

HIV/AIDS remains the most important social and public health problem in Botswana and in Sub-Saharan Africa. Doubts have been cast with respect to the true prevalence of HIV/AIDS world over. Arguments over this can only serve to derail us from the progress that has been made in our struggle against HIV/AIDS. The truth of the matter is that due to the level of the maturity of the pandemic it is clearly evident to all of us that HIV has had a gross negative impact in our communities. To use the expression of one the members of Parliament "HIV/AIDS is dessimating communities" or as His Excellency observed " People are dying in chillingly large numbers." We cannot therefore afford to argue over numbers. We should realise that HIV/AIDS is not just about numbers but about real people. Ofcourse numbers are important for planning purposes but let us never forget the people behind these numbers.

In Botswana, over 70% of admissions in Medical wards are HIV related. Orphans are on the increase with 40 000 registered orphans. Grandmothers have the misfortune of looking after orphans when they should have been cared for. Some homes are child headed all because of this scourge.

It was for these reasons that the Government of Botswana introduced various interventions including the ART and PMTCT Programmes. One is aptly aware that the study by BIDPA does not in the eye of a non economist project a negative economic growth at a macro level. However, the impact of HIV/AIDS at a micro level is what matters to many people. Looking at the number of funerals that are taking place and the fact that these deaths involve the economically productive there is no doubt in my mind that families are suffering.

This meeting therefore is important for us as a country. The need to scale up these two critical activities in Botswana and world over cannot be overemphasized.

I therefore wish to welcome you to Botswana and urge you to see this activity as a challenge to you for contributing toward making this world a better place.

We shall be waiting for your report with keen interest.  
Thank you for choosing Botswana as one of the places  
where you could carry out the consultations.

Once again welcome to Botswana.