



A View From Singapore

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The global AIDS pandemic

March 29, 2007



The AIDS pandemic is growing rapidly, especially in the African and Asian continents.

Twenty-seven of World Vision's humanitarian leaders from Africa have written a paper calling for the rich Group of 8 countries to step up efforts in the fight against AIDS.



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What are the challenges facing those who have the disease and those who want help them?

How different is the AIDS problem in Africa compared to Asia?

Find out more in this edition of Connections. Welcome to the programme. I'm Yvonne Gomez.

AIDS has orphaned 15 million children worldwide.

In 2006 alone, it killed an estimated 380,000 children under the age of 15.

And of all AIDS-related deaths in 2006 across continents, 72 percent occurred in sub-Saharan Africa.

Simon Duffy is World Vision's HIV and AIDS Policy Officer in Australia.

SD: As far as we understand, HIV began in Africa...

World Vision's paper calls for increased funding, stronger health systems and the protection of children who are particularly vulnerable, like orphans.

Mr Duffy explains why some issues have been given greater priority.

SD: I think in that paper, we have dealt with...

Getting enough funds to run AIDS treatment and prevention programmes is always a challenge. But it's not always only about money.

SD: Well, the funding is clearly very important...

Development in post-colonial Africa has been hampered by instability, corruption, violence and extreme poverty.

Poverty is crucial in contributing to severe health problems in Africa, with reports of 6,000 Africans dying from AIDS, and 11,000 new infections each day.

Some have described the situation there as hopeless.

Simon Duffy from World Vision Australia gives his view.

SD: I don't actually agree with that at all...

In Asia, some studies have shown that the continent stands on the brink of a full-blown AIDS epidemic.

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China and India account for most of Asia's HIV/AIDS cases, but that is because of their large populations.

Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand are wrestling with entrenched epidemics.

The Thai government has sometimes been praised for its campaigns to minimise the spread of HIV infections.

Thailand's latest move in this effort was to break patents on two anti-AIDS drugs earlier this month, so that cheaper generic versions of the drugs could be made to make AIDS treatment more affordable.

This raised concerns about the intellectual property rights of drug manufacturing companies.

Pascal Tanguay is an Information Officer at the Asian Harm Reduction Network in Thailand.

PT: In general, the compulsory licenses for HIV AIDS drugs are an excellent mechanism to reduce the costs for patients to buy the medicine. One of the issues with HIV AIDS drugs is that they are very expensive. Thailand has been very fortunate in that it has built up its own generic brand of HIV drugs. But that doesn't mean that Thailand doesn't need other drugs from other companies. The compulsory licenses ensure that second-line medication will be available for very low prices. So the generic medication which Thailand produces is the first-line; patients with HIV AIDS will develop resistance to the drugs so they'll need to switch to another regiment and that's the second-line medication which is very expensive. Now compulsory licensing brings down the cost of second-line medication and allows the poor segments of society to have access to such medication. What happens when a company like Abbott pulls out because of compulsory licensing, the poorest segments of society will be penalized. It's those people who have the lowest possible access and means to protect themselves from HIV who are penalized; it's not the ones that can afford the medication that get penalized. In the field of prevention, Thailand has been highly successful in preventing HIV AIDS. For instance, the success in the beginning of the 1990s with the Thai condom campaigns has been replicated in other parts of Asia. So there is a strong possibility to happen with compulsory licensing where a domino effect will happen in other countries.

At home here in Singapore, AIDS infections are on the rise.

More than 1000 people have died from the disease so far, and there have been about 300 new cases of infection every year since 2004.

George Bishop is a health psychologist and member of the Executive Committee of Action for AIDS in Singapore.

GB: Essentially, there are increasing numbers of infection...

Mr Bishop gives some specific figures on the rate of infection in Singapore and which groups are affected by these number.

GB: What we've had since about 2000...

What are some misconceptions about the disease that remain among Singaporeans?

I think that basically, most people are pretty much...

So what does Mr Bishop think about efforts to raise awareness about AIDS in Singapore so far?

GB: I think that there has been a very good...

Various campaigns have been launched in Singapore over the years to educate the community about accepting and dealing with the AIDS problem.

[One Step Beyond](#)

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