

ADVOCATING FOR THE ACCELERATION OF HIV PREVENTION EFFORTS IN THE AFRICAN REGION

By Max Tello, 2007

Contextual Background

Africa has an alarming HIV/AIDS epidemiological context . The most vulnerable are young people, they are more than 50 % of all new infections.

There is a limited scale of implementation of successful interventions: PMTCT coverage less than 5 % , less than 10 % of PLWHA know their HIV status and there is a growing recognition that prevention efforts have not had the desired impact

Acceleration Initiative

The Acceleration Initiative is a very aggressive Advocacy Campaign. Is being undertaken in support of Resolution (AFR/RC55/R6) adopted by African Ministers of Health declared 2006 as the year for Accelerating HIV prevention to reinvigorate HIV prevention efforts with a sense of urgency equivalent to those of treatment.

The Initiative is led by the Regional Directors of WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO, UNIFEM and UNAIDS who in November 2005 adopted a declaration in Brazzaville in which they committed themselves to support the resolution of the African Health Ministers, recognising the need to strengthen action and refocus attention on the need to accelerate access to prevention.

This is not a new initiative but takes place within the ambit of the Universal Access Initiative that provides a new momentum to scale up and integrate prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010.

By 2-4 November 2005 there was a UN Regional Directors meeting in Brazzaville.

The Outputs of the meeting where:

- UN Joint plan for Acceleration of HIV Prevention in the African Region
- To mobilize the UN system's technical and programming support for the acceleration of country-driven and owned HIV prevention interventions
- To promote partnerships among regional actors to strengthen support for acceleration of HIV prevention in the African Region
- To promote the collection and use of country strategic information, experiences and evidence to guide the scale-up of HIV prevention
- To mobilize leadership at all levels to support acceleration of HIV prevention efforts
- To mobilize leadership at all levels, including the community, to support acceleration of HIV prevention efforts
- To establish a mechanism to manage and monitor implementation of the African Regional UN Joint Plan on Acceleration of HIV prevention
- To support countries in resource mobilization

Advocacy and Communication

Communication skills and experience can help accelerate access to HIV prevention by providing communication support to advocacy and social mobilization efforts and through external outreach.

There is a Regional Communication Plan 2006 in order to re-emphasise and re-invigorate HIV prevention efforts with a sense of urgency. The Objectives of this Plan are:

- Undertake communications activities in support of the Interagency Workplan to Accelerate Prevention in 2006.
- Support countries to develop effective communications strategies and interventions in support of the Accelerating HIV Prevention Initiative.
- Mobilize leadership commitment at the regional level to accelerate access to prevention.

In **Advocacy** the Plan includes

- Provide communications support (eg. Fact sheets, press conferences and releases) to advocacy efforts with regional leaders and policy makers such as AU, ECOWAS, SADC, East African Community, African Union Parliament, etc....to highlight issues relating to accelerating HIV prevention in all major regional gatherings.
- Three subregional media workshops with regional editors forums and other media organizations on the need for HIV prevention

In **Social Mobilisation** it includes:

- Finalise and disseminate guidelines for countries on communicating acceleration of HIV prevention Organize sub-regional experts think tank to review the evidence of the impact of communication initiatives for HIV prevention
- Provide technical communications support to countries to scale-up social mobilization initiatives on HIV prevention at the country level.
- Identify and appoint sub-regional (individual or groups) Goodwill Ambassadors to champion Acceleration of HIV Prevention (eg. Miss World, Miss Universe, African singers, artists and performers)
- Organize sub-regional experts think tank to review the evidence of the impact of communication initiatives for HIV prevention.

About **External Communication**, there are considered:

- Interagency Communications Working Group established to prepare the details for the launch
- Produce the launch kit and organize/coordinate the launch
- Undertake sub-regional launches
- Integrate messages on HIV prevention within relevant Regional and International Days, meetings, events and highlevel missions.
- Efforts to be made and information provided to support international and regional media to encourage articles and stories in existing news outlets such as newspapers, newsletters.
- 3.6 Utilise launch of UNAIDS Global Report and AIDS Epidemic Update to highlight key messages and progress made on Accelerating Access to Prevention Initiative

About **Documentation** there will be:

- Establish an e-forum to facilitate an ongoing discussion based on position papers on HIV prevention for continuous exchange of information in support of the Acceleration Initiative
- UNAIDS RST to have a page on the Accelerating Page on RST website

Launching of the Initiative

The april 11, 2006 this Initiative was launched in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia , at the AU Headquarters, with simultaneous launches in Johannesburg (South Africa), and Khartoum (Sudan).

Acceleration of Prevention at Country Level

At Country level for the acceleration initiative to succeed, activities must be integrated and comprehensive. Communities, civil society, media, public and private sectors, development partners and governments need to work together in partnerships, coalitions, networks and alliances in responding to people's needs.

There were established Operational Steps for establishing a Communication Component for Acceleration of HIV prevention:

- UN thematic group to brief the Minister of Health on the acceleration initiative
- Consultation with top management within the Ministry of Health
- Briefing Senior management in Ministry of Health
- Dissemination of the Acceleration of Prevention Initiative package
- Consensus meeting with Key stakeholders
- Develop a plan and materials
- National launch of the Initiative
- Provincial and District Orientation and launches
- Monitor regularly and Evaluate the Initiative at the end of one year

The conditions for success of this Initiative at Country level are:

- Ownership, acceptability and impact are drastically improved with people driven interventions.
- Coordination of acceleration would lead to efficient utilization of resources, zero duplication, synergy and complimentarily of interventions.
- Matching message with service will balance supply and demand of service, optimal access and use of services
- Adopting a human rights approach ensures equity in access and use of resources in line with global, regional and national conventions, treaties and commitments.
- Adequate funding for priority areas of action will ensure acceleration of HIV prevention. This funding should include areas, which are usually neglected such as research and documentation.
- HIV prevention activities have to be integrated with other health and related development interventions.

Ten Communication Points to Countries for Acceleration of HIV Prevention

Priority Area 1: HIV prevention contributes to poverty reduction and socio economic development.

Objective 1: To incorporate HIV/AIDS prevention interventions into poverty reduction and economic development plans.

Key Promise 1: Each case of HIV/AIDS prevented is a specific saving on the national budget.

Means of Acceleration1: Lobby for development of policies that provide conditions favourable to prevention eg duty waivers.

Carry out advocacy with policy makers and partners to factor HIV/AIDS in development programmes and activities.

Mobilise communities and partners for implementation of programmes that incorporate HIV/AIDS prevention.

Priority Area 2: Gender inequality, discrimination and violence contribute significantly to HIV infection

Objective 2: Develop mechanisms to facilitate gender sensitive socio-cultural relationships and implementation of gender related policies and legislation pertaining to sexual and reproductive rights.

Key Promise 2: Implementation of gender related policies and legislation complemented by positive socio-cultural interactions can contribute to reduced HIV infection rates.

Means of Acceleration 2: Empower law enforcement personnel, judiciary, media, youth and leaders to address adequately gender related violations.

Increase awareness and appreciation about gender dimension in HIV transmission.

Gender sensitive socialisation

Priority Area 3: Education is a pillar in HIV prevention.

Objective 3: To increase access to formal and informal education

Key Promise 3: Education for all, knowledge and skill development for specific population groups, enable individuals to make appropriate choices for HIV/AIDS prevention

Means of Acceleration 3: Scale-up participatory HIV prevention initiatives targeting young people.

Increase school enrolment and retention of pupils in schools, especially the girl child.

Priority Area 4: Leadership and political commitment are critical in HIV prevention.

Objective 4: To increase the involvement of leaders in HIV/AIDS action.

Key Promise 4: Committed leadership shall ensure improved resource mobilization and community action for HIV prevention.

Means of Acceleration 4:

Intensify advocacy to enlist high level political commitment and support.

Intensify mobilization of diverse leaders eg sport, media, traditional authorities, private sector

Priority Area 5: Accurate information and adequate skills about HIV/AIDS prevention methods and techniques are fundamental in the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Objective 5: To enhance knowledge and skills relating to various methods on HIV prevention for diverse population groups.

Key Promise 5: People with appropriate knowledge and skills on prevention methods are able to make positive choices to HIV prevention.

Means of Acceleration 5: Increase involvement of the mass media

Scale-up community level interventions

Match messages with services eg VCT, PMTCT and condoms

Intensify involvement of PLWHA

Scale-up peer education and other interactive methods

Use door-to-door approach

Priority Area 6: Misconceptions, rumours, beliefs and negative practices grossly hinder prevention of HIV.

Objective 6: To proactively provide accurate information and facts to facilitate positive choices for HIV prevention.

Key Promise 6: People with adequate and accurate information and skills are more likely to avoid negative behaviors that expose them to HIV infection.

Means of Acceleration 6: Scale-up initiatives that address stigma and discrimination

Develop a plan for addressing misconceptions and negative practices according to specific circumstances.

Priority Area 7: People Living with HIV/AIDS can make significant contribution for HIV prevention

Objective 7: To involve People living with HIV/AIDS in the acceleration of prevention.

Key Promise 7: Active participation of people living with HIV/AIDS will give HIV prevention a new face.

Means of Acceleration 7: Increase the participation of People Living with HIV/AIDS in prevention initiatives.

Priority Area 8: A national communication plan is essential for acceleration of HIV prevention.

Objective 8: To establish a national initiative for acceleration of HIV prevention as part of the national acceleration plan.

Key Promise 8: Mobilise institutions, resources and guide implementation of the communication component of the national acceleration plan.

Means of Acceleration 8: A plan of action, a budget, a mechanism for coordination,

Priority Area 9: Use of operational research findings, documentation and sharing of best practices are essential for guiding the acceleration of HIV prevention process.

Objective 9: To promote use of research findings and experiences to guide and improve the acceleration process

Key Promise 9: Use of research findings and lessons learnt to determine effective ways shall lead to acceleration of HIV prevention.

Means of Acceleration 9:

Increase documentation

Information exchange and experience sharing

Guidelines for the HIV prevention acceleration initiative

Priority Area 10: Guidelines are necessary for determining key issues, strategies and actors for various acceleration interventions.

Objective 10: To use existing and new guidelines to prioritise and focus interventions of the HIV prevention Acceleration initiative.

Key Promise 10: Use of guidelines shall facilitate multi-sectoral and inter-agency collaboration in support of the Acceleration initiative.

Means of Acceleration 10: Adaptation and use of WHO Health sector guidelines

Mobilisation of relevant agencies to identify/develop other guidelines as appropriate eg for education, poverty reduction, gender