



**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 estimated population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is 66.5 million people, with an average life expectancy of 54 years. French is the official language of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has an estimated literacy rate of 66%, with uneven distribution between men and women. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, a nation endowed with vast potential wealth, is slowly recovering from two decades of decline. Since August 1998, internal conflict has dramatically reduced national output and government revenue, increased external debt, and resulted in the deaths of more than 3.5 million people from violence, famine, and disease. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$300. Conditions began to improve in late 2002 with the withdrawal of a large portion of invading foreign troops.

HIV/AIDS Statistics

The HIV prevalence rate in the 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 (CAF) include between 300,000 and 475,000 members. This military, still in the process of rebuilding after the end of the war in 2003, is one of the most unstable in the region. The Democratic Republic of the Congo allocates 2.5% of the GDP for military expenditures. The first HIV seroprevalence study for CAF was conducted in the capital city Kinshasa from July

to August 2007. Participatory sites were randomly selected from all military units located in Kinshasa. A total number of 3,943 troops were tested. Results from this study are pending.



PROGRAM RESPONSE

In-Country Ongoing Assistance

The network of partners involved in the CAF program have evolved to include an in-country program manager working closely with the Johns Hopkins Cameroon Program (JHCP), Population Services International (PSI), and Family Health International (FHI). DHAPP staff provides oversight for the in-country program manager and technical assistance.

Foreign Military Financing Assistance

The Democratic Republic of the Congo was awarded Foreign Military Financing funding for the acquisition of laboratory equipment, supporting reagents, and other supplies related to the diagnosis and treatment of HIV/AIDS. This award was appropriated for FY05 and FY06 and has not been released yet for expenditure. Although still in negotiation, the current proposal for these funds includes procuring refrigerators and freezers, in addition to other blood-product storage supplies.

OUTCOMES & IMPACTS

Prevention

PSI provides prevention services to the CAF. PSI trained 59 peer educators, who held comprehensive prevention sessions that reached 1,578 troops. These sessions will be expanded in the next quarter. The target number for troops reached with prevention messages fell short of its goal because of the late start-up of the program and the constant mobility of the military.

Care

The first seroprevalence study for the CAF was conducted in the capital city Kinshasa from July to August 2007. JHCP provided technical assistance and oversight for this study. Participatory sites were randomly selected from all military units located in Kinshasa. A total number of 3,943 troops participated in the study. Results from this study are pending. During FY07, a total of 4,300 troops and family members were counseled and tested. Ten (10) counselors (6 from Mbuji-Mayi and 4 from Lubumbahi) and lab technicians were trained in testing capabilities. Two (2) nurses were trained in palliative care. Due to the delayed completion of the permanent Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) Center, 2 temporary VCTs were established. Counseling and testing activities began in August 2007. The permanent VCT Center will be completed and ready for operation in the first quarter of FY08.



Proposed Future Activities

DHAPP received proposals from JHCP, PSI, and FHI on behalf of the CAF and in conjunction with the in-country program manager for activities during FY08. Proposed activities include promoting VCT and psychological support in military regions by training counselors in the military health centers, continuing prevention education for troops, training peer educators, and developing TV/ radio promotional segments for the military.