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Government Intervention

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As a central planning body with access to the national budget and also international sources of finance, the government of Zambia help alleviate the Aids/HIV epidemic by undertaking a number of policies geared at raising awareness to Aids at all levels of the social strata. The government can play a direct role by directing legislation to include HIV/AIDS friendly laws and undertaking policies that help increase social and public awareness of HIV/AIDS. This section will concentrate in the latter initiatives that the government can implement to ensure that the spread of the disease in contained in the future years so it does not permanently debilitate the economy from achieving

economic growth and welfare for future generations. The government should undertake steps that will help reinforce the role of the Zambia National AIDS Council and Secretariat which was formally launched on March 16, 2000. These bodies, which are under the supervision of a Council of Ministers, can take a very active role towards strengthening of the AIDS/HIV support and prevention programs around the country. They have the ability to exploit a number of different types of outlets for information and support generation to the public. The National Council was established with the goal of promoting and implementing effective approaches via different sectors of the economy. Their attention should be directed towards the prevention of HIV Transmission to the non-affected population and also provide care and social support for those already infected for HIV/AIDS by helping mitigate their pains both physical and social. The objectives of the Council are: the promotion of behavior change; prevention of mother-to-child transmission; safe blood transfusion; voluntary counseling and testing; care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS and orphans and vulnerable children; development of an information system database; and, coordination of multi sectoral interventions at district, provincial and national levels.

One of the reasons why there has been such rapid spread of the epidemic is because of the inequality between the genders. In general, women tend to have much less economic and social power in the community because of the way the society is organized. In general, the household are dominated by the decisions of the males in the family. This inequality has evolved because traditionally women have been less educated and less able to support themselves. Hence, they depend on the men for economic and moral support. The fact that women generally have less brute force than men has exacerbated the process. Consequently, women find it difficult to negotiate safe sex with their husbands who general indulge in extra-marital affairs and are hence more susceptible to HIV/AIDS transmission. The men then pass on the HIV to their wives who are unable to make their husbands use condoms during intercourse. Thus, in order to ameliorate the spread of the disease, the country needs to also raise the status of women in society by giving them a larger voice and ensuring that they are able to uphold their rights in the bedroom as well in society. The way that this can be done is by increasing their level of literacy so they are able to find employment and support themselves. Also, the Council can initiate a number of different types of awareness programs which inform women of their rights in the household. Campaigns can be started to encourage women to use the female condom. Health workers need to be employed who will work at the local government level along with the local policy makers in order to help start such awareness programs. The government can seek the aid of the multilateral and bilateral support from donor organizations to help create funding for these projects. In order to make the above programs viable, the government must also include the Local Government and Women's Affairs Ministries with the National Council. Both these ministries can play an important role in implementing the objectives of the National Council. By integrating them into the Council, there is direct involvement of these sectors in the process of helping create awareness

and ways to reduce the onslaught of AIDS/HIV at all tiers of the government and society. By promoting the rights of the women in all levels of the social strata, the Zambian government will be able to progress much further in their battle against AIDS.

One of the other major majors where both the government and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) need to focus is the prevention of the mother to Child transmission of AIDS/HIV. This is a very important focus area because by reducing the transmission of the virus from mother to child, they are able to substantially reduce the spread of the disease to future generations of the population who are the ones that are responsible for the future growth of the economy. If the new generation of the population of seriously debilitated by AIDS/HIV, then the future growth prospects of the economy will get seriously jeopardized. A weak dying population cannot work at levels required to compete if a rapidly globalizing environment where international competition is very high. Zambia needs a strong and healthy workforce and in order to ensure that is the case the state along with the help of the local and international NGOs need to massively upscale the project of providing treatment to pregnant mothers with IADS from a very early stage of pregnancy. Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) is one of the most effective ways know so far that will help in the process. Zambia's Prevention of Mother To Child Transmission (PMTCT) initiative was launched in 1999 offered anti-retroviral drugs (primarily Nevirapine) to expectant mothers. Such medicine can reduce the chance of an HIV-positive mother infecting her baby by around 50%. Unfortunately, very few pregnant women are even tested for HIV, let alone offered treatment. However, although at this moment the government is providing such treatment at the public health institutions, due to a constraint in resources ART is available in very limited supply. This project needs to be scaled up massively. Not only that, the treatment should prioritize the pregnant mothers because they have the most value-added from this treatment. At present, the Council has initiated programs with UNAIDS and its cosponsors and the bilateral agencies, to help in the prevention of Mother-to-child transmission of HIV (MTCT) at a limited number of sites along with and the Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT). Although the latter program has been expanded from a few sites to all districts, the former which is very important has been limited in its availability. This needs to be taken up by the Council in order to ensure that pregnant mother in all the district have access to this kind of free treatment benefits from the state, especially since they would most likely be unable to afford the treatment otherwise.

The government in general should try to increase the general provision of Anti- Retroviral (ARV) support at the public health institutions. One of the major factors that can potentially limit the growth of this program is the lack of trained health workers at the public health institutions. In order to cope with this restraint the government needs to seeks the aid of other donor organizations to help with this process. UNAIDS and WHO can provide support in this process by setting up extensive and intensive training programs for health workers so they can help

in the process of providing Care to the AIDS/HIV affected patients because ARV is known to dramatically improve the quality of lives of AIDS infected patients.

The government has much to do in order to help create awareness of the methods of treatment for AIDS infected patients and the way in getting this treatment. They need to encourage more people to undergo voluntary testing and take the benefit of counseling services. They can create networking institutions for people with AIDS to get moral support and receive counseling and mobilize communities to participate in the program. They can also set up orphanages for children whose parents die of AIDS and homes for single mothers with HIV. They can use the help of the media (radio and television) to spread these messages to the general public.