

ICAI Policy Statement on HIV and AIDS

Introduction

HIV and AIDS is one of the most important health and development issues of our time. It exists on every continent and in every country of the world. Its impact is devastating and its presence undermines progress in myriad areas of human development.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs, through human development projects in countries around the world, has been active in community development and transformational change for over 40 years. Over the past decade, an increasing number of national ICAs have harnessed their methods and resources toward solving challenges posed by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. One of the roles of the Institute of Cultural Affairs International is to help share this work, and to advocate for policy change at national and international levels.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs International is:

- an international organization comprised of autonomous national member organizations that are registered, governed and administered nationally
- a secular organization dedicated to facilitating the role of culture in achieving sustainable human development, strengthening individual and organizational capacity, and advocating for appropriate and effective policies at local, national and international levels
- an organization with tested, effective methods for facilitation, participatory community development, community mobilization, and leadership development
- an organization with exceptional ability to mobilize and motivate individuals and communities toward positive change and to create strong linkages and sustainable community structures that last beyond the life of a specific project
- an organization that seeks out and works with many of the most marginalized people and communities within society through firmly rooted and credible local networks
- an organization with a strong record of engaging community leaders and encouraging ownership of development goals and strategy, and with the means to both proactively include people affected by HIV and AIDS in decision-making processes, and to advocate politically on behalf of affected peoples

The Institute of Cultural Affairs International believes:

- that HIV is the cause of AIDS
- that HIV and AIDS are not inevitable - prevention and effective management are possible
- that every individual has a right to HIV and AIDS prevention, support, treatment and care, delivered with **compassion** and **respect** for human dignity

- in the **power of individuals** and communities to organize, take greater control of their lives and situations, and take action to positively affect their condition
- that effective long term solutions must be those embraced by the people themselves, where groups and individuals **take ownership** of their battle against the disease, and where people living with HIV and AIDS, including the children and orphans of HIV and AIDS, are **key players** in the development, implementation and evaluation of programs to fight the disease
- that **governments at all levels** have a critical role to play in **creating effective policies** and laws, financing comprehensive approaches to prevention, treatment and care, and in taking leadership to reduce the stigma and create an enabling environment for change
- that HIV and AIDS is a **complex problem** embedded in social, political, economic and cultural systems that can not be solved with a single, narrow and/or rigid approach
- that **attitude** and **behavior** change, including **reducing stigma** surrounding the disease, is the principal means to stop the disease's spread and is the most effective means of prevention
- that HIV and AIDS programming must be **evidence-based** and driven by the expressed needs and realities of individuals and communities, and not by preconceived ideological or religious conceptions of right and wrong
- that unfettered access to **accurate, scientific and comprehensive information** about HIV and AIDS, including all available means of prevention, is essential
- that 'knowing one's status' is a critical step in ensuring effective prevention, care, and treatment of HIV and AIDS, that **voluntary testing** is the principal accepted way to achieve this knowledge, and that counseling and voluntary testing for HIV should be **available to all persons** who request it, along with appropriate pre and post-testing support mechanisms
- that gender inequality and domestic violence hastens the spread of HIV and AIDS and hampers effective prevention, care and treatment; that HIV and AIDS is particularly **devastating for women**, young people and children, and that **equality** between men and women is crucial to effectively reducing the impact and spread of HIV and AIDS

The Institute of Cultural Affairs International is committed to:

- the **health** and **safety** of its staff, volunteers, partners and others with whom it works
- acting in **solidarity** with people living with and affected by HIV and AIDS, respecting the **dignity**, intelligence and **fundamental human rights** of each individual as laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and championing the **defense** and **promotion** of these rights
- designing and implementing programs that are **specific, flexible** and **appropriate**, based on knowledge of the HIV and AIDS challenges facing the country, communities, and individuals, and adapted to local context, needs and changing realities
- extending support, care and compassion to HIV positive individuals **without discrimination** on the basis of age, gender, class, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, ethnicity, mode of infection, or other factors

- actively promoting **equality** between men and women, speaking out against violence, and ensuring all individuals, and particularly women, have access to high quality **reproductive health** information and services
- reducing the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS through **education**, by encouraging and facilitating **open and honest discussion** about HIV and AIDS and by actively **dispelling myths** surrounding the disease
- working with and lobbying partner organizations, governments, patient groups and relevant national and international organizations to ensure that **national health policies** clearly and explicitly **prohibit discrimination** against people affected by HIV and AIDS, and proactively support efforts to effectively combat the disease
- ensuring local **ownership** through active participation of all interested and affected parties in planning, program design, and implementation
- helping **individuals, communities, civil society organizations** and **governments at all levels** to identify the changes they wish to bring about and helping build and maintain partnerships to achieve those goals
- strongly encouraging all persons to **know their status**, and especially those in recognised high risk groups; however ICAI does not support mandatory/forced testing nor does ICAI encourage or facilitate HIV testing of individuals without ensuring that appropriate counseling and support for the care and treatment of HIV positive individuals is available
- encouraging the use of industry standard **rapid tests** so that results are provided in a timely fashion and can be followed up immediately with post-test counseling
- ensuring that HIV testing of individuals respects the ‘3 Cs’ – that is, testing must be: **confidential**, accompanied by **counseling**, and conducted with informed **consent**, meaning that it is both informed and voluntary. In the case of infants and young minors the consent of a parent, guardian or medical professional should be obtained.
- respecting the **right to privacy** of all individuals and maintaining the confidentiality of personal information and records
- ensuring that HIV and AIDS programming is not fragmented or isolated from the rest of its human development programming; rather that HIV and AIDS projects are linked to and/or **embedded within broader actions to advance human development**
- seeking comprehensive, **holistic** approaches when assessing how best to deal with prevention, treatment/care, and impact mitigation, working with local leadership and community stakeholders and, where possible, linking to existing health care services
- making a **long term** commitment to the countries and communities where we work
- promoting **education** and **outreach** activities that are based on medical and scientific facts, and which are responsive to new information and new learning about the disease, its prevention, transmission and treatment
- actively promoting globally recognized best-practices in HIV and AIDS prevention, including the **distribution** and **proper use of condoms** among all sexually active age groups within society

The Institute of Cultural Affairs International advocates:

- for a **Human Rights Based approach** to combating the disease and its impacts
- for the creation and effective implementation and enforcement of **national legislation** in every country that protects the rights of HIV positive individuals to be free from all forms of discrimination
- for governments to recognize the **special risks** facing women and young people and to create specific measures to deal with these risks
- for political leaders at all levels of government, as well as community and religious leaders to '**break the silence**' and begin talking publicly and honestly about the realities of the disease and its consequences
- for national governments to work with other levels of government and NGOs to develop **comprehensive plans** for dealing with all aspects of HIV and AIDS, including prevention, counseling and testing, treatment and care, and impact mitigation
- for governments and international organizations to recognize the **critical role that NGOs and CBOs play** in combating HIV and AIDS, and to provide the financial resources and other support required for NGOs and CBOs to carry out their work (such support might include providing tax exempt and/or charitable status to HIV and AIDS organizations, and eliminating all restrictions on the import of critical machinery, equipment, drugs etc.)
- for funding organizations and mechanisms (such as PEPFAR in the USA) to **eliminate all conditionality** in HIV and AIDS funding that is not related to evidence-based best practice and accepted standards for transparency, accountability and effectiveness
- for the incorporation of **compulsory HIV and AIDS programs** into every education system and all school curricula, including teacher and parent education programs
- for the wide availability of **Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT)** programs, including at schools, youth centers, churches, community centers, etc.
- for protecting each person's **right to education** and ensuring **access to education** of children and older learners affected by HIV and AIDS
- for **universal access** to affordable HIV and AIDS drugs, including specific measures to make low-cost generic drugs available to those in need