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WESTERN HEMISPHERE REGION, INC.

HIV/AIDS/STI Update 2004-2005

Moving beyond its solid foundation of family planning services, IPPF/WHR's work has increasingly supported a comprehensive vision of sexual and reproductive health that includes human rights, sensitivity to gender, and a focus on quality care. The advent of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which has been particularly devastating in the Caribbean region, has made urgent the need to integrate HIV/AIDS into the spectrum of education and services offered by IPPF/WHR's member associations.

The IPPF Western Hemisphere Regional Office made great strides in its HIV/AIDS/STI work through 2004 and 2005, both at the Regional Office (RO) and member association level. During these two years, the HIV team has done much strategic planning, taken measures to increase RO capacity and partnerships, and promoted a significant increase in the number of HIV/AIDS and other STI (sexually transmitted infection) programs among member associations. This update provides an overview of the current HIV/AIDS/STI program unit and activities in the field.

IPPF/WHR Regional Office

Staff The current HIV team is comprised of:

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Focus As part of its mission to provide quality sexual and reproductive health services, IPPF/WHR's HIV, AIDS and STI strategy includes access to prevention, treatment and care, with an understanding that a synergy among these elements is a vital component in the global fight against AIDS.

IPPF/WHR strives to reduce stigma and discrimination, protect the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS, and address the specific needs of vulnerable populations. As a result, IPPF/WHR seeks to reduce the gaps in knowledge and service provision regarding HIV, AIDS and STIs in the Latin America and Caribbean region.

Partnerships and Participatory Advocacy

The Regional Office has significantly increased its partnerships and collaborations with outside agencies over the past two years. In 2004 alone, HIV team staff met with representatives from the United Nations' Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (GFATM), the Global Campaign for Microbicides¹, and Population Services International. RO staff attended working group meetings on HIV integration at Family Health International (FHI) in 2004 and 2005, and were asked to participate in a successive FHI sub-working group. The Senior Program Officer was also invited to become a member of the Pan-American Health Organization's technical advisory committee on HIV/AIDS/STI.

The RO and a number of member associations (MAs) have also signed onto the "Code of Good Practice for NGOs responding to HIV/AIDS,"² a document which provides a framework for a rights-based approach to HIV-related work. All signatories agree to abide by the document's guidelines, which center on themes of advocacy, involvement, rights promotion, public health principles, and employing evidence-based approaches.

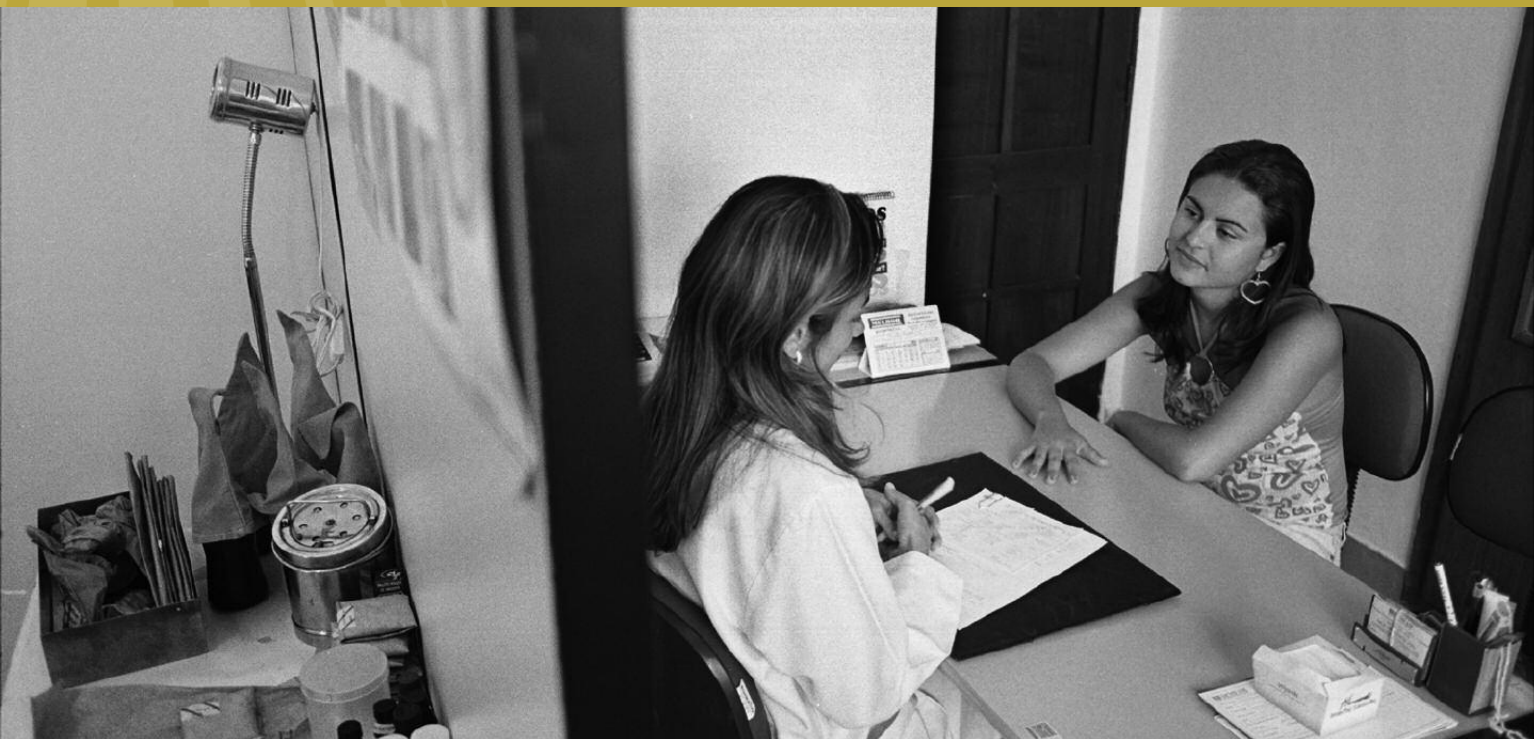
For more information, visit
<http://www.ifrc.org/what/health/hiv aids/code/>.

Publications

In 2004, the HIV team adapted, translated and disseminated the *HIV/AIDS Advocacy Guide* published by IPPF's Central Office. The Western Hemisphere Region's version includes case studies of MA work with vulnerable populations, as well as a section on participatory advocacy. The *HIV/AIDS Advocacy Guide* is available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese at: www.ippfwhr.org/publications/publication_detail_e.asp?PubID=60.

¹ Helpful fact sheets about the GCM are available at: www.global-campaign.org/press-factsheets.htm.

² The full 'Code' document is available at: www.ifrc.org/what/health/hiv aids/code/.



The Integration Process and Lessons Learned

Over the past fourteen years, IPPF/WHR has been working to integrate STIs, HIV, and AIDS into its programming, at both the regional and local levels. In 2004, the RO conducted an evaluation of the six-country HIV Integration project (participants included ADS–El Salvador, PROFAMILIA–Nicaragua, PLAFAM–Venezuela, FPATT–Trinidad and Tobago, CIES–Bolivia, and APROFAM–Guatemala, all of whom received training and guidance from BEMFAM–Brazil).

The lessons learned from this evaluation illuminate the complexity of “true integration,” and will help to guide future work:

- A self-assessment model, whereby the associations could evaluate their own needs and strengths was one of the central components of the HIV Integration project. All of the participating MAs reported that self-assessment was a helpful means of identifying individual strengths and weaknesses.
- Training staff to address stigma reduction and introduce service protocols was central to the project. Participants noted that a multi-

disciplinary training and sensitization workshop fostered staff integration and teamwork, and increased the project’s prioritization among employees.

- The integration process must be systematized, including basic standardized norms and protocols, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Integration should also be linked to a quality of care process, so as to ensure quality implementation of services.
- The integration process must be tailored to each association’s individual needs.
- True integration necessitates sustainability plans and/or ongoing investments.

While integration of HIV/STI services into the continuum of care provided by member associations is crucial, integration at the Regional Office level is important too. The HIV team has collaborated with RO program staff from other priority areas, such as adolescents and access, in an attempt to enhance the linkages between the different strategies.

Member Association Activities

Every year, more and more MAs are offering services for HIV and STIs. In 2004, 18 out of 34 MAs (53%) reported that they offered voluntary HIV testing. While HIV/AIDS has gained global attention, other STIs continue to plague the Latin America and Caribbean region at high rates. In response, many associations are now offering other STI services. For example, out of 34 MAs surveyed in 2004, 20 (59%) reported providing syphilis testing, while 14 (41%) were offering treatment for the herpes virus.

In addition to providing services, a number of MAs are involved in specific projects that aim to reduce the prevalence of HIV/AIDS/STI. Highlights include systematizing the integration of HIV services, work with at-risk groups, and involvement in major global initiatives.

Increasing Capacity to Integrate STI/HIV Services within SRH Service Delivery

Several MAs have taken significant, proactive steps to increase their capacity to offer quality HIV/AIDS/STI services. MEXFAM–Mexico, for example, recently completed the first phase of a project entitled *Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS into Action*, developed and funded by IPPF's Central Office. MEXFAM applied the Central Office's new "Mainstreaming Checklist and Tools"³ to help assess institutional needs and develop an action plan to guide the integration process. Other activities included a staff training and sensitization on stigma reduction and sexual diversity, development of strategic alliances with the Ministry of Health and other non-governmental organizations, and revision of informational materials.

INPPARES–Peru is also furthering its HIV integration process. Via a capacity-building grant from the RO, Peru will hold staff training and education workshops, as well as develop and disseminate educational materials on STIs and HIV. As a recipient of an IPPF/WHR capacity building grant, APROFE–Ecuador is also in the process of developing their next actions to further progress in its HIV and STI programming.

Given the impact of the epidemic and unmet need for services, the HIV team chose to establish a regional priority through the project: *Caribbean Regional HIV Initiative*. (The Caribbean region continues to have the world's second highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS after sub-Saharan Africa). The participating associations, PROFAMIL–Haiti, Stichting Lobi–Suriname, and FAMPLAM–Jamaica, attended a workshop at the Regional Office in New York in March 2005 in order to strategize before implementing their proposals. The session allowed for the MA representatives to participate in sensitization exercises, exchange ideas, and develop a more detailed, strategic activity plan. Although there are some variations among the three proposals, all of the MAs will focus on staff training, implementing voluntary counseling and testing (VCT), dissemination of materials, and establishing a referral system. Through this two year project, IPPF/WHR hopes to further the integration of HIV prevention into sexual and reproductive health services among the Caribbean affiliates, with special emphasis on increasing access to VCT, as well as clinic-based and community-based efforts to reduce stigma and discrimination.

³ The toolkit can be accessed via the Central Office's website under HIV/AIDS publications:
<http://new.ippf.org/ContentController.aspx?ID=7570>.

Work with Vulnerable Populations

In many regions of the Western Hemisphere, the HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to affect certain groups at higher prevalence rates than the general population. Many social, economic, and political factors contribute to this phenomenon, including pervasive stigma and discrimination against certain groups. Given these factors, an important component of successful HIV/AIDS strategies is reaching out and serving those who have been particularly affected and historically underserved. A number of regional MAs provide effective models for such efforts.

Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM)

PROFAMILIA-Colombia initiated a project in September 2004 targeting MSM, a crucial population in the Latin American HIV epidemic. Entitled *Promotion of the sexual rights and prevention of HIV/AIDS in men who have sex with men*, this one-year project was funded by GTZ (a German government development agency) via IPPF's Central Office. The initiative strives to reach MSM groups (and their partners), increase their access to quality HIV/AIDS/STI services and information, and simultaneously reduce stigma and discrimination among both clinic staff and the community. In collaboration with several other non-governmental organizations, PROFAMILIA staff participated in a three-day training which addressed themes of HIV/STI integration into SRH services, promotion of sexual rights, and prevention of HIV/AIDS in MSM and their possible partners. A number of participants commented that the workshop made them question various assumptions they had in regards to sexuality, and that it provided important ideas for how to better respond to diverse client needs. One of the other central activities of this project is the design of a promotional campaign. After an intensive development phase, staff elected the campaign slogan *El Hombre Más Hombre* ("The Manliest Man"). Promotional materials consequently were developed for three different audiences: gay men, men in "homo-social" spaces, and women (potential partners of MSM). PROFAMILIA will launch a new website related to this campaign, to be located at www.elhombremashombre.com, and will touch on issues related to sexuality and health.

Youth

The ongoing three-year project, *Scale-Up HIV Services*, funded by an anonymous donor in PROFAMILIA-Dominican Republic and ADS-El Salvador, seeks to increase awareness about and access to STI/HIV prevention, screening and treatment services for youth through direct service delivery and a referral network. An evaluation conducted in the spring of 2005 revealed that this project has trained hundreds of youth peer educators who have conducted informational sessions for their peers at participating free trade zone factories. Numerous health providers at the two associations have participated in trainings on providing youth-friendly and gender-sensitive services. Statistics point to the effectiveness of these activities: from June to December of 2004 alone, 631 youth received treatment for STIs, 2,400 youth received HIV/AIDS/STI counseling and 843 received subsidized, voluntary HIV tests. Approximately 3% of these youth tested HIV-positive, which is a higher rate than the national prevalence of 0.6%, indicating that the project has succeeded in reaching at-risk youth.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) youth

BEMFAM-Brazil recently piloted a project entitled *Sex and Survival: Colours of the Rainbow*, funded by the Elton John Foundation. This youth project centers on HIV efforts, namely the prevention of HIV/AIDS and provision of appropriate information and services to meet the needs of GLBTQ youth living in the favelas (shantytowns) of Rio de Janeiro. Major achievements of this project have included the training of nearly 30 GLBTQ youth as peer educators, as well as numerous youth-led educational and condom distribution activities, including a presence at Carnival.

Persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)

While many MAs in the region have begun offering prevention services, most associations are not involved in providing a wider continuum of HIV services. PROFAMILIA-Dominican Republic has forged ahead in the field by offering care, treatment, and support to persons who are HIV-positive in a project financed by GTZ via the IPPF Central Office. Clients have praised the services offered by the association, saying that PROFAMILIA offers them one of the few "safe spaces" where they can discuss and give voice to their experiences. Offering HIV services beyond prevention not only improves access and continuity of care, but also provides an opportunity to facilitate a supportive community.

Involvement with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria

The UN's Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (GFATM) has become one of the world's largest health financing mechanisms. CIES, IPPF/WHR's member association in Bolivia, has been acting as the Country Principal Recipient since 2004; responsibilities have included managing the country's grant, and coordinating seven other recipient agencies. The MAs from Belize, Colombia, Dominica, Guatemala, Guyana, Peru, St. Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago are also involved with the Fund, assuming roles within the Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs). These external, administrative roles complement and further a range of services that the institutions offer, expanding their role beyond the national realm and into the international forum. Such new national

and international forms of participation will present challenges to the MAs, from which we hope to learn valuable lessons that can be disseminated throughout the region.

The IPPF Central Office in London is currently conducting research on all of the Federation's member associations throughout the world, in order to assess the level of the affiliates' involvement with their CCMs. The research aims to increase knowledge of CCMs, make specific recommendations as to how MAs can best become involved in the Fund, and to strengthen the capacities of MAs who are already involved or wish to increase their involvement with the Fund.

Further Regional Efforts

Several MAs have assumed other unique activities in an effort to address HIV/AIDS/STIs. The Caribbean Family Planning Association (CFPA), for example, initiated *Fighting AIDS through Training and Education (FATE)*, a project funded by the Canadian International Development Agency in 2003. The three-year project aims to improve the sexual and reproductive health status of Caribbean youth by decreasing the incidence of HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy. Central to this initiative is a mass media campaign, which includes radio call-in programs.

Meanwhile, the Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association (GRPA) attempted to tackle stigma and discrimination through efforts to involve those most affected. GRPA developed an initiative to provide care and support for persons living with HIV/AIDS in the community, and

furthered their efforts by hiring an HIV-positive individual to serve as the project coordinator.

Stichting Lobi of Suriname launched *The Anti-Retroviral Emergency Revolving Fund* in 2003, which serves as a model not only of successful fundraising and procurement of antiretroviral medications (ARVs), but also as an example of community mobilization. Lobi's role entailed managing the fund, importing the ARVs, and distributing them to selected hospital-affiliated pharmacies. Lobi also held public, widely publicized fundraising events, which promoted community awareness and enhanced Lobi's visibility. These activities highlight the diverse range of roles and functions an association can assume to contribute to the global fight against HIV/AIDS.

About IPPF/WHR

The vision of IPPF/WHR is to build upon a network of local and global partnerships to advance the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women, men and young people. IPPF/WHR is one of six Regional Offices of the International Planned Parenthood Federation and is a secretariat to 46 member associations in the Western Hemisphere. For our partners, IPPF/WHR offers technical assistance and training in a variety of capacity-building and programmatic areas, including proposal writing and evaluation. To find out more, visit our website at www.ippfwhr.org or contact us at info@ippfwhr.org



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UPCOMING INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

Internet sites are listed to obtain further details and registration information for these international HIV/AIDS/STI conferences.

The **12th International Conference for People Living with HIV/AIDS** and the **7th International Conference on Home and Community Care for People Living with HIV/AIDS** will take place in Lima, Peru, March 12–16, 2006. The PLWHA Conference will convene on March 12, and the whole conference will open on the evening of March 13. Further information and registration can be accessed via: www.living2005.org.

III Latin American and Caribbean Forum of HIV/AIDS/STD, the IV Central American Congress of STI/HIV/AIDS – CONCASIDA 2005 and the IV Central American Gathering of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWA), will take place in San Salvador, November 7–11, 2005. Further information and registration can be accessed via: www.concasida.org.

The **XVI International AIDS Conference** will take place in Toronto, Canada during the week of August 13–18, 2006. Further information and registration can be accessed via: www.aids2006.org.



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