

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

Monire-Therese Bassir, Programme Specialist in UNFPA Iran  
presenting on behalf of UNFPA Iran



## 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/combat 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

WHO	UNFPA
Support to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STI survey among sex workers (joint activity with UNFPA)</li> <li>• Review of the STI surveillance and provision of recommendations</li> </ul>	Support to : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The review of the STI programme</li> <li>• The review and assessment of sex-work in Iran and establishment of the sex-worker centers</li> <li>• Strengthening of laboratory</li> <li>• Support to etiologic studies.</li> </ul>
	Continuous advocacy for a strong STI control programme

## 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

