SPLA HIV/AIDS Secretariat will direct the evolution of program priorities over time, but the direct program support of the Emergency Plan will focus heavily on prevention campaigns based on partner reduction, counseling and testing, and condoms. With increasing recognition of the statistical significance of HIV transmission within stable discordant couples in the region, promoting knowledge of HIV status is a core prevention strategy, linked closely to faithfulness and partner reduction behavioral change messages. The PEPFAR country strategy includes support for basic palliative or preventive care for affected people and their families. The SPLA has also identified alcohol abuse as an important co-factor in risky behavior related to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, so SPLA programs will seek to address institutional norms that promote irresponsible alcohol consumption.

OUTCOMES & IMPACT

Prevention

Military-to-military cooperation with Sudan has only recently commenced. DHAPP looks forward to a successful program with the SPLA.