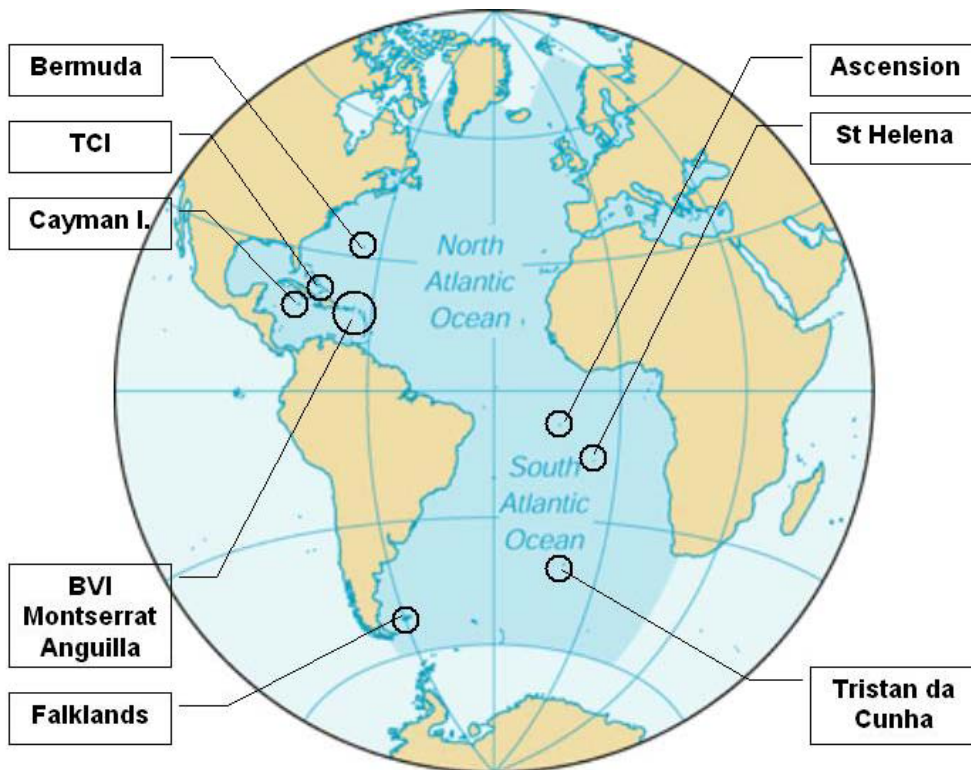


Taking Action against HIV and AIDS in the UK Overseas Territories

The Department for International Development (DFID) UK Overseas Territories HIV and AIDS Project



Background

The DFID UK Overseas Territories (OTs) HIV and AIDS project aims to increase the capacity of national AIDS programmes to take action against HIV/AIDS in Caribbean and South Atlantic UK OTs. The project runs for three years up until February 2011.

It covers six Caribbean OTs (**Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat and Turks & Caicos Islands**) and four South Atlantic OTs (**St Helena, Tristan da Cunha and the Falklands**). This initiative builds upon earlier DFID support to the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC).

Options Consultancy Services (Options) and its Caribbean partner, Associates for International Development (AIDInc), are working with the OTs to strengthen their ability to respond to HIV/AIDS.

The programme

The programme is helping strengthen the organisational and technical capacity of the National AIDS Programme and health/social systems. A combination of technical and management support and skills transfer is aimed at:

- Building up the technical capacity to address local and regional HIV and AIDS issues;
- Building up the organisational capacity to identify, prioritise and contract technical assistance (TA) – and manage and monitor its implementation;
- Improving integration and co-ordination of HIV & AIDS activities, including integration with other donor-funded programmes and regional initiatives;

We give high priority to harmonisation. All TA is provided in close collaboration with National AIDS programmes, social marketing organisations and others addressing HIV and SRHR. This includes the forthcoming EU/PAHO programme.

Two experienced long-term technical advisors are operating in each region, supported by a UK-based Team Leader and a resource group of short-term technical advisors.

Guiding Principles

The approach taken is underpinned by the following principles:

- Prioritising the poorest and most vulnerable;
- An emphasis on evidence-based decision-making;
- Coordination with others in the region to maximise complementarity and avoid duplication;
- Adaptation and responsiveness to individual needs of territories, identifying *appropriate* support for sustainable responses;
- Focus on humanitarian and de-stigmatising policies and practices, mindful of human-rights, gender-rights and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH);
- Building multi-sectoral involvement for better integration – including identification of opportunities for appropriate integration of HIV and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR);
- Ensuring manageable timeframe and cost.



Assessment of the Territories

The initiative is based on a capacity assessment of the ten Overseas Territories which took place between April and August this year. This highlighted a number of priority areas that are being addressed.

Caribbean

Territories have been responding to the HIV epidemic to varying degrees since the first cases were recorded in the region in the early to mid 1980s. Current levels of response vary according to the degree of engagement of leadership over the years - and have generally been severely constrained by lack of resources. Priority areas for the first year include:

Strategic information management

Current systems of data gathering and analysis are insufficient to accurately characterize the epidemic and its drivers in the different territories. This constrains development of appropriate and well-targeted programmes and services – and monitoring of their impact.

Strategic planning

All the Caribbean OTs have strategic HIV plans. These will benefit from improved information management and could be made more specific to current needs. Support for development of costed workplans to guide implementation, is also being provided.

Organisational strengthening

All the Caribbean OTs have recognized a need for multi-sectoral input and have generally been successful in engaging partners. But this could be taken further through formalised multi-sectoral advisory groups.

Addressing these priority areas will facilitate the creation of an enabling environment for addressing a range of important issues including: stigma and discrimination; access to services by Most-At-Risk-Populations (MARPS); linking SRH and HIV services and capacity of NGOs and People Living With HIV and AIDS (PLWHA).

South Atlantic

The South Atlantic OTs currently have no reported cases of HIV and few sexually transmitted infections (STIs). So the focus for this part of the initiative is on HIV prevention as part of a broader sexual and reproductive health (SRH) strategy.

Strategic plans

Leadership on HIV and AIDS varies significantly among the South Atlantic OTs. HIV strategies are not in place - though sporadic activities have addressed some needs (and St. Helena has drafted a plan). The response to date has primarily been clinically reactive.

Capacity

Capacity on HIV is limited across all the islands. Staffing is in place for health and social care - but there are few 'champions' for HIV/AIDS. Surveillance and monitoring mechanisms within the healthcare structure are weak and need to be strengthened across all islands.

Socio-cultural and environmental factors

Underlying factors are key to sexual health and may lead to increased vulnerability of young people to HIV. Issues such as: lack of social venues and activities for young people; early sexual debut; age disparities amongst young people's sexual partners and lack of institutional Sexual and Reproductive Education (SRE) were identified across all South Atlantic Islands.



Priority programme themes

Key common themes include:

- The programme is strengthening management of current surveillance systems; updating skills of key focal persons to maximize the use of current data collection; expanding and strengthening behavioural surveillance; and strengthening analysis of data (with a focus on gender issues).
- Another common theme is migration. All the OTs have either an influx of migrants from other countries or residents who travel and return home to the OT.

Key Caribbean OT themes include:

- This initiative is promoting further multi-sectoral involvement through formalising multi-sectoral advisory groups. TA will be involved in facilitating the development of these bodies.
- We are supporting further development and targeting of existing strategic plans, drawing on improved information management.

Key South Atlantic OT themes include:

- Assistance is structured around HIV prevention as part of broader SRHR strategies.
- Strengthening human rights, reducing stigma and discrimination and improving quality and availability of health information, within broad SRH strategies.
- Providing technical support to identify vulnerability amongst the population and for on-going strategic information management for surveillance and monitoring.
- Raising professional and public awareness - including mass media and condom distribution.

Looking ahead

Once capacity and infrastructure are in place, activities will focus on awareness-raising and access to services. Activities will 'tail off' in Year Three, as services are provided and monitored locally with remote support and assistance by the Technical Advisor.

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