

Global AIDS: A Snapshot

AIDS has become the worst global epidemic in history – and it's still in its infancy. Every day, AIDS kills 8,000 people, and nearly 14,000 become HIV-infected. In some parts of Africa, 35% of all people are HIV-positive. Prevalence rates globally are increasing among women (from 41% in 1997 to 50% in 2002) and youth. In some countries, up to 20% of children will be orphaned because of AIDS. In 2003, it is estimated that 4.8 million people became infected with HIV. And the sober reality is that the epidemic is likely to get much worse before it gets better.

In most of the world, medications to treat HIV/AIDS are simply not available, and prevention programs have just begun. Less than 1% of Africans and 5% of Asians have access to antiretroviral drugs. According to the World Bank, over 95% of youth in Bangladesh do not know a single method of HIV prevention. A Sri Lanka study of 9th graders found that 63% could not name a single mode of HIV transmission and 75% could not identify a single strategy for HIV prevention.

It is becoming alarmingly apparent that AIDS not only affects individuals, families, and communities, but entire countries and regions – national economies, global trade and security, agriculture and manufacturing, health care delivery systems, and more – as well. The cumulative impact of global AIDS is profound, and now affects every corner of the planet, including northeast Ohio.

The Economic Impact of AIDS

The most direct impact of AIDS on local economies around the world is reduced life expectancy due to illness: 51 countries now experience *reduced* life expectancy due to AIDS. When people of productive years die at a younger age, there are five catastrophic effects. First, family savings are reduced, leaving communities more vulnerable. Second, higher employee turnover results in increased labor costs. Third, returns on investment in higher education and training are reduced. Fourth, intergenerational accumulation of capital and knowledge declines. And fifth, there are fewer workers available to meet the sustenance needs of sick family and community members.

The combined impact is enormous: it is estimated that Africa's economy as a whole has declined by *10% percent in less than two decades* as a result of increased adult mortality caused by the AIDS crisis.

As families' discretionary spending is curtailed, national governments are further affected as a result of reductions in tax revenue and economic growth, and increases in demand for health care and social welfare. Countries most affected will experience developmental delays in other areas as a result of AIDS and redirected resources, such as poverty, education, health care, and orphan care. It's a vicious cycle.

The burden experienced by AIDS-affected governments will be felt internationally. Shrinking markets could reduce investment and increase inflation, further slowing growth and fueling macroeconomic downturn. With 42% of American exports destined for developing countries, AIDS will affect import/export balances. Currently, for example, the gold industry – much of it centered in South Africa – is facing increases in production costs, and it is estimated that the cost of gold will increase by an additional \$4 an ounce by 2012 solely as a result of increased AIDS-related labor costs in the South African gold industry. That the impact of global AIDS will be felt everywhere, therefore, is not an abstraction: a gold wedding band in the United States will cost more because of the epidemic.

What Can Be Done

Global AIDS Fund
Business Response
State and Local Policymakers
Individual Citizens and Communities
US ASOs

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has teamed up with governments and the private sector to develop recommendations. There are useful tactics to combat global AIDS for private, nonprofit, and government sectors.

Companies that are affected by HIV in their workforce have four reactionary options:

- 1) Invest in HIV prevention programs
- 2) Provide treatment, care, and support to infected employees
- 3) Invest in training new workers and broadening skills
- 4) Alter policies and practices to reduce exposure to AIDS costs

In the United States, most HIV nonprofit work is conducted by AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs). There is growing discussion around the possibility of “twinning.” Twinning involves partnering with an international organization to mutually assist enhancing service delivery. Areas of improvement include: assistance in new program development, support for outreach to new communities, and staff skill development.

Governments should regulate the unjust private sector practices. In addition, trends must be analyzed, both in terms of the epidemic itself and service delivery. Advocacy efforts to slow the global AIDS crisis should increase exponentially.

Ohio's impact, Ohio's response

In addition to economic reasons, Ohio is greatly impacted by global AIDS in two distinct ways. First, the increasing prevalence of AIDS globally affects Ohioans who are HIV-positive. The impact of HIV in developing countries looks much more hopeless than in the U.S. This can be dangerous if AIDS initiatives begin to ignore the crisis domestically. Second, Ohio has seen the devastating impacts of poverty, health care inadequacy, and stagnant economic development. The state has an ethical responsibility to help other nations experiencing similar episodes of need.

Ohio's response must emphasize increased advocacy, for both resources and awareness. This should be undertaken at the local, state, federal, and international levels. Ohio's efforts must be absorbed into a larger, more encompassing endeavor. Global AIDS will not be mitigated until its effects are understood as a barrier to social and economic development, not only for those affected, but for all the world. The response to AIDS, like its perception, must be altered to a holistic and formidable force.

Knowledge from global AIDS initiatives

Americo Miguel is a 27 year-old social worker who recently moved to Cleveland from Angola. He spent many years working to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa. While working in Zimbabwe, Americo visited a village called Nyatso Farm, and partnered with the local health worker to instigate some positive change in the area. During his first tour through the village, Americo thought, “We greeted so many people, heard so many stories, that I was overwhelmed. Every hut had at least one orphan, every home, a recent death.” Clearly the devastation caused by AIDS in Africa is obvious to any visitor. Perhaps more striking, however, is the hopeless state many people affected by HIV are facing. Americo met Rose, only four years old, who had recently been orphaned because of AIDS and was seriously malnourished. “I touched her hand, and wanted to take her away – from everything – to give her another chance. How long would she live with no nutritious food in her diet? With no soap to wash her body? With no money for medication? There were four or five other orphans living with Rose, her aunt, and the family. I wondered what chance they had.”

Lynn Stratford is the Project Officer for UNICEF's HIV/AIDS section. While in her current position, Ms. Stratford has traveled to Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda and Zimbabwe, assessing projects and organizations and speaking with children who have been directly affected by this pandemic. Ms. Stratford provided some interesting recommendations for Americans wishing to mitigate the AIDS crisis. In addition to contributing to existing international AIDS initiatives, Ms. Stratford thinks Americans should, “Be aware of the epidemic, realize that it affects *everyone* including women and children, generously give time and energy, share knowledge, and join networks.” This experienced AIDS advocate also recognizes that AIDS causes systemic international crises. She noted that economic impacts of AIDS are profound, and the subsequent political instability can change a public health issue into a social development threat. “There's a reason AIDS is a national security concern.”

- Every day, AIDS kills 8,000 people and infects 14,000
- In some countries, up to 20% of children will be orphaned because of AIDS
- It is becoming evident that HIV is part of a larger, more systemic public health crisis
- Africa's economy has decreased by ten percent as a result of increased adult mortality
- Advocacy efforts to slow the global AIDS crisis must increase significantly
- "There's a reason AIDS is a national security concern."