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DBSA's HIV statistics are implausible and should be ignored until peer-reviewed

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Statistics are suspicious and appear to be plagiarised from an out-of-date source

On Sunday 4 May, the Sunday Independent reported HIV statistics released by the Development Bank of South Africa. In particular, the report stated:

According to statistics released by the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA), more than 7,6 million South Africans are HIV-positive - 2,2 million more than the department of health's figures for 2007 state.
Of these, about 6,1 million are the economically active people between the ages of 20 and 64, who could contribute to the country's economy.
What makes these statistics more alarming is the fact that the data on which they are based are probably more reliable than the department of health's because they were collected at grassroots level and not based on estimates.

We have examined the statistics sent by the DBSA's AIDS researcher to the Sunday Independent. Frankly, they are extremely suspicious and cannot be characterised as having been "collected at grassroots level and not based on estimates." They are certainly not more accurate than the Department of Health's statistics.

We have ascertained that this report cannot be ascribed only to poor journalism. The DBSA's researcher, Johan Calitz, needs to explain the following:

- Why are Calitz's statistics so similar to the ASSA2000 model which is out-of-date, does not account for mother-to-child transmission prevention or the antiretroviral rollout and has been replaced by the ASSA2002 and subsequently the ASSA2003 model?
- Why does a spreadsheet Calitz sent to a journalist, which the TAC has obtained, look very similar to the ASSA2000 spreadsheet? Why has he not credited the Actuarial Society of South Africa who produce the ASSA models?
- Why have he and/or his colleagues released a scientific report to the media before publishing it or presenting evidence that it has been subjected successfully to peer-review?
- On what basis does he claim that the statistics were collected at grassroots level? Why is it that no other leading HIV demographers are aware of this grassroots work conducted by Calitz?

We note with concern that the Sunday Independent report has generated follow-up reports. Only confusion will arise from this. Until Calitz has answered these questions successfully, the statistics released by the DBSA to the Independent Group should be ignored.

- Statistics

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