

EDITOR'S COMMENT

Money talks



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As this issue of *CME* goes to press, the Western world is in financial chaos. European leaders are meeting day after day to try to hammer out a financial deal to save the Eurozone. At each 'deal' markets rally briefly – and then the gloom returns. The figures being bandied about are astronomical – in the billions of US dollars. At the same time that all this money is being thrown at an unsustainable social system in Europe (and the USA) the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria is in financial crisis. Donors are simply not paying – either scaling down their commitments or not releasing money that has been promised – because they are too wrapped up in trying to save their countries' economies.

This is expected to have a serious impact on southern Africa's HIV treatment and prevention programmes. The local charities and groups that are most affected by this are the Treatment Action Campaign and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). The Budget Expenditure Monitoring Forum have met to discuss the extent of the problem. Doctors speaking for MSF have described how they will now have to cancel its round of 11 new grants allocated to various programmes in a number of countries, which will have a major impact on the treatment of diseases such as AIDS, TB and malaria.

The latest report of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) on the global HIV and AIDS situation is the first truly optimistic one we have had in years. There is real progress in preventing

new infections and death in people already infected, through massive antiretroviral treatment programmes. If the continuing financial crisis in Europe and the USA results in further cuts to donor funding for programmes such as the Global Fund, then next year's UNAIDS report will not carry such good news.

At the same time the recent COP17 in Durban failed to reach any meaningful agreement about setting emissions targets that will effectively prevent the inexorable rise in global temperature, by delaying the replacement of the Kyoto Protocol until 2015 – by which time probably all concerned will have worked out new ways of wriggling out of their responsibilities to the planet as a whole. Canada has already formally pulled out of the Kyoto Protocol – no doubt others will follow suit soon. Again, many of the arguments currently being put forward by large polluters such as the USA for not reducing emissions of climate gases are around the financial recession in the west.

It seems that the developing world, and Africa in particular, must continue to suffer from the actions of the rich world. As rich countries discover that their spending levels are unsustainable, so major problems facing the developing world become insignificant in global terms – and the poor suffer. Science may inform those in power around issues such as the prevention of the diseases of poverty and the effects of climate change, but it is economics that determines how the powerful use this information.



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