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Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges

**APCOM's Engagement
in the 22nd International
AIDS Conference (AIDS 2018),**

Amsterdam, The Netherlands



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Abbreviations

AFAO	Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AINA	Asian Interfaith Network on AIDS
APN+	Asia Pacific Network of Positive People
APNSW	Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers
APTNI	Asia Pacific Transgender Network
CSO	civil society organisations
CCM	Country Coordinating Mechanism
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CSS	Community Systems Strengthening
FHI360	Family Health International
FSW	female sex worker(s)
FTM	female-to-male
GFATM	Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
HCT	HIV Counselling and Testing
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
Hivos	Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries, Netherlands
HLM	high level meeting
IAS	International AIDS Society
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICD	International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights
INERELA+	international, interfaith network of religious leaders who are living with or personally affected by HIV



INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IRMA	the International Rectal Microbicides Advocates
ISEAN	Insular South-East Asia Network
LGBT	lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
MSM ¹	men who have sex with men
MSW	male sex worker(s)
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PLHIV	people living with hiv
PSDN	Pacific Sexual Diversity Network
PSI	Population Services International
SOGIESC	sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics
SRS	sexual reassignment surgery
STI	sexually transmitted infections
UN	the United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VCT	voluntary counselling and testing
WHO	World Health Organisation
WHO-SEARO	World Health Organisation-South-East Asia Regional Office
WHO-WPRO	World Health Organisation-Western Pacific Regional Office

¹ In this report, '**men who have sex with men**' or **MSM** refers to all men who engage in homosexual behaviour, inclusive of the large variety of settings and contexts in which male-to-male sex takes place, across multiple motivations for engaging in sex, self-identified sexualities and gender identities, and various identifications with any particular community.



About APCOM

APCOM works to improve the health and rights of gay men, other men who have sex with men and SOGIESC² people across Asia and the Pacific.

Based in Bangkok, APCOM is a not-for-profit organisation representing and working with a network of individuals and community-based organisations across 38 countries in Asia and the Pacific.

APCOM has a primary focus on HIV because it is a key health issue for gay men and other men who have sex with men in the region. APCOM also addresses other related health issues for our communities such as sexual health, mental health and drug use.

APCOM also focuses on improving relevant human and legal rights across the region as discrimination, stigma, criminalisation and exclusion impact on the health outcomes of the communities we serve.

New Strategy

1. Advocacy & Research

We work with individuals and community partners across the region to help implementers, legislators, policymakers, and international agencies including donor agencies to better understand the needs of our communities and compel them to act. We also undertake and support a range of local, national and international research projects, so we can inform this advocacy with appropriate evidence.

2. Education & Innovation

We drive innovation and promote technology to build community-based models of evidence-informed interventions and responses. We produce campaigns to inform our community members about issues which affect their health and wellbeing. We deliver training and produce resources to help our community partners to improve how they work. We develop and trial new health promotion initiatives that can be used by community partners across the region.

3. Community Engagement

We build capacities to ensure new generations of leadership among gay men and other men who have sex with men and SOGIESC people. We engage communities to deliver strong responses based on evidence and good practice. We connect community members, community partners and other stakeholders so that we can all work together more effectively. We work with individuals and communities to focus attention on local needs that are emerging, forgotten or ignored.

² people and communities of diverse, non-heteronormative and gender-nonconforming sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics.

Strategic Goals

1. HIV is not over

- 1.1 APCOM wants no more early deaths from HIV. APCOM believes that gay men and other men who have sex with men in Asia and the Pacific must have timely access to full health services including antiretroviral therapy.
- 1.2 HIV Prevention works. APCOM supports evidence-informed actions that reduce the risk of HIV transmission. Presently these actions include use of condoms and lubricants, safe injecting practices, PrEP, PEP and U=U. To effectively implement these actions, increased national and local investments are needed, including building the capacity of communities to deliver results.
- 1.3 APCOM believes Asia and the Pacific must be PrEPed and PEPed. APCOM will work to increase access to PrEP and PEP for gay men and other men who have sex with men who are affected by HIV.
- 1.4 Testing Testing Testing. APCOM will work to increase access to HIV testing for gay men and other men who have sex with men affected by HIV in Asia and the Pacific.
- 1.5 APCOM will conduct and support quantitative and qualitative research to inform our and your programmes and advocacy.

2. Our Rights - Protecting gay men, other men who have sex with me and SOGIESC Persons

- 2.1 Bad laws cost lives. APCOM will work to decriminalise same sex relations.
- 2.2 Human rights are our rights – safety and inclusion of gay men, other men who have sex with men and SOGIESC persons in humanitarian settings, marriage equality and protection from sexual abuse and gender-based violence.
- 2.3 Enough is enough - No more HIV-related stigma and discrimination.

3. Our Strength – Stronger interlinked communities and broader partner networks

- 3.1 APCOM will support community partners to improve how they work and deliver through providing training, technical support and data to inform professional practice and advocacy for change.
- 3.2 APCOM will create new opportunities and partnerships that can support the work of APCOM and our community partners.



APCOM staffs at 22nd International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2018) in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

APCOM at AIDS 2018

1. Background: AIDS 2018 and the human rights-based response

The International AIDS Conference 2018 (AIDS 2018) is one of the largest conferences in global health and development sector, with a view to galvanise the response to the AIDS epidemic. As a forum for biomedical and prevention science, as well as community participation and advocacy, it serves as a platform to intensify the political commitments to ending HIV and AIDS.

With the theme “**Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges**”, the conference draws attention to the need for rights-based approaches to bridge gaps still facing the HIV response. With an aim to promote human rights based and evidence-informed HIV responses tailored to the needs of particular key populations and communities, the conference takes a focus on Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the North-African/Middle Eastern Regions which are seeing a growing epidemic, while also highlighting the on-going need in other regions particularly around sustainability of the HIV response.

2. Engagement Objectives

With more than half of 270,000 new HIV infections attributed to men who are having sex with men³, there is an urgent and on-going need to address key populations still affected by the epidemic in particular their access to HIV services such as prevention, testing and treatment. Thailand, amongst the very few, has begun offering PrEP as part of the prevention package for key populations. More countries are following suit, however the response has been typified by demonstration projects with limited cohorts and number of persons recruited. There needs to be an urgent push for more comprehensive and accessible forms of PrEP access embedded within public health systems to ensure this prevention approach is effective.

The conservative swing in Southeast Asia has also caused widespread stigma and discrimination against young gay men, young men who are having sex with men and transgender people, turning back a humanistic and public health-centred response to the epidemic. Policy reform for a more enabling legal environment have been implemented, but political will is much needed still amongst policy makers and governments.

The following are APCOM's objectives in AIDS 2018:

1. Build a case on the continuing rise of HIV epidemic and human rights violations against key populations in Asia and the Pacific Region;
2. Promote HIV responses in Asia and the Pacific that are supported by and tailored to the needs of the community and key populations;
3. Showcase, disseminate and present strategic information on gay men, bisexual men, other MSM and transgender community in Asia and the Pacific;
4. Strengthen existing partnerships between and among community based organisations, funders, and technical partners, and establish new relationship, to:
 - a. Commit and advocate for innovative HIV prevention and testing methods tailored for young key populations aged 15-24;
 - b. Commit and advocate for political will of governments to increase domestic financing on HIV programs for key populations and to create a more enabling environment.



APCOM Executive Director, Midnight Poonkasettwatana speak at 22nd International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2018) in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

³ The Joint United Nations Program for HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) reported that in 2016, there were 5,100,000 people living with HIV, and 270,000 new HIV infections among adult and children, 170,000 of which are men who are having sex with men



APCOM's engagement shall highlight the HIV epidemic and state of human rights situation in Asia and the Pacific, and advocate for an increased political commitment and accountability among governments, donors and civil society in combatting the HIV epidemic in the region. This is also an opportunity to showcase the support provided by Expertise France to Asia and demonstrate the achievements from these partnerships.

It should be noted that the International AIDS Conference 2018 is putting the spotlight mostly on the state of epidemic in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. However, considering the alarming state of the epidemic especially concentrated on key populations, and the human rights situation in the Asia Pacific region, a significant mandate of APCOM and partner organisations is to continue to highlight and galvanise the regional response.

3. APCOM Thematic Areas in AIDS 2018

The work that APCOM engages canvass three cross-cutting thematic areas, namely human rights, evidence based advocacy and community engagement.

Human Rights

APCOM's work is first and foremost grounded on a human rights-based approach. As an organisation working for and by the community, APCOM works to highlight the needs and realities of the MSM and transgender communities in the Asia Pacific region, as well as champion community based responses that better serves the communities most affected by HIV. Programmes such as the Multi-Country South Asia Global Fund HIV Programme (MSA) seeks to build community capacity and put centre stage the role of key populations in the national HIV response. Similarly the SHIFT (Sustainable HIV Financing in Transition) programme which works to advocate and scale up the domestic investments in key populations prevention programming, also takes on a human rights approach, namely to ensure that despite criminalisation of key populations such as MSM, transgender people, people who use drugs and sex workers, programmes that work towards bettering HIV and health of these communities are still being prioritised.

Finally, the TestXXX campaign ensure that MSM and transgender communities have the right to sexual health information, by making these information and messaging approachable and relevant to the communities most needing it.

Evidence for Advocacy

Using research and evidence base generated to inform advocacy initiatives is another cornerstone of APCOM's approach. Programmes such as the Pulse Project generates strategic region-wide epidemiological and behavioural data on young MSM from each country and convert them into fact-driven and evidence-based advocacy to aid the countries' national AIDS programmes. We also deliver strategic information, training and produce resources to help our community partners improve how they work. Examples include the SHIFT Programme's National Financing Situational Assessments, MSA's advocacy toolkits and the PrEP Map resource web-platform, where we pilot new health promotion initiatives that can be used or adapted by our community partners across the region

Community Engaged

There is nothing for us without us. As a coalition of community, civil society partners and multilateral agencies, we produce and support a range of activities and events that help to better connect our community members, community partners and other stakeholders so we can all work together more effectively. A core component of all our programmes is the role of strengthening community systems to improve coordination with local governments and health care providers. Partnership is key, we work with community partners across the region to help legislators, policymakers, and international agencies better understand the needs of our communities and comply them to act.

4. APCOM Engagements and Activities

Launch of the APCOM Strategic Framework 2018-2020

A launch of the Strategic Framework was organised during the conference, to celebrate this milestone, as well as to engage various stakeholders on the priorities and commitments of APCOM, and to foster a shared ownership and collaboration in the goal to end AIDS and promote SOGIESC human rights.



Launch of the APCOM Strategic Framework 2018-2020

Responding to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, APCOM's Strategic Framework in the coming years focuses on the most vulnerable and on striving to leave no-one behind. The strategic framework has been developed as a flexible tool to support individuals, local communities and national governments to end AIDS and promote justice in Asia and the Pacific by 2030, and to realise the human rights of gay men, other men who have sex with men and SOGIESC persons. Aligning to the 2030 Agenda, gay men and other men who have sex with men across the region needs to be protected from HIV, to have access to HIV testing, to have access to treatment if living with HIV, and enjoy lives free from stigma and discrimination.

The Strategic Framework is informed by a process of community consultations, culminating in the RRRAP summit organised in November 2017 to take stock of the challenges facing the region's HIV response. Recommendations were drawn together to develop the framework, which aims to guide APCOM's priorities through to 2020.

The Strategic Framework is multifaceted and anchored around three themes:

- 1) HIV is not over. Strengthening the HIV Response for Gay Men and other Men Who Have Sex With Men.
- 2) Our rights. Protecting Gay Men, Other Men Who Have Sex With Men and SOGIESC Persons.
- 3) Our strength. Stronger Interlinked Communities and Broader Partner Networks.

Main Conference

1. Poster Abstracts

1.1 GayOK Bangkok: Increasing PrEP awareness among young gay men in Bangkok with a scripted web series

Co-authored by APCOM Senior Campaigns Coordinator Safir Soeparna, APCOM Deputy Director R. Figueiredo and researcher from Mahidol University Thomas Guadamuz and accepted as poster. The poster, which was exhibited on 26 July, concludes that including PrEP into a plot of a scripted gay-themed web series increased PrEP awareness among YMSM audiences, and therefore, should be considered as an additional strategy for online outreach to this demographic. This conclusion is drawn from the serial cross-sectional survey assessing the correlation between testBKK's exposure and the HIV-related behaviour among YMSM in Bangkok with a closed cohort of 500 YMSM ages 15-24 years who reside, work, or attend college/university in central or suburban Bangkok.

1.2 A Tale of Two Cities: A comparison of district level analysis of HIV budgets in Bandung and Semarang, Indonesia

Co-authored by Indonesian country partners Seknas Fitra, Indonesian AIDS Coalition and SHIFT Programs Communication Officer, the abstract discusses a civil society led initiative on health budget analysis and data-driven advocacy, focusing on a comparison of two cities in Indonesia. In Indonesia's decentralised political system, districts exercise a high level of autonomy and determine, independently, where to rank HIV as a priority. Analysis of the 2017 Bandung and Semarang budgets show misalignment between investments and disease burdens across districts. Both Bandung and Semarang fall under the highest HIV prevalence category in Indonesia, and yet the budget allocation for HIV in Semarang is considerably larger. In Bandung, there was not a single programme specifically targeted on prevention for key populations. In Semarang, though there were resources budgeted for key population groups, many organisations either did not have the legal recognition to access these funds or did not have the capacity to apply for and manage district funds. A conclusion drawn from these findings suggest budget transparency and analysis at the national and local district level are essential to revealing situations where insufficient resources are allocated to fighting HIV or HIV resources are allocated inefficiently. Importantly, the role of civil society led initiatives to ensure government accountability were highlighted.



Co-author by APCOM Senior Campaigns Coordinator Safir Soeparna, GayOK Bangkok abstract poster increasing PrEP awareness among young gay men in a scripted web series.



APCOM Strategic Information Officer, Min Fuh Teh speak at 22nd International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2018) in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

2. Oral Presentations

2.1 Leaving No One Behind: Sustaining the MSM and Transgender Community Response in the Age of HIV Financing in Transition (Inter-Regional Dialogue)

Organised by APCOM Strategic Information Officer Min Fuh Teh, this forum takes a community-led perspective on the issue of HIV financing sustainability. As developing countries approach middle-income status and are increasingly less likely to receive international donor support, there is an urgent need to address the needs of key populations, particularly as the bulk of key population programmes are funded internationally. Sustainable and effective responses will need to make sure key populations such as men-who-have-sex-with-men, transgender people, sex workers and people who use drugs are not left behind. Many of these communities are also marginalised or even deemed criminal in their respective countries, raising particular challenges to ensure long term viability of key populations focused programmes.

In light of these contexts, APCOM as part of the MPact Global Fund consortium in partnership with MPact, consortium members SOMOSGAY and ECOM, organised a dialogue to highlight the issues on the ground and collectively voice the perspective of MSM and Transgender communities. APCOM's experience delivering strategic information as part of the Sustainable HIV Financing in Transition (SHIFT) Global Fund Programme contributed findings and lessons learned to this dialogue. As a consortium active in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia and the Pacific, the discussion highlighted through the lens of MSM and Transgender perspectives, the threats as well as opportunities in the current situation with a focus on initiatives through the SHIFT programme, other regional advocacy fronts, and an emphasis on rights-based approaches.

2.2 WHO PrEP Advocacy (Role of CSOs in expanding PrEP access among MSM in Africa)

APCOM Strategic Information Officer presented on elements of PrEP advocacy based on experiences in the Asia Pacific, as part of a panel discussing best practices and lessons learned from a community perspective. These include: Demand generation by making sure the 3Ps (policy makers, providers, potential PrEP users) are engaged equally, including raising the literacy and awareness not just with MSM communities but also policy-makers, funders, government ministries and big pharma, making sure communities and stakeholder alike are aware of, and demand for PrEP to be made available. Another consideration is equity, making the case for more equitable access to proven prevention modalities such as PrEP is an ethical and practical imperative. Current PrEP access favours those who are able to afford it, can access it or know about it. Making PrEP access truly equitable demands integration into Universal Health Coverage, in the meantime making sure interim access through demonstration trials and potentially, buyer's club. Finally, financing PrEP for integration into Universal Health Care to ensure sustainability and equitable access is critical for the long run. However, a major barrier experienced in integrating PrEP is the often-raised prohibitive cost as it considers lifelong use. A more realistic costing approach would be to consider event driven use, as intermittent dosing works. This will greatly reduce the amount needed to cost PrEP within health systems.



2.3 Coming of Age of PrEP

A short lecture on the overall progress of PrEP uptake in the Asia-Pacific region was presented by APCOM Senior Campaigns Coordinator Safir Soepartha at "Coming Age of PrEP" - a discussion forum of PrEP advocates from all over the globe, taking place on 26 July. The lecture showcases how, although Thailand is the only Asian countries that has implemented PrEP as part of national AIDS strategy, the trend of PrEP awareness and uptake is slowly appearing among mid-to-high income MSM in urban cities across the region through online procurement or in-person purchase in clinics in Bangkok.

3. Global Village and Youth Programme

3.1 PrEP Map Launch

As a true "intravention"- developed by APCOM by the community for the community, PrEPMap is an online resource and advocacy portal, designed as a resource database on PrEP awareness and to advocate for and build demand in our communities for the right to access proven and comprehensive prevention. The event formally launched the website, with APCOM Strategic Information Officer facilitating a discussion with PrEP activists, civil society organisations and policy advocates on their perspectives in building a PrEP advocacy that is grounded in a community owned response.

3.2 Booth: A10tion: Highlighting a decade of APCOM in Asia and the Pacific

Asia Pacific region has the second highest HIV prevalence in the world, and 60% of the world's population, and yet does not get as much profile in the International AIDS Conference, mainly due to language issues. As a key population network in Asia Pacific that recently celebrated our 10th anniversary we would like to bring attention at AIDS 2018 - to visibly raise successes, challenges and innovations that we have in the last decade at this world class event. The overall goal of this engagement with AIDS 2018 through a booth is to showcase the successes and raise the challenges in combatting the HIV epidemic in Asia and the Pacific. At the same time, this activity will highlight the MSM and transgender community-led HIV responses in the Region and in the Countries. At the end of the conference, the participants of AIDS 2018, from community, academic and technical fields, have an increased knowledge APCOM as a regional organisation, as well as, APCOM -led and -supported interventions that led to improved male sexual health and scale up of sexual health services.



As a key population network in Asia Pacific, APCOM would like to bring attention at AIDS 2018 - to visibly raise successes, challenges and innovations in the last decade at this world class event.



APCOM Senior Campaigns Coordinator, Safir Soeparna speak at 22nd International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2018) in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

3.3 War on Drugs and Gay Men: Intersecting Criminalisation and Discrimination

Presented by APCOM Senior Campaigns Coordinator Safir Soeparna at "Support. Don't Punish": Local Actions, Global Voices (Workshop) organised by International Drug Policies Consortium on 24 July. The presentation showcases how punitive laws and discriminatory action towards illicit drug consumption fuels the HIV epidemic among MSM who use drugs. In retrospect, the key takeaway from the presentation includes, but not limited to:

- the chemsex epidemic among MSM in urban cities in Asia region is continuously emerging and put those who engage in the activity in higher risk of seroconversion
- there are ways to reduce the harm associated with chemsex, including to reduce or eliminate the probability of virus transmission (such as taking PrEP, regular HIV testing, clean needle provision)
- punitive law and discriminatory action among law enforcers and/or healthcare providers on drug use and/or drug users hinders MSM who use drugs from accessing HIV response they need

3.4 SHIFT – Lessons Learned and the Road Ahead

This session discussed the lessons learnt from SHIFT especially the value of community led, grounds up advocacy for sustainable HIV financing. A key discussion is the lessons learned and legacy of SHIFT's experiences – the value of a collaborative multi-stakeholder engagement, the role of information as power (strategic information/research as the cornerstones of advocacy), and the value of community ownership/self-determination in tackling a technical sector such as health financing.



4. Asia Pacific Networking Zone

APCOM Strategic Discussion on Commitments for Asia and the Pacific

While the current conference focuses on Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the MENA region, this does not dilute the fact that the epidemic in Asia and the Pacific is still rapidly evolving, requiring ongoing commitment and collective organising to stem the epidemic. With a disease burden concentrated on key populations, there is an urgent need to sustain the key populations and community focused responses. The challenges are many and immediate: in light of countries in the region transitioning into middle income status, these countries lose the eligibility to receive international donor funding. Additionally international aid dollars are shrinking. These trends indicate an uncertain future for key populations and community based interventions, particularly as the bulk of these programmes are funded via international aid.

APCOM invited community based organisations from Asia and the Pacific region, regional key population networks, international donors and funding agencies, and other stakeholders such as government actors to come together for a strategic discussion and to galvanise a way forward for the region. The general objectives are:

1. To build a case on the continuing rise of HIV epidemic and human rights violations against key populations in Asia and the Pacific Region
2. To renew global and regional commitments to support community based organisations, prevention and treatment programs (including HIV Testing, Treatment and PrEP)
3. To re-ignite political will to curb HIV epidemic and address human rights violations against key populations



APCOM Invited community based organisations from Asia and the Pacific regional to come together for a strategic discussion and to galvanise a way forward for the region.

Equity. Dignity. Social Justice.



We are united in advocating for issues around HIV and those that advance the rights, health and well being of people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.

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