



## Activists and the Success of PEPFAR

**Reading:** *Redefining the Possible: The Global AIDS Response*, Pg. 121-131, from *Reimagining Global Health*, Paul Farmer, Jim Kim, Arthur Kleinman, Matt Basilio

### Discussion Guide

**Goal:** Understand how strategic advocacy efforts contributed to the passage of PEPFAR and how this set the stage for massive advancements in the right to health movement.

#### **Suggested Discussion Questions:**

1. Why is it important to be strategic about goal setting, in addition to being collaborative and coordinated, when thinking about advocacy efforts?
2. Why were activists during the AIDS movement so successful? Consider differences in strategy between the activists who protested at Al Gore's rallies and advocates like Franklin Graham. Then, consider the current state of the movement for the right to health. What unique challenges exist now?
3. The text notes that due to diminishing support for AIDS care efforts following the 2008 economic downturn, "Across the developing world, hospitals and clinics have had to turn away new AIDS patients" (131). How does our work as an Engage Chapter help to ensure fewer patients get turned away?

#### **Key Quotes:**

"Activists interrupted his speech with whistles, banners, and chants of "Gore's greed kills! AIDS drugs for Africa!" In the ensuing days, similarly disruptive protests took place at other campaign events, lending the bilateral dispute prominence in the US press. Soon after these protests, the political winds shifted decidedly against the pharmaceutical lobby" (123).

"Spurred by the same forces—lower drug prices, growing evidence of treatment efficacy in resource-poor settings, grassroots activism, and advocacy by elites—other rich nations also increased their allocations to global AIDS programs" (129).

"The first decade of the twenty-first century raised the bar in global health. The failures of imagination that had long been the status quo fell prey to evidence of effective health care delivery in resource-poor settings matched with bold visions of global health equity... yet, it is still a long road to 'health for all'" (130).

## Lesson Plan

**Goal:** Understand how strategic advocacy efforts contributed to the passage of PEPFAR and how this set the stage for massive advancements in the right to health movement.

**Warm Up:** What values inspire people of disparate backgrounds to advocate for the right to health?

**Diagnostic:** It is important to be collaborative and coordinated between diverse groups in advocacy efforts. Why is it also important to be extremely strategic about goal setting, that is, about choosing which of many diverse issues to pursue?

**Teaching Bit:** While there is still much work to be done, the AIDS movement has been a great success story. Activists of many different backgrounds, who seemingly had little in common, were able to come together, driving forward these strategic successes:

- **Drug prices:** When antiretrovirals were first developed, they were heinously expensive. This created a significant barrier for poor countries (and individuals) to access care. In an effort to overcome this barrier, the South African parliament passed the Medicines Act, declaring that in cases of public health emergencies, generic drugs could be produced or procured. This caused both diplomatic and legal backlash from the U.S. government and pharmaceutical industry, largely due to a loss of profits from brand-name pharmaceuticals. A small group of activists (who would become Health GAP) took carefully planned action by repeatedly protesting Al Gore's campaign events. In a matter of months, the Clinton administration reversed its stance on the Medicines Act and the pharmaceutical companies withdrew their lawsuits.
- **PEPFAR:** With medicines now affordable, activists turned their attention to securing funding for broad treatment interventions. During an era of Republican control over the executive and legislative branches, the AIDS lobby, a broad and diverse group consisting of religious organizations, students, gay rights activists, African Americans, and HIV+ individuals, was able to inspire unheard of levels of support from the US government. One of the most ambitious funding programs came from President George W. Bush, who established the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a massive \$15 billion pledge to fight AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean. As stated in the text, unlike many previous global health initiatives, which focused on specific diseases in specific countries, PEPFAR "established new goals to strengthen health infrastructure—recruiting and training (and retaining) 140,000 health care professionals and paraprofessionals in partner countries... in addition to expanding AIDS treatment and prevention services" (130).

**Guided Practice:** PEPFAR's massive pledge to fight AIDS in multiple nations changed the face of global health. In pairs, first brainstorm a list of specific potential goals that AIDS activists could have set. Consider the initial goal of fighting for drug prices, potential educational campaigns that might have taken place, international work, or other policies, facilities, etc. that might have made AIDS treatment possible. Then, talk as a group about these goals and why fighting for a broad funding mechanism is a smart and strategic goal.

**Independent Practice:** As a group, consider who fought in the AIDS movement and brainstorm what made their advocacy efforts so effective. Consider who was leading advocacy efforts, who was being affected by policy decisions and lack of care, the political actors being targeted, etc.

**Assessment:** Sadly, the text notes that due to diminishing support for AIDS care efforts following the 2008 economic downturn: "Across the developing world, hospitals and clinics have had to turn away new AIDS patients" (131). How does our work as an Engage Chapter help to ensure fewer patients get turned away? Have each person hypothesize potential advocacy goals, considering current PIH Engage advocacy goals, and consider which would be most strategic when working to advance the right to health movement.

**Closer:** Reflect back on the AIDS Epidemic Launches Global Health lesson. In that lesson we discussed what an AIDS-free generation might look like and if we thought it was possible. Keeping in mind the great success of the AIDS movement has your outlook on an AIDS-free generation changed at all?