

## AIDS Threatens African Governments: Study

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Wednesday, 18 March 2009 09:44 -

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AIDS is killing so many politicians in southern Africa that their deaths are threatening the ability of governments to function properly, a researcher said Tuesday.

Kondwani Chirambo, the lead author of a new study on deaths among local councillors in South Africa, told AFP he had studied six other countries where unnatural numbers of deaths of lawmakers could be attributed to AIDS.

"If you look at the statistics, MPs have been dying relatively young and dying in large numbers. These trends are not dissimilar from the general population," said Chirambo, of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa.

Over the last eight years, South Africa has seen nearly half of its elected local councillors dying before the age of 50.

Chirambo said this "does not bode well" for South Africa, where the poor government services are a major public complaint.

In the whole of southern Africa, the study found only one elected official who openly disclosed her HIV status, and Chirambo attributes the failure of these officials to seek help to a fear of stigma.

"It is not a very healthy profile. Councillors are not the poorest people in the world," he said.

"It is clear a great deal of them feel to disclose your status is a form of political suicide." South Africa has one of the world's highest AIDS prevalences, with 5.4 million people affected. Eighteen percent of them are in the work force.

According to Chirambo, 2.6 million registered voters have died since 1999, the majority of them still young.

In Senegal, with a national AIDS prevalence of one percent, there were only three vacancies in parliament caused by death of the politician.

By comparison in Zambia, where the first AIDS case was noted in 1995, death is the most common cause for parliamentary vacancies.

Source : Sapa-AFP /ts/GJ

Date : 17 Mar 2009 13:34