



FHI focus on Timor-Leste

The world's newest nation is one of the poorest countries in the world, addressing substantial challenges in health, education, security and administration. HIV is already present in Timor-Leste and some people have died of AIDS, but recent research shows that the virus has not yet spread widely. Even so, the same research also shows that, in Dili,

FHI's mission in Timor-Leste: to keep HIV prevalence low and to provide care for people already living with HIV and AIDS.

2 herpes, which can contribute to rapid HIV spread and 15% of sex workers and MSM have curable sexual infections such as gonorrhea and chlamydia. Among groups of men who have cash and are frequently away from their families, visits to sex workers are very common. Condom use is extremely low among all groups at risk of HIV infection: not one sex worker consistently uses condoms. Risky sex is the norm among MSM, and 50% of MSM also have sex with women including sex workers, forming a "bridge" between MSM, female sex workers and heterosexual married men and their families.

(see **Focus** page 4)

Strategies and Program Areas

In May 2002, with USAID Economic Support Funds, FHI established the FHI/IMPACT office to provide support to the Government of Timor-Leste in the establishment and implementation of an HIV/AIDS and STI prevention program.

FHI has focused on strengthening the capacity of the government and other stakeholders in their responses to HIV/AIDS and STI. Finding a lack of formal data on HIV and STIs, FHI launched several significant research projects, including the country's first bio-medical assessment of STI and HIV prevalence and associated risk behavior. This has allowed precisely targeted evidence-based programming.

The FHI/IMPACT program has three components. 1) In this low prevalence setting it is vital to focus on prevention of new infections. In Timor-Leste, the IMPACT/FHI program balances its prevention effort between supporting the social values and norms that successfully encourage many people to choose abstinence and fidelity, and, for those who are at risk of STI and HIV, providing access to condoms and STI services. 2) Because some people have already become infected with HIV and AIDS, the program is working with government and other stakeholders to form a public-private sector partnership which will provide a continuum of care. This continuum includes: voluntary counseling and testing of HIV, training doctors in the clinical treatment of opportunistic infection, provision of antiretroviral therapy, and prevention of mother-to-child-transmission. 3) The IMPACT/FHI program provides the government with support for the development of appropriate health policy and systems.

FHI Timor-Leste Makes a Difference

"FHI has turned things around for MSM in Timor-Leste. Before FHI arrived MSM were a shunned vulnerable community with little access to information," says Rui Carvalho, FHI



Program Officer and well known member of the MSM community in Dili.

Working with local NGOs FHI ensures MSM receive information on HIV and STI transmission and prevention. FHI is the first group to support condom distribution targeting MSM.¹

¹ FHI's East Timor HIV/AIDS Support Project: keeping prevalence low. FHI East Timor Fact Sheet. January 2004.

Working with Faith Based Organizations and NGOs

Faith based organizations and NGOs working in HIV/AIDS and STIs in Timor–Leste must find ways to work sensitively, yet effectively, in a conservative Catholic society.

To help them, in 2004 FHI started a monthly coordination meeting of local faith based organizations and NGOs working in the HIV/AIDS and STI field. The forum helps NGOs coordinate their efforts, share and solve programmatic and management challenges, and ensure that they have access to accurate information and quality communication materials.

Through this forum, FHI has is providing:

- grants to eight NGOs and faith based organizations working with Christian groups, students, men who have sex with men, female sex workers and unformed services
- 13 organizations with condoms for free distribution to their target groups
- training in formative research and BCC
- opportunities to visit and learn from highly experienced faith based organizations and NGOs in countries with higher HIV prevalence
- training in proposal writing, budgeting and design of monitoring and evaluation activities.



Faith based organizations play an important role in working in a conservative Catholic society such as Timor–Leste.

A complex, expanding HIV/AIDS program



A balanced approach to prevention

The FHI study suggests that the conservative culture and the predominantly Catholic religion of Timor–Leste play an important role in limiting HIV and sexually transmitted infections—by quite effectively promoting abstinence and fidelity. Yet the same study demonstrates the existence of small yet critically important subgroups among which risk of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STI) is alarmingly high. The people at most risk of HIV and STI are female sex workers (FSW), men who have sex with men (MSM—including men who sell sex), and clients of sex workers. The broader community is at risk because of high levels of extramarital sex among some men, high levels of bisexuality among MSM and low condom use in risky sex, including commercial sex. Through these groups, the broader community is exposed to STI including HIV.

Acknowledging the importance of both approaches—promoting abstinence and fidelity *and* providing people most at risk of STI and HIV with information, condoms and STI services—FHI is supporting local NGOs and faith based organizations to provide a balanced prevention strategy.

To achieve this, two local faith based organizations are receiving technical, managerial and financial support to vigorously promote abstinence and fidelity. Five local NGOs

and one faith based organization are receiving technical, managerial and financial support to prevent an increase in the infection rate by providing carefully targeted behavior change activities for those at most need, along with provision of condoms and non-stigmatizing STI services.

FHI is funding these organizations to provide HIV prevention activities targeting youth, MSM, sex workers, clients of sex workers and the broader community. FHI technical support includes sponsoring visits to Timor-Leste by specialists in research, behavior change communications, monitoring and evaluation, condom social marketing, HIV outreach, and financial management, as well as training in outreach at FHI sister organization in Jakarta. Importantly, the project is working to coordinate the activities of partner NGOs and faith based organizations, to minimize duplication and maximize impact. All activities are carefully designed, and monitored and evaluated.

Developing a continuum of care for people living with HIV and AIDS

In addition, the appearance of AIDS cases from late 2003 has prompted FHI to support MoH in developing a system for providing treatment and care throughout the continuum from infection with HIV to death. With MoH and other partners, FHI has designed an appropriate model for the provision of a continuum of care in the Timor-Leste setting, which we are ready to implement. The project proposes to:

- * Train 16 Clinical staff from four selected clinics (Centro Clinic, Motael Clinic, Café Clinic Timor and Bairo Pite) in advanced STI management. (This training will take place in FHI clinics in Jakarta, where there is a high caseload).
- * Fund the clinics to provide free, non-stigmatizing, high quality services which are particularly attractive to those most at risk of HIV/STI.
- * Train and financially support NGOs and clinics to provide STI outreach services for those people most at risk of HIV who are reluctant to attend clinics (sex workers, for example).
- * Train Clinic staff from selected clinics in Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT).
- * Train Clinic staff from district hospitals around Timor Leste in Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT), and in referring PLHA to clinical services in Dili, if required.
- * Develop appropriate, confidential, systems for transfer of blood and specimens to the national laboratory for examination, and for reporting back to the clinic and to the national reporting system.
- * Provide support for CD4 counts, which may include providing a cytometer machine and training technicians in its use.
- * Train front-line doctors in clinical management of AIDS and opportunistic infections.
- * Provide training and medications for the prevention of mother to child transmission.
- * Train hospital, laboratory, and other health staff in infection prevention.
- * Work with the National Pharmacy to ensure drugs needed for management of AIDS, Opportunistic infections, mother-to-child transmission and home based care are included on the Essential Drugs list.

(see **Continuum**, page 4)



Continuum:

- * Provide financial and technical support to church groups and NGOs to develop support groups, and home-based care for people living with AIDS.

Research and advocacy

The project has completed important work in research and advocacy. These activities were designed and completed in accordance with the National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS 2002–2005.

The project has completed three research pieces: mapping of risk groups, assessment of the political and cultural impediments and opportunities for HIV/AIDS programming, and the behavioral and biological survey. These studies not only produced valuable evidence, they led the development of a Research Ethics Committee in Timor–Leste, strengthened the capacity of several important organizations (East Timor Study Group and National Statistics office), and as part of the STI study directly reduced STI infections among at risk populations by providing free treatment for over three hundred people..

FHI designed and presented to MoH a draft national strategy for behavior change communications which may be incorporated into the Ministry's national plan. FHI was involved in supporting the establishment of the National AIDS Advisory Council. FHI supported the work of several NGOs in World AIDS Day activities, and will support study tours and on–going training opportunities for MoH staff.

FHI Partners: Ministry of Health, National AIDS Advisory Council, Dili General Hospital, National Center for Health Education and Training, UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, UNDP, East Timor Study Group, FDTL (military agencies), Institute of Tropical Medicine of Antwerp, Prince of Wales Hospital, Australia, Indonesia Statistic Bureau, East Timor Women Against Violence and Children Care, Deo Gratias Foundation, JHPIEGO, Café Clinic Timor, Fundacao Hari Timor, Caritas, Christian Children’s Fund, Catholic Church and World Vision.

Focus:

Fortunately, these high levels of risk appear limited to defined populations. In the conservative Catholic culture of Timor–Leste, abstinence and fidelity within marriage or relationship are very common, including among students: this has protected many people from HIV and other STI. Since the current level of HIV infection is very low, Timor–Leste has an opportunity to keep HIV prevalence low by maintaining high levels of abstinence and fidelity, and decreasing risky behavior before the virus ever has a chance to take hold and spread into the general population.

Did you know? Three million people died in 2003 because of AIDS—nearly 8,000 a day.



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The FHI Timor-Leste HIV/AIDS Support Program is supported by USAID



Family Health International was established in 1971 as a private, non–profit organization. Since forming its first AIDS task force in 1986, FHI has pioneered worldwide HIV/AIDS prevention and care efforts. FHI has managed USAID's largest HIV/AIDS projects, including the ongoing (1997–2007) IMPACT (Implementing AIDS Prevention and Care) Project and YouthNet, a global program that is improving reproductive health and preventing HIV/AIDS among young people aged 10 to 24. The **FHI Institute for HIV/AIDS** was formed to bring focus to FHI's leadership in providing an

effective response to the growing needs created by the epidemic. Its work is complemented by the research on HIV prevention and on reproductive health undertaken by **FHI's Institute for Family Health**, based in North Carolina.

The Institute for HIV/AIDS has more than 550 employees and offices in more than 40 countries. Supporters include USAID, DFID, Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, Elton John AIDS Foundation and Bristol–Myers Squibb.

<http://www.fhi.org>