



Synopsis

This programme has sought to challenge the complacency towards HIV and AIDS that exists in many countries with low HIV prevalence. The Programme's rights-based approach prioritises the leadership roles of a wide range of stakeholders including the meaningful involvement and empowerment of people living with HIV and AIDS. The main aim of this programme is to create a self-sustaining model for upstream policy advocacy and downstream pilot interventions.

Objective

To strengthen the Lao PDR's National Response to HIV and AIDS.

Brief Description

Within the complex socio-economic milieu of South East Asia, the causes and consequences of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in the region are closely linked and rooted in development challenges such as poverty, unemployment, gender inequality and social marginalisation. Experience has shown that in order to develop effective policy and programme responses to the epidemic, a multi-sectoral perspective needs to be adopted in addition to a public health approach. Since the atmosphere of fear, denial, stigma and discrimination fuels the HIV epidemic, a range of issues from social, cultural, and psychological to economic, need to be addressed.

Although the official incidence of HIV and AIDS remains low in the Lao PDR, the steady increase of population mobility, tourism, urbanisation and seasonal migration between neighbouring countries with a high and growing HIV incidence, makes Lao particularly vulnerable to the epidemic.

This project seeks to enhance of Lao PDR's national response to HIV and AIDS through:

- Mainstreaming and integrating responses on HIV in different line Ministries through multi-sectoral working groups and interaction platforms;
- Ensuring greater involvement of people living with HIV and AIDS (GIPA);
- Developing partnerships, by bringing organizations of people living with HIV and AIDS and the government together for more meaningful involvement of PLWHA; and,

- Developing and implementing an effective advocacy and communications strategy at national and provincial government levels across various line Ministries.

The 'Leadership for Results', a component of the Multi-Sectoral Programme on HIV and AIDS, seeks to strengthen the HIV and AIDS responses currently undertaken at the national level by building leadership capacity and organisational effectiveness among leaders, decision-makers and opinion-leaders, who will lead these responses. The programme aims to develop networks of innovative leaders from all sectors and sections of society who can work together to create a response that is nation-wide, multi-sectoral and sensitive to the needs of those infected and affected.

One of the main value added contributions of this programme is that it seeks complementarity while avoiding duplication of activities undertaken at the grassroots level by other stakeholders, including the government and development agencies. This will be achieved mainly through a sharp and strategic focus on upstream advocacy and capacity enhancement of leaders and champions.

Lessons Learnt and Replicability

National Ownership: This project is nationally executed by the National Committee for the Control of AIDS (NCCA), which is a multisectoral body, comprising of representatives from key line Ministries, including Education, Agriculture, Labour, Health, Information, Infrastructure, etc. NCCA and its Bureau (NCCAB) have been at the forefront of formulating and implementing the project and lobbying for its approval from appropriate government sources.

The Right People: In order to adopt a truly developmental approach to HIV and AIDS - as opposed to a health-oriented focus, concerted efforts have been made to ensure that a wide range of stakeholders from various line Ministries are involved at all stages, from planning and implementation, to evaluation of the project. Positioning its mandate within a rights-based perspective, the meaningful involvement and empowerment of people living with HIV and AIDS were also critical to the success of project. To date, this is ensured not only through the articulation of a specific component on GIPA, which



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involves the recruitment and capacity development of local UNVs who are infected or affected by HIV and AIDS, but also through the central role accorded to PLWHA groups during the implementation of the 'Leadership for Results' training for key decision-makers. The involvement of the media, civil society organizations and religious leaders has also ensured a broad base for sustained advocacy and potential transformation in attitudes and behaviours.

Personal Commitment: The basic premise of the leadership programme rests on the creation of a new generation of leaders who are personally committed to the cause of reversing the spread of HIV and AIDS. The added value of this approach is that the programme and its various tools and exercises, focus on fostering personal commitment and sustained action as a means to address the structural issues surrounding HIV and AIDS, such as stigma and discrimination.

Innovative Approach: In the Lao context, the policy-makers have particularly welcomed the programme's innovative approach to leadership and transformative methodologies, which allows the participants to analyse their own attitudes and norms and to use that knowledge to reach out within their own constituencies in order to develop sustainable breakthrough initiatives. As HIV issues have not been adequately discussed within Lao society previously, this programme offered an appropriate platform for key stakeholders to respond to the additional challenges, resulting from silence and denial.

During the organization of the 'Leadership for Results' series, key UN and donor agencies, which included UNFPA, WHO, UNICEF, UNAIDS, ADB and JICA, ensured that their senior representatives participated over the entire duration of the workshop. There was great appreciation for the high level platform that UNDP had helped catalyse, which was recognized by all agencies as a major opportunity to discuss significant issues and explore avenues for joint collaboration. For example, UNDP and UNICEF have jointly supported a follow-up 'Leadership Programme on HIV and AIDS for Lao Children and Youth', as part of the Multi-Sectoral Programme on HIV and AIDS.

Replicability: Numerous 'breakthrough initiatives' have evolved from the 'Leadership for Results' workshop. These initiatives are meant to be self-sustaining as they are based on currently available resources and do not rely on additional funds. These initiatives include: the involvement of housewives, through the Ministry of Agriculture, in the Savannakhet Province, where the prevalence rate among women is over 45 per cent and most of the new infections are among housewives; leadership by the Lao Military to promote 100 per cent condom use within their cadres; and the use of television and other types of media, as well as mobile phones to reach the newly emerging vulnerable groups, including youth, sex workers and government officials.

What makes this experience innovative and worth replicating is that the initiatives mutually reinforce the other's start-up. It is envisioned that the successful breakthrough initiatives can be scaled-up at the end of a 12-month period, at which point there would be enough credibility to attract donor support. Such breakthrough initiatives are used by local communities and the Line Ministries in various provinces as catalysts to translate a multi-sectoral response to HIV and AIDS into tangible results.

Project Information

Duration

3 years (2005-2008)

CO Focal Points

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Partners

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Centre for Control of HIV/AIDS/STI (CHAS)

UNAIDS, FAO

MYFF Service Line

Governance of HIV and AIDS Responses