Promoting STI control policies and programmes post-2015: Lessons for the future from Iran and China

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Outline of Presentation

- STIs in the IRI
- Examples of an effective intervention
- Why are STIs on the agenda in Iran?
- STI programmes versus HIV programmes
- Support of UN agencies
- Why didn't STIs fall of the agenda for UNFPA Iran?

The STI surveillance system in Iran

- Established in 1998
- Routine STI case reporting based on two diagnostic methods – aetiological and syndromic
- MOHME STI guidelines oblige service providers to report syndroms and etiology of sexually transmitted infections.
- Surveys among high-risk groups and general population

Public/private sector partnership

- 86 % of STI patients in Iran refer to the private sector for treatment.
- Although mandated to do so, service providers in the private sector do not regularly share data with the MOHME
- Two recent studies have estimated sensitivity of the STIs surveillance system in Iran about 25%
- Another recent study has come to the conclusion only 4% of physicians and midwives had regularly reported new cases in the past 4 years.

What is the situation of STIs?

- Quality of evidence is poor (mostly anecdotal evidence)
- Surveillance is “patchy”
- A few cross-sectional surveys
- No trends in time

Plans for diagnosis, care and treatment for STIs

Chapter 5 of the National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS is on diagnosis, care and treatment for STIs

- By the end of the Plan
  - 10% of the most vulnerable women and 5% of the most vulnerable men receive periodical check-ups for STIs and standard treatment.
  - At least 10% of the STI patients diagnosed with genital ulcer and urethral discharge who refer to the Ministry of Health's health centers will be covered by the condom use program.
Example of an effective intervention
• 30 "counselling centres for vulnerable women" were set up throughout the country.
• Centers are run by NGOs
• Services include:
  • assessment and treatment of STIs, psychological and social support
  • counselling and testing for HIV
  • reproductive health services
  • referral system

Why are STIs on the agenda in Iran?
• STI programmes are not separated from HIV programmes (both in the Department for Communicable Diseases Control of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education)
• The Ministry of Health is merged with medical universities, which ensures that technical people are in charge of health programmes, rather than sole managers.
• The MOHME uses the opportunity that the global attention and funding for HIV provides to address STIs, sex work and other related social issues.

Quotes from Dr. Gouya, the D.G for Communicable Disease Control Department
• Target groups for HIV and STI are the same – populations with high-risk sexual behavior.
• The STI surveillance system is an opportunity to improve the HIV surveillance system and vice versa
• The needed interventions to control/combats STI and HIV are the same, so it is better to see them in one package, this not only reduces the costs, but makes the interventions more effective.
• These two infections can only be interpreted correctly, if they are seen in conjunction.
• It is a big mistake to see STI and HIV infections separately.

How does the MOHME address STI control in a sensitive environment?
• Pragmatic approach of MOHME
  • “We are in charge of the health of population, not their morals.”
  • The MOHME provides services with the argument that Islam emphasizes the importance of health and dignity of Muslims, and their programmes are in line with these teachings.
• Services provided to sex workers are provided "under the radar".

Promoting condom use in a pro-natalist environment.
• “If usage of condoms for contraception is discouraged, this has nothing to do with usage of condoms in extramarital sex.”
• Condom promotion for contraception targets married couples
• Condom promotion to prevent STIs targets people with high-risk sexual behavior.

UN agencies’ support to STI programmes

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<td>Support to:</td>
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<td>• STI survey among sex workers (joint activity with UNFPA)</td>
<td>• The review of the STI programme</td>
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<td>• Review of the STI surveillance and provision of recommendations</td>
<td>• The review and assessment of sex-work in Iran and establishment of the sex-worker centers</td>
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<td>• Strengthening of laboratory</td>
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<td>• I support to etiologic studies.</td>
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<td>Continuous advocacy for a strong STI control programme</td>
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Why didn’t STIs fall of the agenda for UNFPA Iran?

- Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health is a core mandate of UNFPA
- UNFPA cares about the vulnerable, the marginalized, the forgotten, the "sinners".
- UNFPA ensures access of these groups to reproductive health services, improving their sexual and reproductive health,
- Ensuring healthy pregnancies and healthy children
- Improving quality of life.

Thank you