

SA AIDS Conference

AIDS Leadership awards

“South Africa now has the largest ARV programme in the world, with excellent results in its prevention of mother to child programme, and the first improvement in overall life expectancy in two decades. Coverage is steadily improving, with access to excellent first line drugs and solid monitoring. The national treasury has funded the programme appropriately.

This rosy picture bears no resemblance to the situation five short years ago, where a denialist president, with the collusion of our health minister and a large number of the cabinet, delayed and stymied the HIV response within the country, conservatively causing the deaths of 400 000 people for lack of access to antiretrovirals. It took the action of a large number of brave organisations and individuals, within civil society and the state, to oppose the unjustness of the Mbeki era, as well as significant leadership afterwards to attend to the damage. People watched as their family, friends and colleagues got ill and died, and galvanised civil society in a way not seen since apartheid.

This award acknowledges the people who have showed incredible bravery during our AIDS response – activists, community members, health workers, politicians, journalists, researchers – and who have made our HIV programme something that South Africa can finally take pride in.”

Talking Back

Remembering a Lost Decade: An Oral History of the South African HIV/AIDS Epidemic

AIDS denialism at senior government level is estimated to have resulted in the untimely death of 340 000 South Africans during the period referred to as “the lost decade” by the current Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi. Memories of the lost decade are vivid in people who lived and worked in close proximity with the devastation caused by this pandemic and in those who fought to change this reality. This project aims to generate oral testimonies of the first decade of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa. The lessons learned from fighting this in epidemic deserves to be remembered and the key individuals who contributed to ensuring that South Africa now has the largest AIDS treatment programme in the world needs to be acknowledged. The Oral History Project acknowledges that that such lessons are best conveyed by human experience, in human voices by those who witnessed and experienced the events of this lost decade.

This project is documenting through the use of multimedia sources the stories and experiences of health professionals, advocates and people living with HIV and AIDS. The project is also building up a repository of these stories for the purposes of creating a historical archive of the struggle against HIV/AIDS, which will be accessible to the public and to future generations.

<http://www.talkingback.dirasengwe.org/>