



Risks | Responsibilities

Male Sexual Health and HIV
in Asia and The Pacific
International Consultation

New Delhi, India, 23-26 September 2006



Towards an Asia and the Pacific Coalition (or TaskForce or Alliance) on MSM and Transgender Organisations working with HIV Prevention, Treatment, Care and Support

Despite evidence which establishes male-to-male sex as one of the driving forces of HIV transmission in Asia and the Pacific, only few HIV interventions strategically focus on prevention, treatment, care and support for men who have sex with men (MSM)¹ and transgenders².

In recognition of the need to build and strengthen interventions addressing HIV-related vulnerabilities of men who have sex with men and transgenders in Asia and The Pacific, a **Male Sexual Health and HIV in Asia and the Pacific International Consultation** was held in New Delhi, India between 23 and 26 September 2006.

This International Consultation brought together government officials, policy-makers, donors, researchers, grassroots and community based organisations across Asia and the Pacific to provide an opportunity for dialogue and learning, and to enable increased investment, strengthening and scaling up of strategies addressing male and transgender sexual health and related HIV vulnerabilities. In addition, the Consultation provided an opportunity to inform and develop strategic advocacy initiatives and deliberate on key policies related to these issues.

The Asia and Pacific International Consultation was held in the immediate aftermath of the XVI International AIDS Conference held in Toronto, Canada. The Global Forum on (MSM) and HIV/AIDS was launched at the International AIDS Conference. While independent, the *Asia and the Pacific Coalition on MSM, Transgender and HIV* will inform, augment and feed into activities, networks and advocacy initiatives supported under the umbrella of the Global Forum of MSM and HIV.

Comprised of an alliance of civil society groups, HIV and AIDS organisations, MSM and transgender groups and other agencies, the Asia and the Pacific Coalition will provide support to national and sub-regional networks, as well as work across the whole region, to advocate for improved HIV and AIDS programming for MSM and transgenders, and to share information on good practice in HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for MSM and transgenders. The Coalition is composed of organisations and agencies with a commitment to social justice and human rights issues, along with those committed to improving the HIV and AIDS response to MSM and transgenders.

Guiding Principles

The work of the Asia Pacific Coalition will be guided by the following principles, which have been adapted from the Guiding Principles of the Global Forum on MSM and HIV/AIDS:³

- **Human rights/social justice.** The inter-related co-factors for HIV risk, vulnerability, and disparities in access to care, treatment and prevention education, have a common basis in the significant social discrimination faced by MSM and transgenders. We believe that human rights and social justice are a key to the health and well being of MSM and transgenders.

- **Strength-based.** Solutions, programmatic, and policy responses often frame the HIV and AIDS problem in negative ways and that demonise MSM and transgenders; we believe that effective responses to the HIV and AIDS epidemic directed at MSM and transgenders must acknowledge and build upon the strengths, competencies, and resources that such persons possess.
- **Sex positive approach.** All MSM and transgenders have the right to healthy and fulfilling sex lives, free from judgement and persecution. We believe that negative attitudes and narrow views about sex, sexuality, gender, and sexual expression are counter-productive and have deleterious effects on the health and wellness of MSM and transgenders.
- **Empowerment.** Self-organising and open participation in the provision of appropriate HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services for MSM and transgenders is important in our work to end HIV and AIDS. We believe in supporting and respecting self-determination and self-initiated HIV and AIDS programmatic and policy responses.
- **Involvement.** There must be greater involvement of MSM and transgenders in programme planning and policy development arenas. We believe that HIV and AIDS programme and policy responses are strengthened by ensuring inclusion, parity, and representation.
- **Resources.** There is an urgent need to significantly increase investment, funding, and technical support for HIV programming directed at MSM and transgenders. At a minimum, we believe that funding should be at a level commensurate with the impact left by HIV and AIDS on MSM and transgenders.

Area of emphasis

The Coalition will devote itself to fostering, supporting and sharing information about:

- Country-level, sub-regional and regional action which raises awareness of MSM and transgender issues, and ensures that national, sub-regional and regional plans and strategies incorporate activities for MSM and transgenders, guarantees MSM and transgender representatives having a voice at national policy setting forums, and mobilises expertise and financial resources.
- Evidence-based research and policy development to address critical knowledge gaps and to develop more responsive programme and policy recommendations.
- Advocacy through the establishment of effective partnerships with civil society organizations, government bodies, HIV and AIDS organisations, academia, and UN agencies.

Short-term action plan

Some short-term activities to be undertaken by the Coalition may include the following:

- Creation of a list-serv/ mailing list for the Asia and the Pacific Coalition on MSM, Transgender and HIV to facilitate information exchange.
- Development and dissemination of a newsletter or bulletin in print and electronic forms.
- Development of a website devoted to regional and sub-regional information sharing and networking.
- Preparation for the 8th ICAAP 2007 conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and *AIDS2008* activities focused on MSM and transgenders.

- Seek financial support and establish a permanent Secretariat for the Coalition with a Terms of Reference, along with a Steering Committee, to manage the above tasks as well as future action plans as they develop.

Key agencies and individuals

Key agencies and individuals committed to the Asia and the Pacific Coalition on MSM, Transgender and HIV issues include the following:

Naz Foundation International

[LIST}

¹ While we use the term ‘men who have sex with men’ here it is within the context of understanding that the word ‘man’/‘men’ is socially constructed. Nor does it use imply that it is an identity term referring to an identifiable community that can be segregated and so labelled. Within the framework of male-to-male sex, there are a range of masculinities, along with diverse sexual and gender identities, communities, networks, and collectivities, as well as just behaviours without any sense of affiliation to an identity or community. This statement addresses the concerns of all these diversities within the framework of *men who have sex with men*.

² Broadly speaking, transgender people are individuals whose gender expression and/or gender identity differs from conventional expectations based on the physical sex they were born into. The word transgender is an umbrella term which is often used to describe a wide range of identities and experiences, including: female-to-male and male-to-female sexual reassigned persons, cross-dressers, drag queens, drag kings, gender queers, and many more. [In the Asia and Pacific region this would include hijras, some kothis, zenanas and metis, kathoey, waria, bakla, fa’fa’finis, etc.] Because transgender is an umbrella term, it is often thought to be an imprecise term that does not adequately describe the particulars of specific identities and experiences. (For example, the identity/experience of a post-operative FTM transsexual will probably be very different from that of a female-identified drag king who performs on weekends, but both are often lumped together under the term "transgender.")

web.mit.edu/hudson/www/terminology.html, accessed 14/9/06

³ http://www.msm-aids2006.org/documents/conceptnote_18aug06.pdf