

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases

Fighting HIV/AIDS through healthy living

- Ø *There were 1,794 people living with HIV/AIDS in the Republic of Moldova on July 1, 2003. Of those, 1743 are Moldovan citizens. Out of the 80 persons living with AIDS, 54 have died.*
- Ø *There are 42 million persons living with HIV/AIDS worldwide and 5 million persons were infested in 2002.*
- Ø *The HIV/AIDS epidemic in Moldova spread rapidly in the mid 90s. The epidemic appears to have spread mostly through intravenous drug usage and sexually transmission. Balti, Chisinau and Bender are the locations most affected by the epidemic. Young people are mainly affected by the syndrome: 13% between the ages 15-19, and 32% between the ages 20-24. Sadly, in the last two years has increased the risk of infection of fertile women and the risk of transmitting the infection from mother to foetus. The number of infested women is increasing and 8 children born out of HIV positive mothers have been diagnosed HIV positive.*

When the danger of AIDS emerged, it seemed it would never reach Moldova. We believed it was limited to Africa or America. Olga, a young woman of 23 thought the same. She had dreams like everybody else: to study, to find a good job, to have a family and to have children. She had her whole life ahead. She fell in love and got married to her brother's friend. She took joy in this union. Unfortunately, Olga's parents did not tell her that her brother and his friend were both drug addicts. The wedding was like a fairy tale. After one year the young family moved to Moscow looking for work. In the meantime, Olga's brother died at the age of 22. AIDS ate his body and soul. Olga did not find out the cause of her brother's death. Her life with Lurie was like heaven. At times when they fought Olga would tell herself that it was just his temper that got in the way. After she got pregnant she felt fulfilled.

They were expecting a little girl. Because she had to give birth in Russia, she had to take the HIV triple test. The first two results were negative but the third result was positive. Her happiness crumbled like a sand castle; her husband, a drug addict had infected her. Stories of the past became clearer.

...After the divorce all she thought about was her little girl. She did not want to be pitied. She did not want to be that poor relative on which wealthy family members pour their attention at holidays. She wanted for her and her daughter to lead a normal life. In the last weeks of pregnancy she followed a treatment designed to reduce the risk of infection for the baby. Olga gave birth to a beautiful baby girl but with the stigma of the epidemic. Doctors are currently doing their best to prolong the life of the little girl. Olga doesn't want to accept that her life is ruined. She dreams that her baby girl will go to school and will enjoy the greatest gift of all: life. She doesn't know how long she will live but she is determined to fight with all her strength the merciless disease.

It is true: the sick ones are confronted with more and more difficult issues. The people who have been infected are doomed to live with a disease that is still a mystery. HIV positive children are most of the time not accepted in kindergarten or school. They are marginalized by society, spending more time in hospitals than with their families. The adults are rejected by their own families and most of them do not have incomes because they cannot get jobs. For those living with HIV/AIDS life has other dimensions, oscillating between hope and despair. The diagnosis is a terrible verdict. It is a cruel psychological blow. It doesn't matter if the

person is a drug addict, or an alcoholic, is poor or wealthy. It is important to someone's support. This person is obviously the doctor. It is wonderful when the family of the patient - mother, father, relatives - give their support, told us Dr Ecaterina Rotaru, chief of Infectious Diseases Section at the AIDS Center. AIDS will be combated only when society will show solidarity and be united to fight this disease, the way people act when a fire breaks out. They all jump in with buckets of water. AIDS is not only a medical problem, but a social one. It is related to our education and behavior. We cannot say that we have not registered success in combating the epidemic; the media informs the public, meetings are organized in schools, high schools and universities. It is a continuous process of information and education, but this topic is nevertheless sufficiently debated, added Dr Rotaru.

The National Programme for HIV/STI Prevention in 2001-2005 created a specialized unit that offers medical assistance to HIV positive persons. The specific antiretroviral treatment applied to HIV/AIDS positive patients was possible because of the support of the international organizations (The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, World Bank, and UNAIDS). The approximately USD 15 million loan will be used to accomplish the National Programme for HIV/STI Prevention which defines key priority strategies and the governments policy in this field. This epidemic can spread rapidly if prophylactic measures are not taken. It is very important that the population is informed on preventive measures and the transmission of the epidemic. Young people in schools must be educated to lead a healthy way of life. The state must elaborate a mechanism of social protection for the AIDS patients, believes Dr Iurie Climasevschi, chief of Contagious Diseases Section of the Republican Dermatology-venereal Diseases Clinic.

The government of Moldova is committed to accomplish the Millennium Development Goals and intends to stop the spreading of HIV/AIDS by 2015 and to cease the current trend. The National Programme for HIV/STI Prevention organized training and information sessions for young people, and the project based on the strategy on harm reduction targeting injecting drug users was very successful. Experts believe that this programme could reduce the losses encountered by Moldova in the next years as a result of the temporary incapacity to work of the population and the reduction of life expectancy.

The power is within each of us to decide about our health. There are a number of diseases difficult to control, like cancer and tuberculosis. AIDS is a tragic disease but it can be so easily to prevent. We decide whether we want or not to get it. It all boils down to our behavior, to our education and to our information on this topic. In a joint effort, in ten years time, the Republic of Moldova could prove to the whole world that just as Brazil or Senegal, it can fight AIDS and it can stop this epidemic.

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