

Global AIDS Technical Assistance Program—Country Profile

BOTSWANA

HIV/AIDS IN BOTSWANA

Botswana is an independent landlocked country located in Southern Africa with a population of an estimated 1.6 million. Half of its population lives in urban areas. Forty-nine percent of Botswana's population is aged 15-49 years old. While the annual per capita income is US \$3300, amongst the highest in the region, 47 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.

The first case of AIDS in Botswana was reported in 1985, leading up to one of the highest rates of HIV infection in the world. In 2003, the highest age-specific HIV prevalence was observed among those aged 25-29 years. The rate of infection among older age groups is on the rise, while the prevalence among 15-19 year olds has remained fairly stable, ranging from 21 to 23 percent between 2002 and 2003. There are currently 275,336 Botswana between the ages of 15 and 49 living with HIV/AIDS. Life expectancy is only 39 years, while it would have been 72 if it were not for AIDS.¹ The rate of reported tuberculosis cases has increased steadily between 1991 and 2002, with an increase of 100 percent over that time. Tuberculosis rates in Botswana are among the world's highest, as HIV-positive individuals develop the infection more easily than others due to their weakened immune systems.

Overall, Botswana maintains an HIV prevalence rate of 36.5%, the second highest in the world after Swaziland. Efforts to curb the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Botswana began in 1987, focusing mainly on the screening of blood to reduce transmission through blood transfusions. During the period of 1989-97, the first Medium Term Plan was developed which focused on information, education, and communication programs. In 1993, the Government of Botswana adopted the Botswana National Policy on AIDS. Education, prevention, and comprehensive care including the provision of antiretroviral treatment followed during the years of 1997-2002 (formation of Medium Term Plan II) in hopes to reduce

the impact of HIV/AIDS throughout the country. Botswana is the first African country to provide antiretroviral therapy (beginning in Gaborone in 2002) to citizens on a national level with scale-up currently underway to include additional cities, hospitals, and clinics.

The National AIDS Coordinating Agency (NACA) was formed in 1999² by a cabinet directive under the Office of the President and is charged with coordinating and facilitating the nation's response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. NACA, in conjunction with numerous domestic and international partners, is leading efforts to provide public education and awareness, education for young people, condom distribution, voluntary counseling and testing, and antiretroviral therapy, while targeting highly mobile populations, reducing stigma, training health care workers, and preventing further mother to child transmission. Under the leadership of NACA, Botswana is currently launching a routine HIV testing initiative to identify and support additional HIV infected individuals through treatment and care programs.

The Botswana and USA (BOTUSA) Project is a collaboration between the Government of Botswana and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The BOTUSA Project provides technical assistance, consultation and funding, implements programs, and conducts research with the Government of Botswana and other local and international partners for prevention, care, support, and surveillance activities related to HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted diseases.

NASTAD'S ROLE

The National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) represents the United States' chief state and territorial health department program directors responsible for coordinating, administering, and managing HIV prevention, care, and support services. AIDS directors are experienced in creating functional

policy, communication, and programmatic links among local, state, and national-level AIDS programs and other state public health programs. NASTAD's Global AIDS Technical Assistance Program works to share lessons learned by NASTAD members with AIDS program managers facing similar challenges abroad. The NASTAD global program is funded solely by the CDC Global AIDS Program.

ACTIVITIES

In August 2003, NASTAD traveled to Botswana to meet with the Government of Botswana and BOTUSA to delineate a scope of work for NASTAD technical assistance. During this visit, it was decided that NASTAD would provide technical assistance towards an evaluation of a house-to-house outreach program (Total Community Mobilization or TCM) and provide district-level capacity building. TCM evaluation activities were continued in December 2003 when NACA formed a workgroup to begin developing the required protocol and methods. Currently, NASTAD is working with NACA and BOTUSA to complete an initial evaluation of TCM.

A workplan for local-level capacity building in Botswana was formulated by NASTAD, BOTUSA, the Ministry of Local Government (MLG), and NACA in March 2003 for technical assistance in evidence-based planning at the district level. NASTAD works with the District AIDS Coordinators (DACs), Peace Corps Volunteers, and co-chairs of the District Multisectoral AIDS Committees (DMSACs) in four districts identified by NACA and MLG. The objective of NASTAD's initial technical assistance is to build capacity among four DACs to carry out specific district planning responsibilities mandated within NACA's *National Strategic Framework* and *National Operations Plan*. The DACs and DMSACs selected are located in the districts of Ghanzi, Kgatleng, Lobatse and Selebi-Phikwe.

NASTAD hosted six delegates from Botswana in June 2004 to the U.S. The DACs from Lobatse, Selebi Phikwe, Ghanzi and Kgatleng, the District Officer from Lobatse, and one representative from MLG participated in this delegation. Participants visited the health departments of Minnesota and Indiana and attended the national HIV Prevention Leadership Summit in Atlanta. From these visits, the delegates and NASTAD TA providers had the opportunity to discuss in-depth community involvement in the planning process, collaboration and guidance from

national to state and local levels, and coordination of activities at the state level in conjunction with community based organizations and nongovernmental organizations. This discussion included the application of lessons learned from the U.S. study tour to the four districts back home in Botswana.

Through the peer-to-peer relationships that they have built, NASTAD's team of U.S. state AIDS directors are able to share their skills and experience with their Botswana counterparts. This technical assistance improves planning processes and program implementation in four selected districts of Botswana to start, with the intent to scale up in the near future. The NASTAD team may provide additional technical assistance to DACs/DMSACs in the following areas:

- Program monitoring and evaluation
- Public health leadership, group process, and facilitation
- Proposal writing and review
- Intervention models selection and best practices, particularly related to local HIV/AIDS prevention services
- Inventory of existing community resources

The NASTAD team will provide technical assistance through periodic visits to each district, as well as through regular communication by mail, email, and telephone between trips. The team will share examples of materials from U.S. planning processes, offer peer support and guidance, and transfer skills related to program implementation and public health leadership through one-on-one technical assistance and trainings.

As Botswana's President Festus Mogae stated, "We are threatened with extinction. People are dying in chillingly high numbers. It is a crisis of the first magnitude." NASTAD hopes to contribute to the war against HIV/AIDS in Botswana in a very focused and tangible manner.

For more information, please contact Natasha Sakolsky, Director, NASTAD Global AIDS Technical Assistance Program, nsakolsky@nastad.org

¹ USAID (2002) 'Life Expectancy will drop worldwide due to AIDS', Press Release, July 8, www.usaid.gov/press/releases/2002/pr020708.html

² NACA. National AIDS Coordinating Agency. www.naca.bw.