



CEPPS/NDI Quarterly Report: January 1 to March 31, 2005

**SOUTHERN AFRICA: STRENGTHENING REGIONAL INFORMATION NETWORKS
OF LEGISLATORS AND LEGISLATURES TO COMBAT HIV/AIDS (03843)**

USAID Cooperative Agreement No. DGC-A-00-01-00004-00

Project dates: August 1, 2003 to December 31, 2004
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I. SUMMARY

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), in partnership with the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF), completed a regional survey of existing national HIV/AIDS plans, policies and legislation in southern Africa. The results of the survey will be shared throughout the region to increase awareness about HIV/AIDS initiatives in each of the SADC countries and to increase and improve national responses to the pandemic.

During this reporting period, NDI disseminated its “Survey of Legislative Efforts to Combat HIV/AIDS” assessment report, and sent 600 copies of the report to the parliaments of the 12 SADC-PF countries in February for distribution to Southern African members of parliament (MPs). Each parliament received 50 copies of the report. As reported during the last quarter, the report was also translated into Portuguese and, during this quarter, the Angolan and Mozambican parliaments received Portuguese-language versions. NDI also disseminated the report to the international donor community, non-profit organizations working on HIV/AIDS and legislators in the United States. In addition, NDI and SADC-PF worked with a web developer, E.com Institute, to design and construct a database web portal featuring HIV/AIDS resources, which has established a prototype portal for the SADC-PF.

II. BACKGROUND

The devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS crisis is being felt across all areas of political, economic, and social life in African countries. The adult prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in the southern Africa region is the highest in the world. According to the UNAIDS 2002 report on the global HIV/AIDS epidemic, seven countries in the region now have prevalence rates higher than 20 percent: Botswana (38.8 percent); Lesotho (31 percent); Namibia (22.3 percent); South Africa

(20.1 percent); Swaziland (33.4 percent); Zambia (21.5 percent); and Zimbabwe (33.7 percent).¹ African governments have attempted to respond to the crisis; at an Organization of African Unity Summit in Nigeria in April 2001, leaders committed to increase their health budgets to 15 percent of government revenue. Although a significant commitment, the increased spending on public health, if even attainable, is insufficient to address all the needs resulting from the crisis.

As HIV/AIDS is not only a matter of public health, but a political, development and security issue, national legislatures are the appropriate body to lead the debate on HIV/AIDS issues and to shape national policies that respond to the crisis. The dramatic impact of the epidemic implies difficult political choices. As venues for debates over public policy issues, legislatures are the natural forum for national dialogues about the impact of HIV/AIDS on economic and political governance. Legislatures are also the institution of government through which citizens can hold their national government accountable for the implementation of policy and the allocation of budgetary resources.

In many of the newly established democracies in southern Africa, political leaders are working to address the HIV/AIDS crisis, but a number of countries still lack adequate legislation, policies, and coordinated responses to the epidemic. Recognizing that the HIV/AIDS pandemic crosses sovereign boundaries, the SADC-PF has begun to promote the role of parliaments in combating HIV/AIDS as one of the Forum's priorities and has been instrumental in establishing HIV/AIDS committees in its member parliaments. At a SADC Parliamentary Forum Plenary Assembly in March 2001, members of parliament from the 12 member states pledged to take a leadership role on the issue and to work with their constituents to develop legislation to tackle the problem and to evaluate the effectiveness of current HIV/AIDS policies. During a strategic planning workshop in February 2002, SADC MPs developed a SADC *Plan of Action* for legislatures to follow in addressing the pandemic. The plan, which was adopted at the Forum's biannual plenary assembly in April 2002, calls for legislators to play a leading role in promoting awareness about the disease and in building consensus to develop cost-effective, sustainable solutions to the challenges HIV/AIDS presents to development. The plan seeks "to raise the profile of the anti-AIDS drive to a regional level so that it becomes a permanent and commonly shared regional agenda."

Within this context, NDI initiated a program designed to strengthen the capacity of the Forum to implement legislation and programs on HIV/AIDS that would be useful to SADC parliamentarians. NDI's objectives for the program are to:

- Conduct a regional assessment to determine the extent of national efforts to combat HIV/AIDS;
- Develop an HIV/AIDS Database to Disseminate the Repository of Information about HIV/AIDS; and
- Establish an HIV/AIDS Network of SADC Parliamentarians to Share Information about HIV/AIDS.

¹ UNAIDS and WHO, Epidemiological Fact Sheets on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases. 2002 Update.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Following the printing of 1,100 copies of the report, (of which 980 were printed in English and 120 in Portuguese) during the last quarter, NDI disseminated a total of 600 copies to the parliaments of the 12 SADC countries in February. Each parliament in the 12-country SADC region (Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania Zambia and Zimbabwe) received 50 copies of the report. The Angolan and Mozambican parliaments received Portuguese-language versions of the report. NDI also sent approximately 250 copies of the report to USAID and the international and U.S. donor community, HIV/AIDS practitioners, legislators and other policymakers in the United States.

During the last quarter, NDI and SADC-PF identified a highly capable web developer, E.com Institute, a South Africa-based Information Technology company to design the HIV/AIDS database. E.com Institute initiated a database design and completed the portal prototype in December, which the SADC-PF will use to deposit information collected during the survey research on national AIDS policies, legislation and efforts in the region to combat AIDS. The portal, which is now located at: <http://www.sadccitizen.net/aids/index.php>, is also intended to engage members of parliament, civil society, and citizens-at-large on the fight against HIV/AIDS. The web portal provides a space for individuals, with varying interests and backgrounds, to access and exchange information regarding the epidemic.

Lastly, during this quarter, the Institute received a no-cost extension from USAID until February 28, 2005 to ensure that its reports were disseminated using accurate contact information provided by the SADC-PF.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Objective One: Regional Assessment to Determine the Extent of National Efforts to Combat HIV/AIDS

- Building on the printing of the final assessment report completed during the last quarter, NDI disseminated 600 copies to the Parliaments of the 12 SADC countries in February. Each parliament received 50 copies of the report. The Angolan and Mozambican parliaments received Portuguese-language versions of the report. NDI also disseminated approximately 250 copies of the reports to the international donor community, legislators, and other policy-makers in the United States. The report is also available on NDI's online electronic library, *Access Democracy* at www.ndi.org.

Objective Two: Development of a HIV/AIDS Database to Disseminate the Repository of Information about HIV/AIDS

- SADC-PF selected E.com Institute to design and develop an HIV/AIDS database and web portal. NDI contracted with the company, which completed the portal prototype, which will serve as a regional information sharing system about HIV/AIDS, intended to enhance knowledge and awareness of policymakers and interested citizens about best practices in combating HIV/AIDS. The portal features a registry component to

- allow members of parliament and the public to subscribe to mailing lists and communicate via the website at <http://www.sadccitizen.net/aids/index.php>.
- In order to accommodate the multiple language needs of legislators and citizenry in southern Africa, the assessment report became available in both English and Portuguese. The two language versions of the report ensure that greater numbers of people across the region have access to the report and to the recommendations it proposes. Its online availability also facilitates improved accessibility and wider reading coverage.

Objective Three: Establishment of a HIV/AIDS Network of SADC Parliamentarians to Share Information about HIV/AIDS

- The new web portal housed on the SADC-PF website will serve as a primary tool for members of parliament, community leaders, and citizens-at-large to network and share information.

V. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

NDI concluded this program on February 28, 2005. NDI will submit a final report on the program during the next quarter.