

**Launch of the Know your Epidemic Know Your Response
Modes of Transmission Study.**

8th February 2016

Protea Hotel, Zambezi Region

The Honourable Governor, Retired Colonel; Laurence
Sampofu

Her Worship the Mayor, Madam Georgina Mwiya Simata

Members of the Regional and local Authority Councils

The Director of Health, Ms Agnes Mwilima

The Director of Education, Mr Samupwa

Regional AIDS Coordination Committee Members,

NGOs present here today,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for taking the time to attend this memorable event to launch the first ever Know Your Epidemic, Know Your Response; Modes of Transmission Study for the Zambezi Region. This report is a crucial part of efforts to prevent the spread of HIV in Namibia.

Namibia belongs to a region that is home to almost a quarter of all people living with HIV globally¹, and Zambezi has the highest prevalence of HIV nationally (16.9%)². The prevalence rate of HIV

¹ AIDS by the numbers 2015 UNAIDS Report

² MoHSS Sentinel Sero Survey Report 2014

among young people 15-24 (our future!)in Katima Mulilo is 24.3%. This statistic, drives home the need and importance for such a report.

In order to improve policy and response options, the KYE, KYR report, is an attempt by the Zambezi Region with support from UNDP and UNAIDS, to generate regional evidence and knowledge about the local epidemic.

Despite concerning statistics on incidence rates contained in the report, Namibia has made tremendous progress in HIV. For example: the Country continues to advocate for universal access to care and treatment for people living with HIV; Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission and Anti Retro Viral Treatment (ART) guidelines have been newly revised, and ART services have been rolled out to most parts of the country.

This provides an avenue for increased service delivery in decentralised health care facilities.

Another positive for Namibia is progress on elimination of Mother to Child Transmission. And if this current trend continues, Namibia is on track to become one of the first countries to completely eliminate Mother to Child Transmission.³

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A second objective of today's launch is to share key findings from the report for use in planning, budgeting and most importantly in targeting responses to vulnerable population groups.

The report tells us that people engaging in supposedly safe heterosexual sex are expected to account for 19% of new infections

³ HIV Estimates and Projections Report 2014

and commercial sex workers and their partners are expected to account for 22.4% of new infections. Multiple sexual partners are common in the region.

The report further highlights that traditional gender roles and the low status of women contribute to their increased vulnerability to HIV infections. There is limited communication between spouses about safe sex practises.⁴

The study states that disposable income, personal autonomy and high mobility are contributing factors to risky sexual practises. Therefore both wealth and poverty can increase vulnerability to HIV infections and subsequent transmissions.

Low levels of circumcision, frequent and concurrent partners, and low condom use sets the scene for high HIV transmission in any population group.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this report could not be timelier as HE the President Dr Hage Geingob has declared war on poverty and implementation of accelerated activities to eradicate poverty will begin this year.

The Namibia poverty mapping report shows that the Zambezi region is the third poorest in the country. Almost 30% of the population in Zambezi is considered poor. Coordinated interventions, including those aimed at eliminating new HIV infections across all population groups are required if 'no one is to be left behind' and zero new infections are to be realized.

Evidence⁵ shows that Namibia has halted and started to reverse the epidemic from 19,000 new infections in 2000 to 9600 in 2014. And

⁴ Koenig, 2003

⁵ HIV Estimates and Projections Report 2014

now that we have disaggregated data for Zambezi, we know who is most at risk for the region. The next step is total elimination.

Based on data from the report, we have an opportunity to develop targeted interventions and allocate resources that include all population groups in the region.

Therefore in conclusion, allow me to leave you with three messages:

First, I urge regional leadership to strengthen advocacy for continued and sustainable financing for HIV prevention programmes. We need to increase our focus on the challenging task of behaviour change if we are to eliminate new HIV infections.

Second, I call on all partners to continue working relentlessly to eliminate all forms of stigma and discrimination in order to reduce sexually transmitted infections that continue to facilitate HIV transmission.

Third, In order to transform mindsets, cultural practises and sexual behaviour that continue to fuel the epidemic must be changed. Ladies and Gentlemen, let's talk about sex!

As always, the UN stands ready to support the region in ensuring an HIV free generation in Zambezi region and in Namibia at large.

I thank you.