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Global Challenges | U.N. Agencies To Launch Initiative To Expand HIV Prevention Programs Aimed at IDUs in Asia
[Aug 23, 2007]

UNAIDS, the [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#) and the [World Health Organization](#) in a joint statement released on Tuesday at the [8th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific](#) in Sri Lanka announced plans to launch an initiative aimed at expanding HIV prevention programs for injection drug users in Asian countries, the [AP/International Herald Tribune](#) reports ([AP/International Herald Tribune](#), 8/21).

The five-day conference, which aims to improve HIV/AIDS services and address the spread of the disease in the region, opened on Sunday in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The conference brings together more than 2,500 delegates from Asian countries to discuss fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS, as well as providing treatment and support to people living with the disease.

An estimated 8.6 million people living in the Asia-Pacific region are HIV-positive ([Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report](#), 8/21). In some countries in the region, IDUs account for as many as 70% of new HIV cases, and the increased use of heroin in South Asia could contribute to the spread of the virus, the statement said. According to UNAIDS statistics:

- An estimated 44% of the 650,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in China contracted the disease through injection drug use;
- In Thailand, 3% to 10% of IDUs contract HIV annually;
- In Malaysia, the most common route of HIV transmission is through contaminated needles; and
- Drug use is a key factor in transmission of the virus in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Myanmar.

According to the *AP/Tribune*, the initiative aims to increase prevention programs by providing IDUs with clean needles and access to substitute drugs such as methadone. It also will provide HIV counseling, promote condom use and increase access to treatment programs, the *AP/Tribune* reports. According to the [Asian Development Bank](#), such programs could cost as little as \$47 per person.

Shiba Phurailatpam, regional coordinator for the [Asia Pacific Network for People Living with HIV/AIDS](#), said many countries' HIV/AIDS policies in relation to drug users are counterproductive. According to Phurailatpam, in many places, syringes are considered drug paraphernalia and are illegal. Phurailatpam added that clean needles often are not readily available (*AP/International Herald Tribune*, 8/21).

"In the last two years, we have seen about a million infections coming in [the region] -- that means half a million every year," Prasada Rao, UNAIDS Asia-Pacific regional director, said, adding, "It is an epidemic which is spreading through the injecting drug users, sex workers ... who are criminalized sections of society" (*Gardner, Reuters*, 8/21). "The time has come to reach out to injecting drug users to step out of the darkness of stigma together and demand an innovative approach to HIV prevention that upholds their human rights and dignity," Rao said (*AP/International Herald Tribune*, 8/21).

UNDP, Thailand Development Group Launch Program That Provides HIV-Positive Women With Business Management Training

The [United Nations Development Programme](#) and Thailand's [Population and Community Development Association](#) have launched a program that provides HIV-positive women with business management training in Cambodia, China and India, a PDA official announced at the ICAAP conference Tuesday, *Xinhua/People's Daily* reports.

The program, called "Women and Wealth Project," will provide training to assist HIV-positive women in each country to develop business plans before establishing "small, market-savvy social enterprises," *Xinhua/People's Daily* reports. As part of WWP:

- The Cambodian Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS has established a garment manufacturing business called "Modern Dress Sewing Factory";
- In India, the Positive Women Network has started a design and printing business called "[Social Light Communications](#)"; and
- In China, Colorful Clouds Yunnan, a section of AIDS Care China, has set up "Positive Candle Works."

Each business will be marketed under the Women Empowered, or "WE," brand so as to gain access to markets for their products and services locally and internationally, *Xinhua/People's Daily* reports.

Caitlin Wiesen-Antin, [United Nations Development Programme](#) regional HIV/AIDS coordinator in Asia and the Pacific, said that women account for 30% of the six million people living with HIV in the region. "In a rapidly feminizing epidemic, the socioeconomic independence of women is essential. It enables women to cope with the devastating impact of the epidemic on their family life and sources of livelihood," Wiesen-Antin added (*Xinhua/People's Daily*, 8/21).

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