



International Harm Reduction Development Program: Lessons learned

Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch
International Harm Reduction Development Program
Open Society Institute

Photo: Marina Smelyanskaya, 2007

International Harm Reduction Development Program (IHRD)



- Since its foundation in 1995, IHRD has partnered with national Soros foundations and local organizations to support more than 200 projects in 26 countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia
- Projects seek to reduce HIV and other adverse consequences of drug use through evidence-based approaches
 - Needle and syringe programs (NSPs)
 - Opiate substitution treatment (methadone and buprenorphine)
 - Peer outreach
 - Medical and social services
 - Community Advocacy
 - Human rights protections and policy reform

Photo: Dan Bigg

The HIV pandemic in Eastern Europe and Central Asia is driven by injection drug use (IDU) and is growing faster than in any other geographic region in the world



http://www.reliefweb.int/map/cis/reg/ee_ca.html, map provided by Relief Web

Socio-Political Transition, Injecting Drug Use, HIV/AIDS, and the State

- **Massive migration, emigration and political conflict**
- **“Rewiring” of economic system, with collapse of old state role and industrial patterns (Castells)**
- **Economic desperation often leads to emergence of underground economies—drug trafficking, sex work, smuggling**
- **HIV epidemic moves in those same channels**





Photo: Ranard

Eastern Europe, former Soviet Union and Central Asia

- ▶ Russia-fastest growing epidemic in the world
 - Estimated 1 million with HIV-more than in North America
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ under age 30, 70% IDU
- ▶ Ukraine-estimated 400,000 HIV cases, 69% IDU
- ▶ Central Asia, cases doubling yearly, >80% IDU



Photo: Mia Foster

Good News.....

- Evidence-based interventions to stem HIV and other harms against IDU's exist
- Syringe exchange programs and methadone maintenance treatment have been proven easy to implement and are highly effective in trials from Australia to Thailand to Belarus.



Bad News.....

- **Evidence of effectiveness has so far proved a poor match for ideology**
- **Countries with injection-driven epidemics continue to emphasize criminal enforcement and demand for abstinence over the best practices of public health.**



Photo: Hans-Jurgen Burkard

Barriers/Policy Challenges



Photo: Hans-Jurgen Burkard

US War on Drugs

- **The United States Government's war on drugs includes efforts to remove harm reduction language from international treaties and policies.**
- **Creates a barrier to disseminating information about evidence-based interventions and implementing harm reduction programs**
- **Influences policies worldwide**

Not a Solution



- Common reaction is to become tougher on drug users
- Drives users underground
- Less likely to access services
- Condemning drug users to overcrowded prisons where needles are shared and HIV rates are surging

Photo: Hans Jürgen Burkard

Limited support in the region

- **Several countries have responded to the HIV epidemic by implementing pilot substitution treatment and syringe exchange programs, but efforts must be scaled up and strengthened.**
- **Harm Reduction programs are often regarded with distrust by law enforcement**
- **Methadone is only available in 2 countries of CIS**
 - Programs extremely controlled and high threshold
 - Uzbekistan pilot only for those with HIV (25 methadone, 75 buprenorphine)
 - Restricted by age, only for those with repeated attempts at drug-free treatment, etc.

IHRD Response: Evidence Based Harm Reduction

- **Use the approaches proven most effective to control infections and reduce deaths: clean needles, substitution treatment, etc.**
- **These methods, extensively studied and endorsed by UNAIDS, WHO etc., decrease HIV risk and do not encourage drug use**
 - **Work with law enforcement**
 - **Media campaigns about evidence base**



IHRD Response II: Advocacy for National Reform

- Disentangle public health from law enforcement
 - Forced testing, registration, sharing of information with police
- Fight discrimination through litigation and regulatory reform
 - Document human rights abuses at program sites
 - Challenge barriers to HIV treatment, laws criminalizing HIV+ adults, lack of employment and housing protections



Photo: Jakarta, 2006

Advocacy for National Reform

- Change overly punitive, ineffective incarceration and institutionalization policies and “scale up” prevention
 - Russian drug law reform in 2004
 - Call to set drug treatment standards, making it unacceptable for forced detention and labor camps in China, Indonesia, Vietnam, etc, to be called drug treatment.



IHRD Response III: International Advocacy

- New IDU epidemics require new policy responses
 - Plenary speeches, satellite meetings and reports at International AIDS conferences
 - Inclusion of IDU issues, and funding, at WHO, Global Fund, bilateral aid efforts
 - UN Commission on Human Rights and Commission on Narcotic Drugs
 - With Human Rights Watch and government of Brazil, special briefing with Paul Hunt, Emma Bonino and Aryeh Neier



Photo: Reuters, 2004

Thank you

Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch

International Harm Reduction Development Program
Open Society Institute

kmalinowska@sorosny.org