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AIDS killing more people than famine in Ethiopia

ADDIS ABABA, April 11 (Reuters) - Food shortages may be threatening the lives of up to eight million people in Ethiopia but certain death awaits at least three million people infected with HIV in the next eight years, health experts say.

Last year, nearly 300,000 people in Ethiopia died of AIDS-related illness – a rate of over 800 per day – and a further three million are believed to be infected with the HIV virus that will eventually lead to the deadly disease.

The toll is far higher than any figures relating to the food shortages in the Horn of Africa country and also threatens the most economically productive part of the population.

"AIDS is a far greater crisis facing Ethiopia than famine," one health expert told Reuters on Tuesday.

"At risk of sounding cynical, I am amazed at the reaction of the Ethiopian government and the West to the food shortages compared to their reaction to the AIDS crisis."

Last week, latest figures on Ethiopia's AIDS crisis showed that nearly 10 percent of the sexually active population – those aged between 15 and 49 – were infected with HIV.

Some 27 million of Ethiopia's 61 million people fall in that age group and those infected are projected not only to pass on the virus to tens of thousands of others, but also produce thousands of HIV-positive babies who will become orphans before probably falling to the disease themselves.

These figures are conservative estimates and based on testing at pregnancy clinics in mainly urban areas, experts say. The Ethiopian government has introduced public awareness campaigns, but health experts say privately that these are half-hearted and have had little impact.

"Perhaps the government feels vulnerable to blame if there is a national food shortage whereas contracting HIV is considered the fault of the individual," one said.

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Country Brief

ETHIOPIA

06/01/00

Socio-Economic Data

Total population (thousands), 1997	60,148	UNPOP
% of population urbanized, 1996	30	UNPOP
Annual population growth rate, 1980-1995	2.8	UNPOP
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births), 1996	113	UNICEF/UNPOP
Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 births), 1990	1400	WHO/UNICEF
Life expectancy, 1996	49	UNPOP
Adult literacy rate, 1995	M 46, F 25	UNESCO
Per capita GNP (US\$), 1995	100	World Bank
Human Poverty Index Value (HPI)	56.2	UNDP

Status of the Epidemic

Prevalence – Year	Trend
9.31 – 1997	In urban and peri-urban areas, higher (14-20%) prevalence. Lower in rural areas, but poor systematic coverage of those areas by the surveillance system.

National Response

Strategic Planning Process

- A National HIV-AIDS policy was endorsed by the Council of Ministers in August 1998; several Ministries have been coordinated by the Ministry of Health and a National (Federal) HIV-AIDS Strategic Plan (2000 – 2004) has been finalised and endorsed by the Council of Ministers.

Political Commitment

- The Government is about to launch a National Council on AIDS to co-ordinate and create an enabling environment for the implementation of the National AIDS Policy.

Multisectoral Involvement

- The decentralisation of the National AIDS programme is now effective and all of the 11 regions have already formulated their Regional Multi-sectoral HIV-AIDS Strategic Plans in collaboration with local and national NGOs. At least 29 NGOs are already implementing HIV-AIDS activities.

UN Theme Group on HIV-AIDS

Chair: UNDP Resident Representative

Members: UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, WORLD BANK, UNESCO, Ministry of Education, OAU, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour & Social

Country Brief

Affairs, UNFPA/CST, UNHCR and ECA

UNAIDS personnel: Recruitment of new Country Programme Advisor underway.

Support from UN System Agencies for HIV/AIDS activities in 1996-1997

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Amount US\$</i>
WHO	3,274,465
UNDP	260,437
UNFPA 4 million condoms for an estimated value of	164,000
UNICEF	211,460
UNESCO	
ILO	
UNAIDS	350,000
Total	4,260,362

Support from bilateral organizations for HIV/AIDS activities in 1996-1997

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Amount US\$</i>
The Netherlands	1,429,498
DANIDA	985,000
USAID	3,900,000
DFID	67,500
Others:	
Total	6,381,998

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