During 2002 alone, 3.1 million people died of AIDS and another 5 million were newly infected. Young people ages 15-24 account for 42 percent of new HIV infections and represent almost one-third of people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide. The eventual loss of so many people could lead to severe socioeconomic dislocations in many countries around the world, as households lose their breadwinners, livelihoods are compromised, and savings are consumed by the costs of health care and funerals.

In addition, more than four million children worldwide have died of AIDS, and HIV infects approximately 800,000 babies each year, most of whom contract the disease from their mother. This preventable transmission of HIV from an infected mother to her baby generally occurs during pregnancy, during delivery, or through breastfeeding.

Africa is the current epicenter of HIV/AIDS. There is evidence the disease is also spreading rapidly in Asia, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Without concerted intervention, the HIV/AIDS infection rate will grow exponentially in China, India, and Russia. In the absence of greatly expanded prevention, treatment, and care efforts, it is predicted that the AIDS death toll will continue to rise before peaking around the end of this decade. But there is hope.

Since the onset of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Management Sciences for Health (MSH) has worked with partners in African, Latin American, and Caribbean countries, as well as with initiatives such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, to combat the spread of the disease. Technical assistance provided by MSH has focused on strengthening the management of HIV/AIDS programs in developing countries and ensuring that commodities related to the prevention, care, and treatment of HIV/AIDS are available to those
who need them.

**Rational Pharmaceutical Management**

In order to fight HIV/AIDS, good pharmaceutical and commodity management practices (how inventory is bought, stored, and distributed; how pharmaceuticals are used; and what information management systems are in place) are essential.

Management Sciences for Health’s USAID-funded Rational Pharmaceutical Management Plus (RPM Plus) Program is currently conducting assessments in seven countries to determine the capacity of their pharmaceutical management systems to support HIV/AIDS services. During initial assessment visits, RPM Plus collected preliminary information on who the primary stakeholders are; what the country’s policy and legal framework is and how it supports (or hinders) efficient pharmaceutical management. The countries assessed - Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Guyana, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, and Zambia - are countries that U.S. President George Bush is targeting under his administration’s International Mother and Child HIV Prevention Initiative. The Initiative’s goal is to reduce mother-to-child transmission by 40 percent in 14 targeted countries in Africa and the Caribbean.

To accomplish this impressive goal, the U.S. government has committed $500 million dollars to increasing the use of antiretrovirals, increasing the number of sites that provide prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) services, and increasing the number of women receiving HIV test results during prenatal care visits. RPM Plus’s assessment findings, which are being compiled in support of the President’s Initiative, will provide in-depth information on the feasibility of various options for improving PMTCT services.

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