

## **Final Remarks**

**USG Representative and USAID M&E Advisor, Todd Koppenhaver**

**NawaLife Trust/Johns Hopkins University Research Dissemination Workshop  
NamPower Conference Center  
May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

Hon Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Minister of Information and Broadcasting,

Ministry of Health and Social Services Officials,

Mr. Nahum Gorelick, Director – NawaLife Trust,

Dr. Warren Parker from CADRE and his Research Colleagues

All of Our Emergency Plan Partners,

Members of the Media,

Distinguished Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am really excited to participate in today's opening of the HIV/AIDS Research Dissemination Workshop. I have a research background and I tend to like this sort of thing. More importantly, it is imperative that we continually improve our understanding of the drivers of HIV/AIDS in Namibia. This information is vital to our collaborative efforts against the epidemic and we thank you for all the good work that you are doing in this field.

We are especially interested in today's results because this year we are focusing even more on our *prevention* strategies. Namibia's care and treatment efforts are recognized internationally for their success and have given new hope, improved quality of life and

longer life to those infected with HIV/AIDS. Clearly, focusing on treatment alone -- important as it is -- would be fighting a losing battle. New infections bring a cascade of recurring costs, not only for the healthcare system but also for every sector of the Namibian community, from the national economy to the child who has lost one or both parents. For a sustainable response to the epidemic, we must focus on prevention. That's why I am very eager today to hear what we have learned about interrupting transmission in the communities studied, and whether these interventions are effective in changing behavior.

NawaLife Trust, formerly known as the Johns Hopkins University Namibia Field office, has been an important contributor to Namibia's HIV/AIDS research, and began its first baseline household surveys in 2003. Today's presentation marks the third year in which the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief -- or PEPFAR -- has funded these studies, thereby demonstrating its commitment to furthering our understanding of the epidemic in Namibia. Under PEPFAR, the US Government has provided US\$124 million (\$N870M) since 2004 to assist Namibia's national HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment programs. Because Namibia is using these resources well and is achieving significant results, U.S. assistance increased in 2007 to US \$91 million, which is \$637 million Namibian dollars.

The importance of this and other HIV/AIDS surveys in Namibia shouldn't be understated. "Research," as African American Author, Zora Neale Hurston, once described, is "formalized curiosity" that involves "poking and prying with a purpose."

And our purpose in this field of research cannot be any clearer. To effectively address the HIV/AIDS epidemic and serve those infected and affected, we first have to understand the different factors driving the epidemic. Once we have this understanding, we can take the critical steps needed to change behavior and thus reduce the rate of new infections.

Identifying the drivers behind the epidemic and the best interventions to address them means that we have to answer some very difficult questions, questions that address sensitive issues.

- Do young people feel able to avoid sex until they are ready?
- Have we done all we can to ensure that schools and hostels are safe environments for our children, and that our children have knowledgeable and trustworthy adults they can talk to when they need advice or help?
- Have we done enough to prevent HIV infection among teachers and health care workers and others providing critical services to the community?
- Are we doing enough in our communities to address the relationship between alcohol, gender violence and HIV infection?
- Have we made sure that condoms are accessible and affordable to people at risk of HIV infection, and have we ensured they know how to use them properly?
- Are there user-friendly systems in place which allow abused women to seek legal protection and support?

- Are we doing enough to fight stigma and discrimination so that more HIV-positive Namibians feel comfortable talking about their status and are empowered to obtain prevention services?
- Are we finding effective ways to address what research elsewhere has shown to be the main drivers of this epidemic in southern Africa -- the high rate of multiple and concurrent sexual relationships coupled with inconsistent condom use?

We are pleased that many of these topics have been touched upon as part of this latest survey. One of the strengths of this research is that it is conducted at the community level and uses both quantitative questionnaires and qualitative focus groups to really explore what people think and what they do. As a result, over the course of this workshop, we hope that you will gain insight into the complex issues we face in addressing the spread of HIV/AIDS in Namibia.

Effective collaboration among the stakeholders and partners is key to designing successful prevention programs. This workshop has brought together a noteworthy representation of these organizations. Let's take this opportunity to learn from the information presented today and utilize it in designing more effective interventions that have greater impact.

We want to commend all the partners and stakeholders present today for your continued concern and efforts in working together to find Namibian solutions to prevention. We would like to thank NawaLife Trust/Johns Hopkins University, CADRE, Research

Facilitation Services and all collaborating partners and stakeholders who have contributed to this vital research.

I thank you.