

**‘HIV/AIDS and Fragile States in Australia’s Proximate Region’
Workshop, La Trobe University, April 2007**

**A Research Agenda for HIV/AIDS and State Fragility in
the Asia Pacific¹**

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The purpose of the *HIV/AIDS and Fragile States in Australia’s Proximate Region Workshop* was to examine and analyse the agenda of the *AIDS Security and Conflict Initiative* (ASCI). ASCI’s focus has been on HIV/AIDS and fragile states in Africa and the workshop sought to expand it into the Asia-Pacific region by creating a relevant research agenda. Participants represented a cross-section of policymakers, practitioners and academics. The aim was to bring practical and political considerations to bear on setting an agenda for research.

The workshop participants quickly came to the conclusion that the ASCI agenda as it stands does not readily transfer to conditions in the Asia-Pacific region. For instance, the orthodox notion of security was considered by workshop participants to be too narrow to account for the characteristics of Asia-Pacific states and the epidemic in the region. The term was thus broadened by participants to include a focus on human security as well as state security. It was also proposed that various dimensions of the relationship between violence, including sexual violence, and HIV be put onto the agenda as an aspect of security. The lack of attention to needle transmission and HIV on the ASCI agenda was also suggested as central when expanding the agenda to the Asia-Pacific. In addition, the difference in drivers of the HIV epidemic in the Asia-Pacific region when compared to Africa, and the tenuous nature of the links between security issues and HIV/AIDS in the Asia-Pacific were also issues of concern to participants when examining the relevance of the ASCI agenda to the Asia-Pacific.

There was repeated emphasis on questioning for whom the research is being conducted and who benefits from such research. There was strong support for the proposition that any research that is done should benefit, as well as engage in a partnership with, the communities in which it is carried out, with findings made accessible to the communities.

Many issues were raised in the two days of discussions regarding expansion of the ASCI agenda to make it more relevant to the participants’ work in the Asia-Pacific region. However, while the credence of these issues was recognised it was also acknowledged that not all issues were able to be put forth as research proposals for ASCI.

¹ *This document is an abridged version of the official minutes that focuses on the outcomes of the final planning session of the workshop held on April 3, 2007.*

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There was consensus that the following six areas of research were priorities in creating practical research on the character and implications of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Asia-Pacific:

1. Links between HIV, Security and Fragile States in the Asia-Pacific

Conceptions of state security are too narrow to capture the true implications of the HIV epidemic for the people who live within states. Human security may be a more appropriate perspective.

It was widely agreed among workshop participants that framing a research agenda in terms of the links between HIV/AIDS, fragile states and security was not a useful paradigm for the Asia-Pacific. Despite the existence of much dialogue linking the issues of HIV/AIDS, fragile states and security, little evidence exists to support the contention that HIV is a state security issue (in sharp contrast to the experience of a number of African states). It was therefore proposed that research go into (a) explaining why the link is not useful and largely irrelevant in the region, and (b) explaining the significance of HIV as a human security issue for people and communities.

It was proposed that both (a) and (b) could be achieved through an historical examination of several countries to determine precisely in what sense HIV is considered a security issue. Expanding on the fragility and HIV framework, ASCI proposed an examination of political economies, specifically, exploration of when local levels of fragility turn into crises at a state level and what, if any, role HIV/AIDS has in transformation of crises at a local level into state level crises. The purpose of this research will be to examine how HIV is able to become a political influence at various levels.

2. Governance and Community Capacity

In much of the Asia-Pacific community-level responses to HIV/AIDS are at least as important as national responses.

As an alternative to having fragile states, security and HIV as an overarching conceptual framework, it was proposed that a research agenda focus on governance and community capacity. However, within this scope there would be room for consideration of issues that may fall into the category of fragile states and security; such as, how states are characterised (weak/strong and in-between) and the role of the state (whether or not states actually facilitate the spread of HIV). Much support existed for this proposal as an appropriate overarching framework for research, from which various research projects could be formulated.

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Proposed directions for research related to the issues of governance and community capacity in relation to HIV/AIDS included: incorporating existing indicators of governance; establishing indicators in regards to community capacity, its definition and interaction with government, and community expectations; policy analysis; and, community-based work.

A possible focus of research into community responses to HIV/AIDS, which is also fitting within the fragile states/conflict framework, was the Papua New Guinea-West Papua border. It was also suggested that communities within the vicinity of the Highlands Highway in Papua New Guinea serve as an entry point into research on the functioning of communities in regard to HIV/AIDS within fragile states.

It was also recognised that within certain states civil society may be under-developed, or take different forms, and not given the chance or resources to create a response to HIV/AIDS. This point emphasised the need to look at community responses to HIV/AIDS in the wider context of national responses to the epidemic. How the wider actions of states without civil society groups that effectively deal with HIV/AIDS impact on HIV policies and, what the ramifications of an absence of effective civil society are, were raised as useful possibilities for future research.

Generally, support existed for the scope of the research to include the influence of outside actors, such as corporations and international aid donors, and their impact on the strength of the state. The Solomon Islands was the country of initial concern in this regard. An examination of health promotion and the capacity of different systems and stakeholders were also proposed. Such considerations as stand alone studies were, however, considered not possible by the narrow timeframe of the initial research program sponsored by ASCI. The priority would have to be the broader examination of policies, policy development, and policy outcomes with the above considerations as factors that could be included.

3. Policy Issues

More comparative analysis of how good HIV policy is made is required with a focus on political will of participants in the policy-making process.

Participants noted that much of the available knowledge on HIV policy was patchy and incomplete. Therefore, a thorough comparative examination of HIV policy was proposed. This examination would include what it is, and whether it is in compliance with supra-state obligations, standards and guidelines. It would be appropriate to develop partnerships between practitioners, policymakers and academics to undertake this type of research. It was suggested that the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea could serve as case studies through which the development of policy be examined.

From the perspective of ASCI’s proposal, and the wider AusAID agenda, it was suggested that the influence, or lack thereof, of political will and political

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commitment by policymakers, donors and practitioners be a factor to be taken into consideration in this area of research.

4. Evolution of the Epidemic

More research of the country-specific differences in the evolution of the epidemic is needed both for national campaigns but also because of its comparative value for other regional states.

It was proposed that research go into the examination of the vastly different evolution of HIV epidemics within different states and how and why these HIV prevalence patterns have occurred. As noted earlier, a number of participants suggested that the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea would be useful cases to examine these trends in the South Pacific. The purpose of such research would not be limited to helping the Solomon Islands to maintain a low HIV prevalence rate and helping Papua New Guinea combat its growing HIV epidemic. Rather, it was hoped that analysis of country-specific trends would be useful for policymakers, practitioners and researchers across the region.

5. Development and HIV/AIDS

Research into the real and potential links between HIV and development has not kept pace with the trajectory of the epidemic in the region. More research is needed and must be mindful of the benefits it can bring to local communities.

A continuing theme raised by participants as an area of potential research was the issue of development and HIV/AIDS. The contention was that there are various obvious, nascent and potential links between development and HIV/AIDS that have emerged in the region but that research has not kept pace with these changes. Related issues include influxes of cash, state incapacity and negation of state law by corporations.

The inability to maintain the status quo within fragile states maintains negative effects of development, cash payment of benefits, development of establishments such as casinos and associated money laundering and brothels and the links between an increase in HIV risky behaviour and such development, development profits used non-developmentally are all issues that arose as concerns for such research. As did the absence of men in villages, the loss of family protection, and the alteration of the way in which family structures operate. A number of examples, such as West Papua, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands were offered as good cases for studying these issues.

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Research must benefit the development of local communities who often form the subject of the research.

6. Case Studies

Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands would be appropriate case studies to tease out most of the issues raised in the Workshop.

The two key countries that participants continually returned to as possible focuses for case studies were Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. The Papua New Guinea/Solomon Islands case study framework was widely supported as feasible within the proposed research framework, limiting it to a small number of case studies with the possibility of cross-country analysis.

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