

- Try to keep a positive attitude. Feeling good is part of being healthy.
- Do light exercise. Choose a form of exercise that you enjoy.
- Find support and get good advice. Ask for information and assistance from health workers. Many of your medical problems can be treated.
- Ask for help and accept help when it is offered.
- Stop smoking. Smoking damages the lungs and makes it easier for infections to attack your body.
- Excessive amount of alcohol is harmful to your body. You may forget to practice safe sex.
- Avoid the intake of unnecessary medicines. They often have unwanted side effects and can interfere with food and nutrition. If you do take medicines, read the instructions carefully.

How does stigma and discrimination fuel the epidemic?

Due to the fear of stigma and discrimination many people deny there is a problem. People may not acknowledge or disclose their status which can result in:

- The epidemic remaining largely invisible and continuing to spread invisibly.
- Giving people an artificial sense of security, thereby encouraging them to take risks and not protect themselves.
- People infected by HIV not receiving medical treatment, nor changing their behaviour in order to prolong their life, and consequently, they may become re-infected deteriorating their health even further.

**Box 5: Take Control, Know the Facts  
The 3X5 Initiative**

To deliver on the international commitment of reaching the ultimate goal of universal access to antiretroviral therapy for those in need of care, the 3X5 Initiative envisages three million people with access to antiretroviral therapy [ARVs] by the end of 2005. Under this plan, Lesotho should provide over 28,000 people with ARVs by the end of 2005. This is a joint initiative by UN-AIDS and WHO involving all UN Agencies.

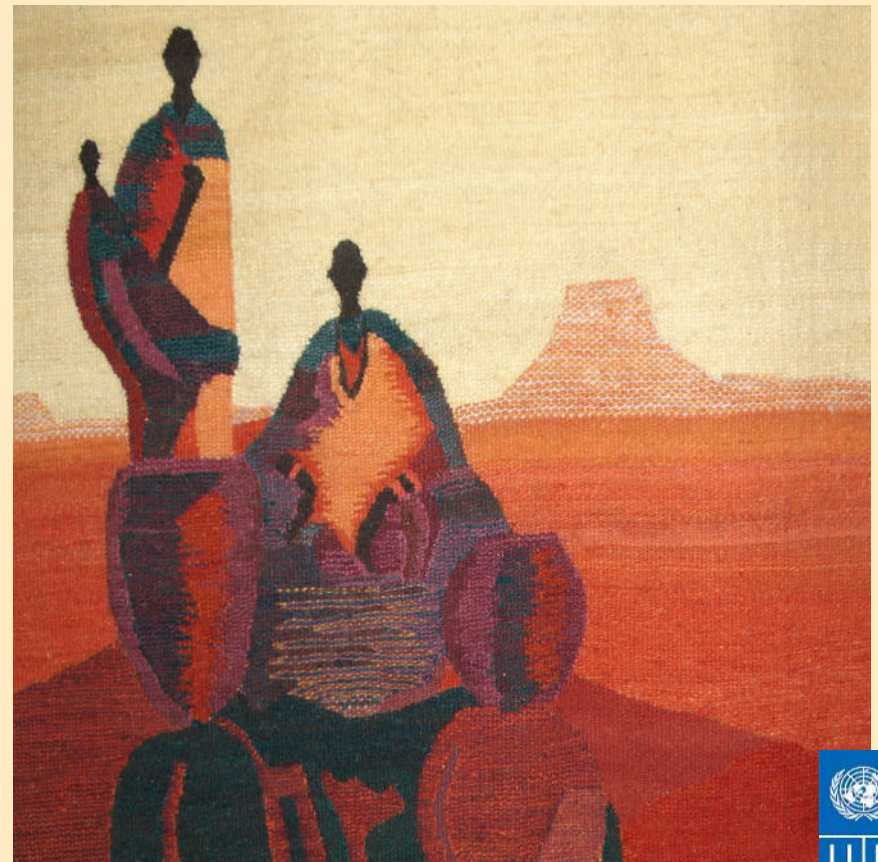


Parliament of Lesotho



British High Commission

# THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN THE NATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE HIV & AIDS PANDEMIC



According to the 2004 UNAIDS Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic, it is estimated that 29% of Basotho between the age of 15 and 49 are infected with HIV & AIDS, making Lesotho the country with the third highest prevalence in the world.

How can we, as democratically elected Parliamentarians and leaders of the country, support the National Strategies developed for Scaling Up the National Response to the HIV & AIDS pandemic in Lesotho, and work toward the goal of being able to manage and revert the epidemic?

## Know the Facts about HIV & AIDS:

### Box 1: Take Control, Know the Facts

#### What is HIV & AIDS?

Being HIV+ is not an automatic death sentence.

Many people think being HIV positive means you have AIDS, but HIV infection and AIDS are not the same.

#### HIV is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus

HIV is transmitted through bodily fluids – blood, semen and vaginal fluids. Once inside a person, the virus lives in cells in the body's immune system that are used to fight infections, CD4 cells. The virus replicates inside these cells and destroys them. CD4 cells are vital as they coordinate the body's immune system, protecting us from illness. As the amount of HIV in the body increases, the number of CD4 cells decreases, further weakening the immune system.

#### AIDS is the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

Over time, as HIV weakens the immune system, a person with HIV develops a number of diseases that the body would normally be able to fight off, known as Opportunistic Infections (OI). When a person's immune system has deteriorated so that they start becoming ill with life-threatening and often unusual illnesses, they are said to have AIDS.

#### Take Control and Manage the Disease

We know that HIV cannot be cured but people can be treated for the infections they develop and the disease can be managed. People with HIV can therefore live long and productive lives. How can they do this? We know that people can lengthen the progression of the disease from HIV to AIDS by taking precautions such as: ensuring an adequate well balanced diet; avoiding stress; avoiding reinfection; making regular visits to their local clinic; exercising on a regular basis.

## Questions and Answers

### Why is Leadership important in fighting HIV & AIDS?

Decisive action by political leaders is the critical factor in halting the spread of HIV & AIDS – as seen in Brazil, Thailand and Uganda and from the experience of halting the outbreak of SARS in Asia.

### How it can be prevented?

HIV can only be transmitted to another person through fluid -contact, as blood, semen, and vaginal fluid. To prevent being infected one therefore has to:

- Practise safe sex: Correct usage of condoms
- Avoid any direct contact with infected blood: Do not share razors, needles or any other instrument that has been in direct contact with blood or exposed to such contact.
- If you have to receive a blood transmission, ask for certified checked blood to be used

### MTCT – Mother-To-Child-Transmission.

If you as a mother are infected with HIV you can infect your child during pregnancy, labour, delivery or after the child's birth through breastfeeding. In order to limit the chances of transmitting the virus consult a doctor concerning the possible use of Nevirapine, special attention during labour, and avoiding of breastfeeding.

### How can HIV be managed through testing, treatment and care?

If infected by the HIV virus, you can maximise your quality of life and prolong the time it takes for HIV to reach AIDS by regularly visiting a doctor to check the development of the virus and receiving continuously adjusted treatment and care.

### Did you know HIV & AIDS is not an automatic death sentence?

Even though infected by HIV you can still live a long and productive life. You can maximise the length and the quality of your life by medical treatments as well as the way you live:

- The body needs extra rest. Try to sleep for eight hours every night. Rest whenever you are tired.
- Eat a healthy, balanced and nutritious diet.
- Try not to worry too much. Stress can decrease the effectiveness of your immune system. Relax more. Relax with people you love, your family, your children and your friends. Do things you enjoy, listen to music or read a newspaper or a book.



Monitoring the efficient use of resources and the effective implementation of policies, programmes and legislation:

A) Costing: analyze the budget through an HIV & AIDS lens – ensure that budgets and economic policies address the needs in order to follow up on National Strategies developed for Scaling Up the National Response to the HIV & AIDS pandemic in Lesotho.

#### HIV & AIDS Analysis of Expenditures

##### Step 1: Situation Analysis

Study key documents, data and national strategies on HIV & AIDS in Lesotho and identify their recommendations, both immediate and long-term. Detailed and complementary data can be found in line ministries, statistical departments and international reports.

##### Step 2: HIV & AIDS Analysis of Sector Policy

Examine sector policy and programme documents to see whether they address the HIV & AIDS issues identified under Step 1. Is the Scaling Up effective?

##### Step 3: HIV & AIDS Analysis of Budget Allocation

To what extent does any policy and strategy commitment that addresses HIV & AIDS concerns match allocation from the budget? Does the Government do what it says it is going to do? Do the allocations address the HIV & AIDS issues identified under Step 1?

B) Regularly review progress made and emerging needs.

For example:

Request regular reports from the Executives on the impact from programmes related to HIV & AIDS

Regularly review progress made towards the 3x5 initiative

Regularly review progress made towards the MDGs



Ensure that HIV & AIDS policies in national plans and priorities filter down and are implemented in community plans and strategies:

- Ensure that periodic reports and evaluations are undertaken to map and estimate the existence and development of appropriate services at the community level.
- Reflect community action plans in national policy decisions.

#### Box 2: Take Control, Know the Facts

What are Anti-retrovirals (ARVs)? How do they fight HIV?

Anti-retroviral medicines (ARVs) suppress the replication of HIV by obstructing the building blocks HIV uses to replicate itself. This allows the immune system to regain its strength and combat Opportunistic Infections.

ARVs prolong and improve the quality of life of a person with HIV. It is not a cure for HIV and must be taken for life. Once you start taking ARVs, you should not stop unless indicated by a doctor who need to prescribe a different set of antiretroviral medicines for you.

The decision to start ART is usually guided by the CD4 cell count (indicating the strength of the immune system) and the viral load (indicating the amount of HIV in the body). A health worker will take a blood sample and send it to a laboratory for testing.

As the amount of HIV in blood increases, the number of CD4 cells decreases. ARVs prevent the virus from multiplying, thereby decreasing the viral load. This allows the CD4 cells to increase and the body's immune system to recover. CD4 counts and viral loads need to be measured regularly while you are taking ARVs to monitor your progress and ensure that the medication is effective.

#### Box 3: Take Control, Know the Facts

Why are Anti-Retrovirals (ARVs) important?

- ARVs can prolong lives, changing HIV & AIDS from a death sentence to a chronic disease.
- ARVs as part of a prevention plan can significantly reduce HIV transmission by lowering the viral load of a person living with HIV.
- ARVs can reduce the overall health care costs by reducing the number of Opportunistic Infections and increase quality of life by improving health.
- ARVs can help people get back to work and remain productive members of our community.
- ARVs help to change attitudes towards HIV by making it a disease to be managed and treated.

#### Box 4: Take Control, Know the Facts What is a CD4 count?

The CD4 count gives us crucial information on the strength of the immune system in our body. The CD4 cells are 'helper cells' that coordinate the body's response in fighting micro-organisms such as viruses. They work with the immune system to destroy infected cells in the body.

HIV infects CD4 cells, thereby destroying the body's immune response to the infection. The CD4 count is a reflection of how many CD4 cells are circulating in the blood. When the CD4 count is low, the virus is able to replicate and infect even more cells.

- Normal values: Varies but is usually 600-1200 in a healthy adult.
- Less than 350: Your immune system is somewhat weakened and your doctor may consider starting HIV medications.
- Less than 200: You are at risk for developing Opportunistic Infections. Your doctor will start medications to help prevent these infections.



#### Be a role model!

- Know your own status.
- Promote and advocate the 'Know Your Status Campaign'.
- If you or your immediate family is affected by HIV & AIDS, be open about it! If the leaders of the country take the lead in this, it will help de-stigmatize being HIV and AIDS positive.
- Practice safe sex!
- Take the initiative and engage yourself in activities that respond to the HIV & AIDS crisis within your constituency.
- Encourage and support initiatives and activities in your constituency that contribute to the response to the HIV & AIDS epidemic.
- Show compassion and solidarity.



#### Legislation

Within a Human Rights framework, enact and reform laws and policies that:

- strengthen HIV & AIDS prevention.
- protect those most vulnerable to HIV & AIDS.
- improve support for those living with or affected by HIV & AIDS.
- eliminate all forms of discrimination against People Living With HIV & AIDS (PLWHA) including gender bias.

- Push for the reform of laws that contradict HIV & AIDS support and treatment (for example, laws that make it taxable to receive free ARVs from employers).
- As part of a comprehensive national strategy, detail the responsibilities of key ministries, such as Finance, Health, Education, Labour and Justice.
- Push for special attention to be paid to vulnerable groups and minorities such as orphans, handicapped people and prisoners.

#### Budget and Resource Allocations



- Give priority to HIV & AIDS related allocations.
- Regularly review budgetary and human resource allocations to HIV & AIDS programmes and interventions, including the implementation of Parliament's stipulation that 2% of the national and sectoral budgets should be allocated to HIV & AIDS programmes.
- Promote adequate resource allocation for the Government's Mother-To-Child-Transmission (MTCT) Programme and regularly review its implementation.
- Promote that adequate resources are made available for comprehensive treatment and care programmes, including Home Based Care (HBC).
- Engage with SADC pharmaceutical companies and donor countries to provide assistance for HIV & AIDS treatment and care, including reducing the cost of ARV treatment and drugs for opportunistic infections.
- Promote that adequate resources are made available to sectors to proactively respond to the impact of HIV & AIDS.
- Promote that HIV & AIDS allocations and their impact reaches the entire nation promote.
- Remember that budget scrutiny is enhanced by continuous review!

