Previously on life…

Dr Maishta Gupta
For the poor, you don’t have to explain that “You need a change!” Everybody knows they need a change, they just don’t know how.

David Werner
Our big challenge is helping people to realise what are the world-wide forces which are affecting our health and wellbeing today.

David Legge
The present global trading regime is unfair, and that unfairness is transforming resources from the South to the North and it is killing people.

Condom lady
Dress your willies!

NARRATOR
Five years ago the World Bank predicted that Brazil would have one million two hundred thousand people infected with HIV/AIDS. The Brazilian government responded with a series of bold moves involving the health service and citizens groups across the nation.

The number of HIV/AIDS carriers forecast for Brazil has been halved.

Condom lady
Dress your willies! Do you know what condoms are for? Are you having sex? Well, are you? No? Well even if you never use it, take this condom, and practice on your own!

NARRATOR
So just how is Brazil succeeding in its war against AIDS?

We’ve travelled to Recife, capital of the state of Pernambuco in the north east of Brazil. It’s one of the regions hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic.

Most of the 600,000 people in Brazil carrying the HIV/AIDS virus don’t know they’ve got it. The first that Emerson knew he’d developed full-blown AIDS was when five years ago he collapsed with a high fever. He was near death when doctors treated him with a cocktail of medicines which included Brazilian made Anti Retro-Viral drugs.

Emerson
I had ganglion Tuberculosis - there seemed to be no way out. I was really, really debilitated – I couldn’t even sunbathe. My mother was taking care of me 24 hours a day - my family were already planning the funeral.

When I go to the pharmacy I get the drugs for free. I’ve been taking the drug cocktail for five years without missing a single dose.

NARRATOR
Maria is 27 and HIV positive. Last year her former husband died of AIDS. She had a three year-old son who also died - of liver disease complicated by an HIV related infection. She’s since given birth to her daughter Elena.

**Maria**

When I was told I had HIV I didn’t understand what it meant. I thought it was a death sentence and that the world would end there and then.

My white blood cell count was already dangerously low. They gave me free medication at the hospital - if they didn’t do that I would never have been able to pay for it and without those medicines I wouldn’t be here today holding my daughter.

**NARRATOR**

Maria cannot breast-feed her baby because of the risk of transmission of HIV. She was given ARVs – Anti Retro-Viral drugs - during her pregnancy to protect the baby; she still doesn’t know if she’s clear. Without the Anti Retro-Viral drugs it’s unlikely that Maria and Emerson would be alive today.

**Emerson**

It helps not to think of these medicines as a “drug cocktail” – they’re easier to take if you pretend they’re beauty pills.

**NARRATOR**

Next to prevention, triple drug therapy is the best answer available at the present time to combat HIV/AIDS. All life is made up of the same building blocks that make up the molecular chain known as DNA. What distinguishes one form of life from another is the code, or unique sequencing of building blocks in the DNA chain. Roughly speaking, HIV reproduces itself by invading the genetic material in the body’s white blood cells, and breaking it up. It then combines with the genetic material, inserting it’s own code. The result is a new DNA chain which is no longer human - but a replica of HIV. The so-called Retro-Virus can now go on to re-infect other cells in the same way. The destruction of the white blood cells leaves the body open to the opportunistic infections seen in full-blown AIDS.

Anti-Retro-Viral drugs slow down the action of HIV to undetectable levels. In 1997 Brazil made a political commitment to make these drugs available to everyone who needed them. But in order to do so Brazil would have to obtain the drugs at a price it could afford. So, Brazil started making its own “generic” medicines - cheaper copies of brand-name drugs. Eloan Pineiro is director of the Far-Manguinas drug production and research facility in Rio.

**Eloan Pineiro, Executive Director Far-Manguinhos, Federal Lab**

Any country with the political will could do this because these drugs are actually not hard to make. It just needs a strong health minister, as we have, who’s solidly behind the free drugs programme.

**Jose Serra, Minister of Health, Brazil**
We’ve managed to bring down the cost of many of the components in the AIDS cocktail by around 70%. These are products that don’t come under our patent law because Brazilian patent law only came into force in 1997.

NARRATOR
Drugs predating this law are effectively un-patented in Brazil – leaving it free to manufacture them. Brazil is breaking the Virtual Price Monopoly enjoyed under World Trade Agreements by the major pharmaceutical companies. They’ve complained about Brazil’s action.

Eloan Pineiro
The drug companies say they need to charge high prices in Latin America and Africa to pay for research into new drugs and that if they were to lower their prices to the poorer countries they would lose heavily. In truth the global drugs business is worth US$300 billion and 82% of this market is made up of sales in the USA, Europe and Japan - 82%! Latin America and the other markets of the world make up only 18% - so how is it then that we poor countries can cause so much harm to these companies with our share of the market? It doesn’t make sense. I ask you!

Paulo Teixeira, National Coordinador STD/AIDS Ministry of Health, Brazil
We don’t have a global agreement for the global happiness! We have some er agreements and we have some interests that er developed counties particularly are trying to maintain as er probably a way to maintain their happiness, OK.

NARRATOR
Pressed by influential drug companies, the United States government recently threatened to sue Brazil at the World Trade Organisation.

The US wanted to enforce the emergency rules of the WTO on Brazil under which it would have to apply for what’s known as a Compulsory Licence each time it wanted to make or import a generic medicine.

Amid adverse publicity the US withdrew its case at the WTO at the last minute. Instead a joint statement was issued on June 29th in which Brazil agreed it would consult with the US before producing more generic drugs. But it’s only a temporary truce. We went to the Correa Picanco hospital in Recife, to meet one of Brazil’s most experienced HIV/AIDS specialists, Dr. Frederico Rangel. Dr. Rangel showed us his war chest of AIDS medicines. About half are produced in Brazil and the pharmaceuticals companies have drastically reduced prices of their drugs that predate Brazil’s patent law – Brazil would otherwise have started to produce these, too.

Dr. Frederico Rangel, STD/AIDS Dept, Hospital Correira Pecanço
Merck laboratories pulled down the price of this drug called Stocrin by about 75% making it worth our while importing directly from their labs. But now there’s a new drug on the market called Kaletra and people are demanding access to it. So the fight for drugs goes on. Today it’s for Kaletra just as yesterday it was for Stocrin or Viracept. So the fight will go on in the future for other drugs too.
Health Minister Jose Serra
Brazil is fighting for access to drugs to fight AIDS for all its people. This policy has resulted in controversy at international forums. So we’ve put our case to the world and we’ve fought for it. And what is our case? It is that access to medicines is a basic human right.

NARRATOR
Maria’s baby, Elena, is due for a check up – to see if the Anti-Retroviral drugs her mother took during pregnancy have worked. In the first of three tests doctors found no sign of HIV. Today Maria will find out the results of the second test.

Dr Edvaldo Souza, Coordinator STD AIDS, Instituto Materno Infantil de Pernambuco
The second result is negative so together with the first test there’s a 99% chance that your baby is clear.

NARRATOR
It’s not yet an “all clear” but the signs are very good.

Dr Edvaldo Souza
We started scanning pregnant women for HIV in 1995, and offered anti-retrovirals to those who tested positive so to avoid mother to child transmission. With these drugs and other precautions, we’ve managed to pull the mother to child transmission of HIV down from around 30% to less than 0.2%.

Paulo Teixeira
Even when we are spending US$300 million on drugs for HIV people each year, we are saving much more than this because we don’t have any more hospitalisations. We are not using all the drugs - so many quantities of drugs - for opportunistic infections and for other health problems. And because we have people – er working people with their families – people producing and being health sufficient. And er this at the end means for the state: save money.

NARRATOR
Just across the street from the hospital is a voluntary group dedicated to helping HIV positive mothers.

Maria’s been coming for counselling ever since the death of her first child.

Maria
Their help has been really important for me over these past few years ever since finding out I had HIV.

NARRATOR
Voluntary organisations fill in the gaps Brazil’s medical system is unable to cover. This group was formed by a woman who’s child died of AIDS, contracted through an infected blood transfusion.
Alaije Da Silva
For me he didn’t die. He’s alive in my feelings, deep inside of me. With this work it’s as if he lives on through the lives of those children we help. I want them to have then chance of having things he never had.

Paulo Teixeira
We have now more than six hundred NGOs working in Brazil and er conducting over one thousand projects in all the areas: prevention care, social mobilisation and er also er-er monitoring the government er response. For us er this is the main – one of the main components of the Brazilian response and one of the-the better answers er to the question: why the Brazilian model is getting so many er good results.

NARRATOR
Once a week Emerson attends a massage workshop for people with HIV.

Emerson
Being touched is the best therapy. It’s the best gesture of solidarity and support you can have if you've got HIV. You feel more human when your body is massaged, touched, without any discrimination. It’s wonderful for an HIV carrier being made to feel relaxed and secure.

1st Lady
I’m losing all my muscles and the fat from my face has disappeared – it’s called lipodystrophy. But I’m not going to stop taking the medicine and I am going to go for physiotherapy.

NARRATOR
For those suffering side effects from the triple cocktail drugs – and they can be serious - there’s a regular discussion group. Reynaldo has had several narrow escapes from death with opportunistic infections. He’s also having trouble coping with the side effects from the triple cocktail.

Reynaldo
Bananas are good to combat side effects – especially for example with Zidovudine which gives you diarrhoea -that’s my advice to you: eat as many as possible and as wide a variety as you can find, the more bananas the better.

1st Lady
And they help you regain your muscles.

NARRATOR
Groups like this are helping people stick to the often debilitating drug regime and the results show: adherence rates in Brazil are the same as those in the USA.

Reynaldo
I have lipodystrophy too. It’s complicated because body fat completely disappears from some parts of the body and it all collects in one single part I’ve always exercised and here I am with a fat belly. I never had a fat belly in my life.
Reynaldo
Despite all the exercises the stomach fat doesn’t go away.

NARRATOR
Dr. Rangel has looked after Reynaldo for the past 11 years. His experience indicates a disturbing trend among those affected by HIV/AIDS.

Dr Fredrico Rangel
AIDS is becoming a disease of the poor and it’s reaching further and further into the interior of the country. The further it goes the worse the situation - and there is a new group; it’s married women. We used to see 30 or 40 men to one woman with HIV. Now it’s one to one and in some places it’s one man to two women.

NARRATOR
Brazil is a vast country; and it’s the voluntary groups who are reaching out to ever more remote communities being hit by AIDS. Geronimo’s organisation works with HIV/AIDS victims isolated 800 kilometres or more into the interior.

Geronimo
We’re going to visit an HIV patient. She’s having difficulties getting one of her infected children to the hospital once or twice a week for treatment. Her husband died leaving her pregnant with four children to take care of so she’s living in poverty with five small children. Ivanilda! Ivanilda my friend! Come and give us a hug. I’ve brought some friends with me. How’s this girl? Can I come in?

How did you find out you were infected in the first place?

Eva
It was when my husband got ill, when he was put into hospital. If he’d survived I wouldn’t have known anything about it.

Geronimo
So now you’re waiting to see if the children are infected?

They’re being tested.

Eva
Yes, and I’ve been getting headaches and vomiting with the drugs - they make me feel dizzy.

Geronimo
These are pretty common side effects.

Eva
Yes I thought that: oh my God, that’s because of the medicine!

Geronimo
But you are taking the pills aren’t you?
Eva
Yes of course I’m still taking them!

Geronimo
Don’t stop

Eva
I know very well it’s not for the rest of my life. Maybe I can go on for another year or two.

Geronimo
No. It’s not like that. The number of years you have will depend on your efforts to take care of yourself.

Eva
But there’s also the food problem because I haven’t been eating very well. I’ve been paying to re-build the house.

NARRATOR
Eva’s house has been rebuilt with Geronimo’s help - the old house blew down in a rainstorm.

Geronimo
Poverty, really, is the root of most of the problems here - and poor people have the hardest time of this disease - and food is an important problem.

If you eat properly the drugs will be more effective and you’ll start feeling better and you’ll find the side effects will not be so strong.

Eva
I know – [but it’s] either I spend the money on food or on the house.

The children are hungry. I can’t try and find work with a baby. I’m trying my hand at fishing. If you don’t put meat in this it doesn’t work. At least I can take care of them like this and we can live.

Geronimo
The difficulty of living here and the isolation make it harder for people to stick to the treatment.

Paulo Teixeira
Even in the more poor countries in the world people – infected people - know that there is a treatment available.

That they and their family and their friends can survive if they have access to drugs. So, triple cocktail means mobilising people to demand er their right to have access to the treatment available in developed countries.

Jose Serra
When you give people the proper treatment it humanises them.
It improves their self-esteem and self-love. This is very important. If you treat people in this way it helps prevent the spread of HIV.

**Emerson**
I’ve changed. I used to only think of myself. I never thought about helping others. Now I’m a better person.

I don’t think like that anymore. I have a different outlook on life; I’m able to make more friends. I care about others and their problems as if they were my own.

**Maria**
I want everyone seeing this film who’s prejudiced to know that HIV is a disease like any other. So forget your prejudice it’s happened to me and it could happen to anyone of you. It’s a disease like any other and prejudice is almost worse than the disease.