



Accelerating the Impact of HIV Programming on Health Systems Strengthening:

**Pre-Conference Meeting of Health Systems Experts,
HIV Researchers and Implementers:**

Cape Town, South Africa, 17-18 July 2009

The AIDS Response & Health Systems Strengthening

The expansion of AIDS treatment and HIV disease management represents the most dramatic change in health care for decades. HIV has rekindled global awareness of the role of health in human development, and has drawn attention to the shortage of up to 4 million health workers globally and the under-funding and systemic deficiencies of the health sector. In this context, concerns have been raised about the impact of disease-specific scale-up on other health services, and on the fragile health systems of resource-limited settings. The increasing amount of donor funding available for health, and for HIV/AIDS and other disease-specific programs in particular, in Sub-Saharan Africa and globally has fuelled a debate between advocates of “vertical,” disease-specific health programs and the “horizontal” approach focusing on strengthening general health systems. The potential for vertical programs to divert resources and experienced staff from mainstay health programs has worried donors and implementers alike.

Yet there is evidence that, if managed correctly, the AIDS response represents a unique opportunity to strengthen the wider health sector. There is wide recognition of the potential to leverage highly-resourced HIV programs to strengthen health systems by emphasizing integration of services, enhancing infrastructure and laboratory capacity, buttressing the health care workforce, improving data management, supporting community-based organizations, and establishing effective, comprehensive models of care more conducive to the provision of continuity services. In addition, the unique manner in which HIV programs focus on empowering patients and promoting greater involvement of people living with HIV has created more engaged and demanding users of the services.

Although significant experience has accrued in the implementation of HIV-related programs over the past few years, most attention has been paid to the immense efforts required to reach the many thousands who require these services, to tackle structural and human resource challenges, and to ensure implementation of high quality programs. Similarly, attention has been paid to demonstrating the impact of the programs on the outcomes as they relate to individuals with HIV or at risk for HIV infection. Until recently, there was little attention paid to systematic research and very few rigorous evaluations conducted on the broader impact, whether positive or negative of these HIV-specific programs on other health services in these settings. In addition, lessons about successful and unsuccessful approaches learned by implementers and Ministries of Health have not been widely shared beyond a few case studies presented at international AIDS conferences.

The IAS views the proactive development of this evidence base and dissemination of research, case studies and lessons learned as a vital contribution our members and partners can make to the building of better health systems. There are a growing numbers of initiatives engaged in research and documentation on HIV and health systems research and operations research in HIV scale up that would benefit from coming together to share knowledge regarding the impact of HIV scale up on health systems; identify gaps and prioritize a research agenda; define methods to evaluate the broader impact of HIV-specific programs on health systems; share and disseminate lessons learned and best practices regarding the impact of HIV programming on broader health services and health outcomes; and plan ahead to leverage HIV resources and research to strengthen health systems.

The Pre-Conference

The International AIDS Society, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, will host a one-day invitation only meeting for up to 100 researchers and implementers in Cape Town, South Africa, immediately preceding the 5th IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention (IAS 2009). The meeting will kick off with at 14.00 pm on the 17th of July 2009, followed by an evening lecture, and a full-day meeting which will take place on July 18, 2009, in Cape Town, South Africa. The meeting will draw from and build on debates and research discussed at the XVII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2008) in Mexico City, and the results of The Rockefeller Foundation-supported workshop held in Bellagio, September 2008. The pre-conference meeting will also draw on initiatives and reports from WHO, World Bank, Global Fund, PEPFAR, bilateral organizations, academic and think tank institutions, and others.

The purpose of this meeting is to build synergies between key actors and stakeholders doing research on leveraging the HIV response in health systems strengthening including health systems specialists and HIV researchers / implementers engaged in operations research on scaling up the HIV response; focus on the knowledge gaps and research agenda regarding the impact of HIV scale-up on health systems and discuss how best to leverage HIV scale-up to strengthen weak health systems. Strong emphasis will be placed on ensuring a balance of developed and developing country participants.

Objectives

- a. Review results and progress from the work currently being carried out in the area of HIV and health systems strengthening by a range of international experts
- b. Provide a platform for profiling ongoing research, and dissemination of existing case studies and best practices on how to leverage HIV scale-up to strengthen weak health systems
- c. Mobilize researchers and implementers working in the HIV and the health systems fields to collaborate to define methodologies; and accelerate research and rigorous evaluation required to answer vital questions on the impact of HIV programming on health systems strengthening
- d. Highlight key policy priorities and strategies required to leverage the impact of HIV programming on

Follow up to the Pre-conference

IAS will organize an open report-back Satellite Session during IAS 2009 in which the results of the 17-18 July 2009 pre-conference meeting will be widely shared with conference participants.

A final peer-reviewed conference report will be produced, covering:

- a. Synthesis of meeting presentations and related abstracts.
- b. Refined research agenda on HIV programming and health systems strengthening.
- c. Proposed methodologies and evaluation frameworks
- d. Mapping of research and programming activities in the area of HIV and health systems strengthening by international partners
- e. Identification of next steps towards accelerating the impact of HIV programming on health systems strengthening

Participants

Although participation will be based on an invitation from meeting organizers, participants at this meeting will be required to register separately for the 5th IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention if they wish to attend the conference.

Health systems experts, HIV researchers and implementers are invited to share information and contribute copies of relevant reports or summaries of their HIV and Health systems research activities to help build a reference database on ongoing research. This HIV and Health Systems database will contribute to identifying existing gaps in data, defining methodologies, help refine the priority research agenda and provide a platform for fostering collaboration and information sharing.

With consent from the authors, reports shared with IAS may be posted onto the IAS website for information dissemination.

Additional Links and Resources:

1. More information on the Rockefeller Foundation health initiative “Transforming Health Systems” can be accessed here - [http://www.rockfound.org/initiatives/health/120208transforming%20 health_systems.shtml](http://www.rockfound.org/initiatives/health/120208transforming%20health_systems.shtml)
2. Background information and materials on the September 2008 Rockefeller Bellagio meeting on “Leveraging HIV Scale-Up to Strengthen Health Systems in Africa” can be accessed here - <http://www.columbia-icap.org/bellagio/goals.html>