



Dr. Nafsiah Mboi Combats Gender Inequity and HIV in Indonesia

NAC Secretary revitalizes the country's national HIV response, advocates for more resources



Dr. Nafsiah Mboi, Secretary of Indonesia's National AIDS Commission

INDONESIA | Together, Indonesia's more than 17,000 far flung islands are three times the size of Texas. This vastness is one of many hurdles facing Dr. Nafsiah Mboi in her quest to stop the spread of HIV and AIDS in her country.

As Secretary of the National AIDS Commission (NAC) in Indonesia, Dr. Mboi knows that the country's HIV response faces multiple challenges. One is the stigma associated with the populations most affected by the epidemic in her country: injecting drug users, sex workers, and men who have sex with men. Another is confronting the gender inequity that leads to women's increased vulnerability to HIV.

The low status of women contributes to the HIV epidemic in Indonesia. Widespread poverty and lack of economic opportunities have driven up the number of women engaged in prostitution in the country, which is fueling the epidemic. In addition, because most women have very little negotiating power in their relationships, they are unable to ask their husbands/ partners who engage in high-risk sexual behavior to use condoms, putting themselves at risk.

Today, as Indonesia's NAC Secretary, Dr. Mboi speaks out—both nationally and internationally—on the consequences of gender inequities and women's increased vulnerability to HIV.

She traces her knowledge of gender equality to her training at CEDPA, back in 1982.

Thinking back to her participation in CEDPA's Supervision and Evaluation workshop in Washington, DC, she remembers that "the whole concept of gender was new to us."

At the time, she was a pediatrician and a governor's wife, and in charge of the women's organizations in Indonesia's Nusa Tenggara Timur Province. She was in a position to put new gender and management approaches into practice.

Later, as director of Gender and Women's Health at the World Health Organization in the late 1990s, she catalyzed efforts to formulate a gender and health policy.

“We need more women leaders in the fight against HIV.”

- Dr. Nafsiah Mboi

As she thinks about gender challenges to slowing the spread of HIV, she has quoted the philosopher Goethe’s words: “Knowing is not enough, we must apply. Willing is not enough, we must do.”

Now she is in the position to do just that. Since her appointment as Secretary of the NAC in July 2006, Dr. Mboi has revitalized the role of the commission—not an easy feat in a country where decentralization has put key health policy decisions in the hands of local provincial authorities. Due in large part to her efforts, the NAC has assumed a position of leadership in Indonesia’s response to the epidemic.

When Dr. Mboi first came to the NAC, Indonesia’s national response was outlined in a National HIV/AIDS Strategy (2003–2007). The strategy included no reference to implementation strategies or targets, no action plan, and no estimate of the resources needed to implement the strategy. Under Dr. Mboi’s direction, the NAC developed a new National Strategic Action Plan (2007–2010). Dr. Mboi then turned to the USAID | Health Policy Initiative, requesting assistance in estimating the resource needs of the NAC’s new plan.

The project worked closely with the NAC’s costing team to build their capacity to successfully customize the Resource Needs Model to provide accurate estimates of the resources needed to implement the Action Plan. The RNM application revealed that implementing the Action Plan would require approximately US \$98.4 million in 2007 alone. The costed Action Plan is an important advocacy tool for the NAC to mobilize resources and guide program implementation at the national and provincial levels. Dr. Mboi has presented the results of the analysis at national meetings to advocate for increased resources for HIV and AIDS.

In her role, Dr. Mboi occasionally finds herself a lone voice, particularly on gender issues, but she sees positive signs of change and greater understanding among the younger generations. Yet, she still believes that “We need more women leaders in the fight against HIV.”

Reflecting on the progress that has been made and the challenges that lie ahead, Dr. Mboi sees hope in women’s leadership programs like those funded by USAID and implemented by CEDPA. “We need more programs like that in our region,” she notes.