

THE PROVISION OF LIFE SAVING HIV TREATMENT AND BROADER HEALTH IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE COTE D'IVOIRE CRISIS

On 14 January 2011 the EU imposed an embargo on general products coming into Côte d'Ivoire as a way of pressurising Laurent Gbagbo to leave power.

According to Council Regulation (EU) No 25/2011 of 14 January 2011 on restrictive measures in Côte d'Ivoire, "Member States... may authorise the release of certain frozen funds or economic resource... after having determined that the funds or economic resources are necessary for basic expenses, including payments for ... medicines and medical treatment".

However, life saving Antiretroviral (ARV) treatment for HIV patients and other essential medical supplies were not reaching people on the ground because the EU embargo effectively prevented any shipment coming from the EU to arrive in the country; irrespective of the types of cargo they transported, as often permitted and embargoed goods travel in the same shipments.

The impact of this blockage on the provision of ARV treatment and other essential medicines to Côte d'Ivoire was ever so serious that about 90% of drug supplies into the country come from European Union member states.

At the beginning of April 2011 supplies of the life saving medicines were running out rapidly.

Following Gbagbo's detention on 11 April 2011, the EU embargo is to be lifted. However, instability remains and the effects of the shortages in provision of medicines, treatments and health services are bound to last long prolonging the suffering of millions of Ivoirians unless effective action is taking to restore the supply chain of medical supplies and of a functioning health provision.

IMPACT OF THE CRISIS AND ITS AFTERMATH ON THE HIV RESPONSE

In spite of working under extremely difficult conditions, national NGOs and civil society organisations were operative during the crisis and continue to provide essential support for the HIV response. Alliance Côte d'Ivoire managed to run HIV/AIDS counselling and testing services in the quieter parts of the country during the crisis. But services providing home based care and supporting orphaned and vulnerable children have not been able to resume yet as Ivoirians remain at their homes because of the insecurity.

Most national NGOs and community based are still unable to access money from the banks as most financial institutions are also closed. As a result essential programmes are still severely disrupted since and programme funding is running out.

The international community can play a vital role is in supporting local organisations finding ways to help these organisations access the funds they need to carry on with their work, get treatment into the country and provide a safe space in which to get HIV and other health programmes up and running again. However, some international funders have suspended the provision of funding for the health response due to security considerations. A quick

resumption of programmes now that the crisis is over is essential so that national organisations get the necessary support to avoid interrupting programmes and causing further delays in the provision of essential treatment and cause further suffering to Ivorian citizens.