Symposium Overview

Meeting the Challenge of HIV/AIDS in South Africa: Exploring Future Strategy and Tactics to Expand the National Response

Rationale and Background:
In addition to the Zuma administration’s progress in scaling-up HIV services in South Africa, an intensified effort will be required to achieve the ambitious targets laid out in the 2007 – 2011 National Strategic Plan and to meet the growing demand for treatment and effective prevention interventions over the next decade. While the government is now providing solid leadership on these issues, significant challenges to mounting such an effort loom. The global economic down-turn means reduced or stagnant bilateral donor support for HIV and AIDS, disputes within the global health community over vertical programming for HIV may threaten resource mobilization efforts, and South Africa’s recession means expanded domestic financing will be difficult. Other challenges include addressing the poor performance of prevention programs intended to reduce incident infections, mounting concerns regarding ART program attrition, and human resource capacity.

In light of the current economic climate and steady growth in global demand for antiretroviral treatment, most health economists project that within five years, middle-income countries will need to take on a much greater share of the financial burden of treatment so that donors can focus on assisting low-income countries. South Africa is moving in this direction, with its Finance Minister recently announcing and increase in allocations for HIV/AIDS. As a hyper-endemic, middle-income country with marked income inequality and the heaviest HIV burden in the world, South Africa will be a bellwether for other countries attempting to achieve self-sufficiency in HIV and AIDS. Since donor assistance too often fails to adequately consider the priorities and plans of the development partner, this symposium intends to incorporate the views and experiences of the largest beneficiary of PEPFAR funds (nearly $1.5 billion to date) into the current U.S. conversation about development assistance for HIV and AIDS. The symposium will provide a forum to review the successes and challenges of the first five years of the South African Operational Plan for Comprehensive HIV and AIDS management and the PEPFAR partnership, as well as to explore strategy and tactics required to mount a robust response over the next decade in South Africa.

Objectives:
− Explore targets, strategies, and tactics for the national HIV program over the next decade
− Estimate the need for foreign assistance for HIV/AIDS over the next decade
− Recommend policy options for maximizing the relationship between PEPFAR and the South African government

Format:
This day-long symposium will include an Experts Session, a Leadership Roundtable and a Keynote Address. The morning Experts Session will consist of five panels devoted to the most pressing challenges to expanding HIV services in South Africa including: prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS; broad-based prevention strategies; expanding ART access and improving retention; building health system capacity; and financing. Expert panelists will attempt to outline the tactics required to achieve the 2011 NSP targets, as well as advise on five and ten year targets and tactics for the national HIV/AIDS programme. Ample time will be scheduled for Q&A following each panel discussion.
Following the midday Keynote Address, the afternoon Leadership Roundtable will feature a panel of provincial and national leaders who will discuss strategy for achieving the 2011 NSP targets, as well as their five and ten year strategic vision for reducing the impact of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. The Leadership Roundtable will be simulcast to an audience of selected CFR members and U.S. officials at the Council on Foreign Relations offices in Washington, DC. The U.S. audience will have the opportunity to watch the Leadership Roundtable and participate in the post-roundtable Q&A.

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