

OSI's Activities in HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and STIs

The Open Society Institute (OSI) is at the forefront of efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) at the global, regional, national, and local levels. The organization collaborates both with individual Soros foundations to support NGOs and with bilateral and multilateral agencies to change policy. This document highlights past and current OSI activities from a regional perspective.

Initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union

HIV/AIDS

The world's steepest rates of new HIV infections are now found in this region—and, unlike HIV/AIDS epidemics elsewhere, the vast majority of those infected are injecting drug users. The countries most affected are Russia and Ukraine, with Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Romania also seeing sharp increases. In response, OSI and its local partners have focused on increasing access to harm reduction services, evidence-based information, and palliative care.

Harm Reduction. OSI's International Harm Reduction Development Program (IHRD) now funds more than 200 needle exchange projects throughout the region. Another longstanding program priority for drug users has been the introduction of substitution therapies, in particular methadone maintenance. Since 2001, the program has increasingly focused on other vulnerable groups by implementing targeted harm reduction initiatives for sex workers, street children, prisoners, and Romani communities.

IHRD has also strengthened its policy and advocacy activities to complement existing direct service, technical assistance, and training programs. The overall goals of this policy initiative are to institutionalize harm reduction methods in national AIDS programs and to ensure that repressive drug policies—which remain common throughout the region—do not impede the expansion of harm reduction efforts. Such draconian policies have a direct impact both on how police and the legal system interact with drug users and the level of societal marginalization and discrimination that users experience.

IHRD has made significant progress in attracting both local government and international funders.

Evidence-based Information. Increasing the availability of evidenced-based information about HIV is another main objective of OSI's HIV/AIDS activities in a region where easily accessible resources remain lacking. OSI's Network Public Health Program and Information Program recently analyzed existing websites and, based on this needs assessment, they jointly awarded the Moscow-based NGO AIDS Foundation East-West a grant to develop a comprehensive Russian-language site for HIV/AIDS/STI information.

Recognizing the need for evidence to convince policymakers of the growing HIV/AIDS epidemics in the region, OSI has enlisted the support of Britain's Imperial College to expand with the scope and reach of the UNAIDS modeling group for the former Soviet Union. The modeling work aims to analyze the potential impact of the HIV epidemic and the potential effect of a variety of interventions. The British government's Department for International Development (DFID) has now assumed full funding for both the sociological and modeling components of the project and the research collaboration between Imperial and its Russian partners.

Technical Assistance. OSI continues to serve as a vital resource for other organizations working on HIV/AIDS issues in the region. For instance, OSI provided technical assistance to the World Bank in

2000 when it was developing TB/HIV loans for Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova, and the foundation played a similar role in 2003 and 2004 on the Bank's TB and HIV strategies for Central Asia and the Balkans. Since 2002, OSI staff have provided resource assistance to various working groups on HIV/AIDS, including the East-West Institute, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, as well as bilateral agencies (CIDA, USAID, and DFID) and the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria.

Palliative Care. Working in 20 countries of the region, OSI funds projects that seek to develop national health care policies integrating palliative care services and assuring essential drug availability. It has formed partnerships with the WHO to advance palliative care policy initiatives throughout the region and has worked with professional organizations such as European Association for Palliative Care, International Association for the Study of Pain, and the U.S. National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) to help countries develop standards and guidelines for palliative care and curriculum for healthcare professionals.

As a result of OSI's efforts and those of other organizations, drug-regulatory reform is in progress in several countries. Six of them—Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania—are currently developing national strategies to reduce barriers to opioid availability and to support the inclusion of essential palliative care drugs in government prescription programs. In addition, two countries, Croatia and Romania, have developed national task forces within their health ministries to address healthcare policy reform for palliative care.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

OSI's STI initiatives dovetail closely with its work on HIV/AIDS issues. Working together with WHO/EURO and the International Union Against Sexually Transmitted Infections, OSI focuses on fostering the adaptation, adoption, and dissemination of evidence-based clinical standards for high-quality STI diagnosis and treatment in five countries of the former Soviet Union (Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan). Among the important achievements has been the development of a network of health professionals with the technical skills and progressive outlook needed to transform the national response to STIs by providing training and networking opportunities to top- and mid-level STI/HIV/AIDS policymakers and program managers. Since 2001, OSI has supported the participation of key STI/HIV/AIDS professionals from the former Soviet Union in the Annual Course on Principles of STD and HIV Research offered by the University of Washington.

Tuberculosis

The incidence of tuberculosis has reached epidemic proportions in several countries of the region, affecting some of the most vulnerable populations—particularly prisoners. OSI continues to expand its TB-related activities to help improve access to treatment and increase awareness of the disease. In 2002, the foundation leveraged matching funding from USAID to support a full-time TB officer for the Balkan sub-region for two years to assist in the preparation, establishment, monitoring, expansion, and coordination of DOTS programs. Similarly, OSI leveraged support from other donors to provide technical assistance for scaling up DOTS interventions in the Caucasus through the support of a WHO TB Advisor for that region.

Prison Health. Health conditions within the region's prison systems remain dire. In 1997, OSI began supporting a pilot project for TB control in the Russian prison system. While the project successfully introduced DOTS, it also uncovered an unexpected epidemic of multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB). The program, now carried out through a grant collaboration with Partners In Health, focuses on the challenges of treating TB and MDR-TB and integrating prison and civilian health care systems. Its priorities have included the upgrading of lab facilities in Russia and the creation of an international training program in Tomsk.

In order to increase international awareness of and donor commitment towards remedying the poor health status of prisoners and the particular health concerns in prison communities, OSI has provided funding to the International Centre for Prison Studies/Penal Reform International. This organization supports a high-level advisory committee on prison health (comprising prison health experts, international agencies, and donors); prepares and disseminates information on prison health issues; and manages a national-level fund for projects and activities implemented, in part, in conjunction with the national foundations.

OSI has initiated projects in Moldova and Georgia aimed at devising policies and revising practices to ensure the continuity of TB care as patients move between the prison and civilian health sectors. In Mongolia, a project is underway to align postgraduate professional training for doctors in the prison sector with what is available for physicians in the civilian sector.

Initiatives in Africa

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS continues to devastate sub-Saharan Africa, with some 26 million people already infected and thousands dying every day. OSI's HIV/AIDS initiatives on the continent focus primarily on increasing transparency and inclusion in the area of HIV/AIDS by supporting projects related to advocacy, awareness, treatment access, and palliative care, particularly among marginalized communities. The initiatives are coordinated primarily through three Soros foundations—the Open Society Foundation for South Africa, the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa—although some projects are coordinated directly from OSI's headquarters in New York.

Open Society Foundation for South Africa (OSF-SA). The foundation, located in the country with the highest absolute number of HIV-infected people in the world, focuses its HIV/AIDS related work in two areas: governance and community media. OSF-SA has supported such organizations as Justice Africa, the Women's Legal Center, Treatment Action Coalition, and Soul City.

Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA). Through its programs in human rights, education, media, ICTs and economic reform in nine countries in southern Africa, OSISA has made a number of grants related to HIV/AIDS in the past years. These include a literacy program in Malawi focused around malaria and HIV issues; a project in Lesotho to ensure the inclusion of HIV positive children in the education system; a project looking at options for HIV orphans in Zambia; and a film that provided a realistic and less apocalyptic portrayal of PLWAs in the region. OSISA also provided significant support to ActionAIDS to work within the education sector to support appropriate government policy and practice in the countries of the region.

In 2004 a new initiative will be launched to monitor national responses to the pandemic, promote regional advocacy, and mainstream HIV/AIDS into other OSI programs such as human rights, media, education, economic policy, IT, and indigenous languages.

Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). Covering 18 countries in western Africa, OSIWA has funded a number of HIV/AIDS projects in the region. Projects have included providing technical assistance for rural HIV/AIDS NGOs in Senegal; policy work in support of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS in Togo; awareness-raising on the pandemic; radio programming; supporting women's protection initiatives; encouraging HIV/AIDS policy development in the region; and disseminating information on prevention, especially focused on youth.

IN 2003, OSIWA will focus its activities on policy (strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations to look at transparency of funds), training and content development for media, community based engagement of women and youth, and integration of TB/HIV.

OSI-New York. Based in OSI's New York office, the Network Public Health Program has begun to provide support to OSI's HIV/AIDS projects in Africa. In 2003, the program funded a project developed by the Africa Grantmakers' Affinity Group to conduct and distribute mapping research on foundation, bilateral and multilateral support of health projects in Africa. Together with OSF-SA, it also funded efforts by the NGO Justice Africa to engage civil society in HIV/AIDS issues and to incorporate these issues into the dialogue on African governance, peace, and security. This project will focus its work around the newly formed intergovernmental Commission on HIV/AIDS and Governance in Africa. With OSISA, the program has supported the University of Botswana in an effort to review civil society involvement in that country's national AIDS efforts.

Through its Palliative Care Initiative in South Africa, OSI has begun to address the critical need for palliative care resources and information. Its goal is to act as a catalyst to advance programs in palliative care education, training, and service delivery and to advocate for their full integration into national HIV/AIDS treatment and care programs. To help achieve this goal, OSI-New York has launched a program to support three NGOs that have the expertise, experience, and proven community-based organizational skills to lead a broad-based initiative to enhance palliative care services through professional and public training: MESAB and Hospice and Palliative Care Association, both based in South Africa, and the New York-based Foundation for Hospices in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Global Initiatives

HIV/AIDS

Although OSI's primary HIV/AIDS activities have been at the regional, national, and local levels, the foundation has supported crucial global campaigns such as the Panos Institute's global AIDS initiative, Aidspan's *Global Fund Observer*, and the Social Science Research Council's Initiative on HIV/AIDS and Global Transformation. These initiatives aim to increase civil society investment in the fight against HIV/AIDS by promoting public participation, ownership, and accountability within the response to the epidemic.

Tuberculosis

OSI's global tuberculosis efforts focus on helping establish and support coalitions aimed at drawing attention and resources to the disease at a time when drug-resistant strains are increasingly common. George Soros' personal involvement galvanized the attention of the White House, the World Bank, the WHO and major funders both internationally and in the region, resulting in worldwide recognition of the problem of multi-drug resistant TB as well as significant budgetary increases to fight TB worldwide.

Since 2001, OSI has served on the Stop-TB coordinating board, a group of 20 organizations that govern the Stop-TB partnership and have coordinated the publication and advocacy around the landmark *Global Plan to Stop-TB*. Stop-TB, a global collaborative movement to accelerate social and political action to eliminate the unnecessary spread of tuberculosis, is committed to ensuring that every TB patient has access to treatment and care; that vulnerable populations are protected from TB; and that the social and economic toll on families, communities, and nations is reduced. The *Global Plan* serves as the blueprint for guiding partnership activities.

OSI aims to strengthen the Stop-TB Partnership through a number of activities. In 2003, Results Educational Fund, Inc. began utilizing OSI funding to stimulate the political and public support needed to implement the *Global Plan's* recommendations. Efforts will include increased media attention to the Plan and the issues of TB and TB/HIV co-infection; the development of a cadre of political leaders dedicated to TB control; and the mobilization of resources from the United States and bilateral donors to implement the Plan. In 2002 and 2003, OSI contributed to the cost of supporting a staff member at the

World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Health Initiative focused on TB. This staff member has been tasked with assisting the Stop-TB Partnership in engaging the private sector to help bridge the resource gaps that hinder the success of a sustained global campaign against TB.

A key activity of the Global Plan is the Global TB Drug Facility (GDF), which was established in 2000 as a pooled procurement mechanism to ensure universal access to and distribution of quality TB drugs. Together with DFID, OSI is supporting an evaluation of the GDF. This evaluation is expected to determine the extent to which the GDF is meeting the goals and objectives set out in its strategic plan and to offer recommendations on the future structure and processes of the GDF.

Other key OSI TB-related advocacy efforts have included supporting the Green Light Committee's campaign to radically reduce the price of second-line drugs for treating MDR-TB and supporting the publication of and advocacy around *Global Impact of Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis*, a report commissioned by OSI from Harvard Medical School that led to worldwide recognition of the problem and the adoption of control strategies by the WHO and major investment by the Gates Foundation.