



Republic of Namibia

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE CAPRIVI
TESTING DAY
AT SIBBINDA HEALTH CENTER
CAPRIVI REGION**

26 JUNE 2008

Programme Director

Hon. Governor for Caprivi Region Hon Mwilima

The Constituency Counsellor Hon. Felix Mukupi

Representatives of the Traditional Authority

Senior Government Officials here present

Distinguished Invited Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am most humbled and honored to address you on this important day, which we have set aside for Regional Testing for the Caprivi region. This day marks an important milestone in our collective fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Following the National Testing day held on the 9th May, the **Ministry** decided to dedicate additional time and resources to some of our regions to reinforce the importance of voluntary counseling and testing. Knowing one's HIV status is part of our ongoing national prevention efforts and where necessary, to ensure access to treatment, care and support to those that are infected and affected by the epidemic.

Since 1992, Namibia has been monitoring the prevalence of HIV through sentinel surveillance of pregnant women attending antenatal clinics. In response, Government has put in place aggressive programmes including the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission Services, Anti Retroviral Therapy, and Voluntary Counseling and Testing in all the 13 Regions. We are now in the process of rolling out ARV services to clinic level.

As a result of all these efforts, we have witnessed some downwards trends in new infections while those needing treatment are accessing treatment. Regrettably, the Caprivi region has been and continue to lead the epidemic with the highest prevalence rate. This is a worrisome trend. The Government and indeed the Ministry remain concerned about the prevalence rate in Caprivi. The results of the just concluded national testing day showed the highest regional prevalence of 20.4% for the Caprivi region which remains the highest of the seven regions tested. In particular, increased prevalence rate of 11.8% amongst the 0 – 14 years age group, partly as a result of early sexual activities is extremely worrisome and must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

For this reason, we have decided to bring national awareness, prevention and treatment programmes to the region constituency

by constituency. However, the successful roll out of these programmes will largely depend on the commitment, involvement and unwavering support of all the stakeholders.

The regional testing day for Caprivi therefore marks the beginning of a vigorous campaign to reduce and eventually stop the further spread of HIV infections in the region. The Ministry is therefore appealing to the regional leadership at all levels from traditional, religious, civic, political and business leaders to get involved in the fight against HIV. If necessary, we must together devise a regional strategy that we believe will successfully respond to the causes of the ongoing spread of the epidemic in this region.

This testing Day must therefore form an integral part of the Region's disease management strategy which amongst others should seek to scale up prevention efforts and focus on the involvement of all Namibians.

This day presents a rare opportunity for the people of this constituency to:

1. learn about their status; and
2. gain new insights into how to assist those who are infected and affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic,

3. create HIV competent communities that will curtail the spread of HIV.

Programme Director

The Day also provides an invaluable opportunity to dispel the myths and stigma associated with HIV testing and to reach those who have never been tested or who have engaged in high risk behaviour since their last test.

Programme Director, Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to assure you that HIV testing and counseling services provided during this day will be strictly voluntary and anonymous. The benefits of knowing one's HIV status are well known. HIV testing is an entry point to access anti-retroviral treatment. Indeed, a person is only enrolled for ARV treatment when he or she is tested and found HIV positive and when he or she is eligible for treatment. We have overwhelming evidence that antiretroviral therapy has dramatically improved the quality of life for many infected people and has lessen the burden of care for the affected family members.

I am grateful to announce that there are now fewer HIV related patients in the wards than was the case five years ago. We see those who come on stretcher beds, fighting for their lives get back to work and join their families in good health.

However, only about **65%** of the women folk who were tested positive country wide are receiving care and treatment services. Whereas, only about **35%** of HIV positive men are partaking in these services. Thus, I call upon my male colleagues to join our women folks in order for men to benefit from the same.

We also realize that awareness campaign programmes alone will not change people's behaviors. There is thus a critical need to halt the further spread of the epidemic through behavior change interventions. In order to formulate appropriate and effective behavior change interventions the Ministry has, with the support of **UNFPA** conducted a study to assess the current sexual practices, habits and knowledge among young people in Caprivi, Oshikoto and Otjozondjupa regions.

This study has given us an indication as to what is happening on the ground. For example, the study revealed that of those who do not use condoms, **67%** do so because they trust their partners! In

the Caprivi region, the usage of condoms among the **30 – 39** years old was found to be a mere **14%** which is very low. An equally disturbing finding of this study was that about **33%** of our young people are sexually active at the tender age of **15** years.

Programme Director,

I wish to use this opportunity to thank our Development partners in particular the **UNFPA**, for their continued support and joint collaboration in the recent survey to measure Behavioural Patterns on Condom Usage, Delayed Sexual Initiation, Teenage Pregnancy and Utilization of Adolescent Friendly Health Services. I now have the honour and privilege to officially launch this Report. At the same time, I would like to invite the residents of this constituency of all ages to take advantage of today's activities and go for VCT services.

I thank you.