

AIDS in Africa Scenario-building Project Orientation Workshop

Opening Remarks

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Chairperson,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Orientation Workshop of the AIDS in Africa Scenario-building Project. We, at ECA, are most grateful and honored that the Initiating Partners of this Project - UNAIDS, UNDP, ADB, the World Bank, and Shell International - and the Project Steering Committee accepted our humble request to host this first of three workshops.

The collaboration of these many agencies testifies to the compelling urgency of the search for effective and innovative ways to tackle the AIDS problem in Africa.

I acknowledge in particular, the involvement of Shell, a private sector entity, and thank the company for making the expertise of its Global Business Environment Unit available to this project. This could become a model for private/public partnership in addressing many of Africa's health and other development problems.

I also thank the donors for seeing and recognizing the value of this work and for supporting it with generous contributions.

UNAIDS' leadership of the fight against the scourge of AIDS remains exemplary and should be applauded. We at ECA have worked together with UNAIDS in the past and look forward to continued cooperation and collaboration with it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is now a truism that Africa faces a social and economic crisis on an appalling scale due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The details and sources may change each year but the flood of alarming statistics about the progression of HIV/AIDS in our continent remain the same.

More than 28 million people are now infected with HIV/AIDS, and large numbers of Africans are dying as a result of the pandemic: over 20 million Africans have died of AIDS-associated diseases since 1981.

It is also evident that the pandemic is having a devastating impact on the Africa's economic development. Indeed, the continent's growth prospects are increasingly fettered by the burden imposed by HIV/AIDS. In many countries, the per capita GDP growth rate is falling.

The education sector is also seriously affected. The increasing mortality of teachers and decreasing number of school-age children in some countries raise questions of quality and access to education. Specific country examples illustrate the gravity of this problem in the education sector.

- In Central African Republic, for example, 85% of teachers who died between 1996 and 1998 were HIV positive.
- According to Kenya's Teachers Service Commission the annual number of deaths due to HIV/AIDS is approximately the same as retirement figures.

- In Zimbabwe it is estimated that the available teacher labor force will decrease by 3.2% per annum over the period 2000-2010.

This generalized epidemic is also imposing considerable burden on the continent's weak and fragile health infrastructure.

Constrained by inadequate resources the system is collapsing in many countries. Health personnel are over-burdened by the sick, many are dying, and governments are increasingly required to allocate scarce resources.

For many infected and affected by this disease, the psychological consequences are enormous. There is often a loss of sense of self-worth. And unfortunately, the ill-informed stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS often makes life even more difficult and painful for people living with the disease.

Friends,

In our part of the world, community spirit and extended family ties remain very strong. Hence whatever affects an individual affects not only his or her immediate family but also the entire community. In many communities, AIDS is eroding the stock of social capital and weakening, as a consequence, social cohesion.

The epidemic is also influencing life-cycle decisions of individuals. Marriage decisions as well as the decision to seek care, for example, are now increasingly influenced by HIV/AIDS.

None among us can afford to be indifferent to this very depressing situation. We simply have to aggressively rise to the challenge presented by HIV/AIDS.

I am indeed proud that African societies have not raised their hands above their heads, to surrender to the epidemic. Efforts continue to be made in the continent to tackle the HIV/AIDS pandemic. All sectors of society - civil society, students, and national leaders - are increasingly involved.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You are aware of the ECA-organized African Development Forum of 2000 (ADF2000) under the theme "AIDS - the Greatest Leadership Challenge". ADF 2000 helped develop a Consensus on the series of actions needed to stem the spread of the diseases. The Consensus has since being advanced by the Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, TB and Other Related Infectious Diseases as well as the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV-AIDS Declaration.

You are also aware, of the "New Partnership for Africa's Development" (NEPAD). NEPAD gives expression to and invests with life the many commitments of African governments to improve the lives of our people, especially to reduce poverty by 2015. Success in this war on poverty is contingent upon a healthy population as people are the most important resource for growth and development.

We are compelled to think boldly in our search for innovative ways, instruments and tools to combat the disease. The Scenario-building project is one such innovative way. You, the participants, are tasked to build scenarios of the future of AIDS in our continent informed by your understanding of the course of the epidemic and the factors driving its spread. This is an enormous task and the scenarios you build, will be important instruments for advocacy, for policy development and for promoting new ideas and programs of action to fight AIDS.

We at the ECA are contributing to the fight against AIDS according to our comparative advantage. In that regard, following the UN Secretary-General's recently announced Commission on HIV/AIDS and Governance in Africa (CHGA), the Secretariat is here at ECA, and the Executive Secretary, Mr Amoako will Chair the Commission.

Research conducted by CHGA clusters will examine the relationship between HIV/AIDS and security, food security, macroeconomic performance, and others. We at the ECA see enormous complementarities between CHGA and the Scenario-building project, and some of the products of this project would be of value to the work of CHGA clusters.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude by sharing with you my vision of Africa. My vision is an Africa free of HIV/AIDS and the other diseases of poverty. It is a vision of a continent where parents do not bury their children, where grandparents are not recalled from retirement to provide care to grandchildren orphaned as a result of the pandemic. It is a vision of life in Africa that is neither circumscribed by poor health nor by poverty.

I believe these to be your vision too.

Should the scenarios that you build, contribute to the actualization of this shared vision of ours, then you would have justified the confidence of the organizers in you and made an important contribution to the development of this continent.

I wish you a very successful workshop.

Thank you.
