



National Response

HIV/AIDS has had a devastating impact on other countries in comparable circumstances to Timor-Leste. Among Timor-Leste's nearest neighbors, Papua New Guinea appears to be in the early stages of a generalized HIV epidemic that threatens to not only halt, but also reverse the development achievements the nation has made in its relatively short history. Many of the circumstances that have led to the current HIV situation in Papua New Guinea are also present in Timor-Leste, including large-scale social dislocation and high levels of HIV-related risk.

In 2002 a National HIV/AIDS/STI Strategic Plan (2002–2005) was adopted. In the period since, Timor-Leste has adopted and implemented strategies, policies, programs, and projects to address HIV/AIDS. However, among key stakeholders, it is generally accepted that while many effective activities have been implemented, overall coordination is weak, and important gaps exist. Knowledge about HIV/AIDS across the general population remains low, the level of unsafe sex practices is high, and STI rates are also high.

In mid-2005, the Ministry of Health, with support from UN Agencies and key civil society organizations, initiated a process to review the National HIV/AIDS/STI Strategic Plan (2002–2005) and develop a new national strategic plan to cover the period 2006–2010. The new National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS/STIs 2006–2010 was approved by the Council of Ministers in August 2006. The goal is “to maintain Timor-Leste as a low prevalence HIV nation and minimize the adverse consequences for those infected with HIV.” Four program components were identified:

- Prevention and education targeting the population in general and more specifically most-at-risk groups (MARGs), which include MSM, FSW, clients of sex workers, people in uniform, and young people;
- Voluntary counseling and testing targeting MARGs and PMTCT; and
- Clinical services: ensure availability of antiretroviral treatment to all diagnosed people; develop policies, protocols, and procedures to all aspect of patient management; STI treatment services; procurement and supply of drugs and other commodities; and blood safety.

A key part of the national strategy is the establishment of the National AIDS Commission, to provide independent advice to the Government of Timor-Leste on all matters related to HIV/AIDS and to monitor and advise on the progress in implementation of the National Strategic Program.

In 2006, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria approved a fifth-round grant for Timor-Leste to scale up the national response to HIV/AIDS through the delivery of services and information to at-risk populations and people living with HIV/AIDS. The grant was signed in December 2006 and now is on quarter three implementation. Assessment reports show good performance in relation to targets settled for quarter 1 and quarter 2.

USAID Support

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programs in Timor-Leste are implemented in partnership with the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The Emergency Plan is the largest commitment ever by any nation for an international health initiative dedicated to a single disease – a five-year, \$15 billion, multifaceted approach to combating the disease in more than 114 countries around the world. To date, the U.S. has committed \$18.8 billion to the fight against the global HIV/AIDS pandemic, exceeding its original commitment of \$15 billion over five years.

Prior to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria grant for Timor-Leste to scale up the national response to HIV/AIDS, from 2003 to 2006, USAID supported the development of Timor-Leste's first National HIV/AIDS program. It was the first and only project about HIV/AIDS in the entire country from 2003 to 2006. Below are the main achievements of the project:

- Policy: provided support to the government to develop appropriate health policies and systems.
- Research: qualitative assessment of the response of social and political institutions. One key result was the inauguration of the National AIDS Council in 2003, to champion the needs of the AIDS program; mapping the communities considered to be in higher risk; MSM and FSW; collecting valuable data on the behavior of risk groups in Timor-Leste: MSM, FSW, military personnel, students and taxi drivers.
- Prevention activities: supporting Timor-Leste social codes, which encourage abstinence and fidelity; providing precisely targeted, evidence-based behavior change communications; and providing condoms to those at risk of HIV/STIs.

- Services: in partnership with the government, nongovernmental organizations, faith-based organizations, and private sector, including USAID-supported Cooperativa Café Timor Clinics, established HIV testing, counseling, treatment and care services.

USAID is an active member of the National Country Coordinating Mechanism (NCCM) that oversees all Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria grants in the country. In 2006, USAID provided technical support to the NCCM in order to fulfill additional requirements before signing the Global Fund Round 5 proposal for HIV/AIDS.

Important Links and Contacts

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USAID Websites: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/Countries/ane/easttimor.html

For more information, see http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids

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