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COP OPPORTUNITY KIT:

Evaluating Key Population Involvement
in COP 2019 and Mapping Opportunities
for Community Intervention in COP 2021



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Contents

Background	4
HIV/AIDs	4
Global response	4
PEPFAR and the Asia Regional Operational Plan 2019	4
Asia ROP2019 community engagement activities (2019 and 2020)	8
Evaluation of the PEPFAR ROP2019 community engagement process	8
Engagement to date with CSOs and KPs	8
What are CSO's views of the ROP process and engagement opportunity	9
What are the gaps in the PEPFAR ROP process and program from a CSO/KP perspective?	9
What additional challenges and opportunities has the COVID-19 pandemic presented to CSOs delivering the ROP2019 strategic plan.	10
Recommendations	11



Background

HIV/AIDS

HIV is a serious health and development challenge. Currently, there are approximately 38 million PLHIV. Many of those at risk of, or living with HIV do not have access to prevention, treatment and care¹.

Global response

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in 2015 and Sustainable Development Goal 3 aspires to ensure health and wellbeing for all, including a bold commitment to end the epidemic of AIDs and other communicable diseases by 2030. It also aims to achieve universal health coverage, and provide access to safe and effective medicines and vaccines for all¹. In addition, on World AIDs day 2014, UNAIDs set the “90-90-90” targets for 2020 aimed at ending the epidemic by 2030.

Since 2015 significant progress has been made in addressing HIV. However, gains have been uneven with too many vulnerable people and key populations left behind, and global targets for 2020 will be missed. In 2019, 62% of new adult HIV infections occurred among KPs and their partners despite these populations constituting a small proportion of the population². Alongside existing challenges the global SARS-CoV-2 pandemic is having far-reaching health, social, economic and political consequences, including, on worldwide HIV/AIDS efforts.

PEPFAR and the Asia Regional Operational Plan 2019

The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDs Relief (PEPFAR) was created in 2003 by the US government. It is the single largest donor globally to international HIV efforts with funding totalling more than \$90 billion and has been reauthorized three times³.

PEPFAR activities focus on expanding access to HIV prevention, treatment and care interventions

Despite being one of the most successful global health initiatives PEPFAR has identified several challenges including:

- How to accelerate progress toward epidemic control in the context of reducing or stagnant budgets;
- Improving use of data systems, dashboards and benchmarking to optimise program improvement and facilitate technical exchange of effective approaches to KPs;
- Supporting and strengthening country ownership and sustainability;
- Addressing the needs of key populations
- Leveraging partnerships with the public and private sectors.

In 2019, in response to these challenges, PEPFAR embarked on a major programming shift in Asia, the Asia Regional Operational Plan 2019. Operating units across Asia and Central Asia were unified into one, 11 country, Asia region with overall coordination taking place through an Asia Regional Coordinating Unit based in Bangkok.

¹ <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/fact-sheet/the-global-hiv-aids-epidemic/>

² Seizing the moment: Tackling entrenched inequalities to end epidemics. UNAIDs. 2020 Global AIDs update. <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2020/global-aids-report>

³ <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/fact-sheet/the-u-s-presidents-emergency-plan-for-aids-relief-pepfar/#footnote-466681-18>



This regional technical platform ensures close collaboration and partnership between cross country governments and international NGOs in an effort to increase efficiency, consolidate expertise and technical assistance, advance and sustain epidemic control with special attention to KPs and drivers of the epidemic, and preserve and increase programmatic funding for effective activities using a (figure 1) distributed assets model.

Countries were classified into one of three tiers dependent on their status towards sustained epidemic control. US Government agencies, within each country, are required to maintain programmatic leadership and work in partnership with civil society institutions and the private sector to achieve the ROP2019 targets (table 1) and ultimately the UNAIDS 90-90-90 goals.



The PEPFAR Asia Regional Operational Planning Meetings took place in Bangkok, Thailand 1-5 April 2019. During the event, Aditya Wardhana, Executive Director of the Indonesia AIDS Coalition (IAC) who was a civil society representative, has delivered a great speech on the country's situation and call for further support from PEPFAR and other partners.

Table 1: PEPFAR Asia ROP2019

Tier	1. Accelerate and achieve epidemic control	2. Protect the investment	3. Sustained epidemic control
Countries	Burma, Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, Tajikistan, Thailand	India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Laos, Papua New Guinea	Cambodia
Aim	Achieve UNAIDs 90-90-90 goals among KP groups in priority locations	Optimise systems, policies and practices to ensure ART beneficiaries achieve and maintain VL suppression, with phased transition to a data-informed, sustainable government – and civil-society-led response	Focus on sustainable financing and strengthening of national systems to identify and respond to new infections, adapting or shifting activities as needed to ensure PEPFAR investment is maximally directed to address key barriers to epidemic control
ROP 2019 Targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote scale-up of index testing with fidelity; • Ensure they are investing in and promoting KP-differentiated case finding strategies within national programs; • Ensure they are able to reach deeper into KP networks and consider social network strategies; • Support linkage strategies that ensure and document at least 95% of KP who test positive are linked to ART, and reduce the time to treatment initiation; • Articulate measurable goals for how PEPFAR support will impact national, sub-national, and/or specific KP cascades; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimize index testing with fidelity, sustained in facilities that support beneficiaries on treatment; • Institutionalize differentiated service delivery models (DSM) with MMS for stable patients; • Increase the use of strategic information through stronger health management information systems, case-based surveillance, and the use of unique identifier codes; • Ensure VL testing and monitoring; • Strengthen systems for appropriate commodities, including TLD and supply chain continuity; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using micro-targeted pre-exposure HIV prophylaxis (PrEP) based on HIV testing yields through refined case-finding activities and point-of-care (POC) recency testing results; implementing case-based surveillance nationally through use of unique identifying codes (UIC) and improved inter-operability of existing HIV data systems; • Capitalizing on the Prime Minister's commitment to increase domestic investments and funding for civil society organizations (CSOs);



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote development and scale of differentiated service delivery models, including MMS and decentralization for stable patients with a focus on models specific to KP; • Include clear strategies for taking successful service delivery models to scale with national governments and clear plans for service delivery models that are not successful; • Support PrEP implementation, and promote relevant policies and programs; and • Focus on provinces/ districts with highest HIV prevalence, burden, number of new infections, and unmet ART needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response (Papua New Guinea); • Strengthen support to orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), prioritizing children of key populations (India); • Maintain PLHIV on treatment, with Intensified focus in current PEPFAR-supported sub-national units; and • Ensure TLD transition and integration of TPT in national protocols. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing international policies aggressively, including multi-month scripting (MMS), dolutegravir-based regimens including tenofovir/lamivudine/ dolutegravir (TLD) fixed-dose combination, TB preventive therapy (TPT) and same-day ART (SDART) initiation; and • Maintaining retention above 95% and ensure 100% of eligible patients receive a VL test.
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Asia ROP2019 community engagement activities (2019 and 2020)

Close collaboration with, and meaningful investment in, key population (KP) led organisations and networks is critical to attainment of the ROP2019 goals.

In **April 2019**, regional KP networks and community groups representatives from 10 of the 11 of the ROP2019 countries met with PEPFAR Ambassador Deborah Birx and the USAID's coordinator in Bangkok for a five day in-person Regional Operational Planning workshop.

The meeting was an opportunity to strengthen relationships and gave attendees valuable insight to the planning, budgetary requirements, past performances and directives of PEPFAR, as well as an opportunity to provide input to the planning process as well as strategize how best to work together.

Evaluation of the PEPFAR ROP2019 community engagement process

At the April 2019 ROP workshop APCOM initiated an evaluation of the PEPFAR ROP2019 community engagement process by asking the attending KP representatives about the engagement process and to explore ways that PEPFAR can better engage with KPs in the region.^{4 5}

In **June 2020**, due to COVID-19 there was no in-person workshop however APCOM took the opportunity to undertake a survey of community groups within the 11 countries plus the Philippines* and Vietnam** to ascertain the degree and level of engagement of PEPFAR with CSOs in the ROP process and the challenges and opportunities facing them. The response rate was 77% (10/13). Alongside this as part of the **July 2020** virtual AIDs 2020 pre-conference "rights, resources, resilience 2020" APCOM held a webinar exploring community engagement in the ROP2019 process with four country representatives⁶.

Engagement to date with CSOs and KPs

Several of the country CSO's had engaged with PEPFAR country operating plan discussions prior to ROP2019. Their involvement had been as civil society members and perceived by themselves as nominal. For Nepal, Laos and Philippines the ROP 2019 was their first interaction with PEPFAR. In the case of the Philippines this was in advance of the new 2020 PEPFAR Philippines program. Prior to ROP2019 KP community involvement in COP development and PEPFAR varied between countries from 'amazing' in India to 'limited scope' and 'last minute' in other countries.

Recognising the lack of investment into KPs and their communities the 2019 ROP specifically aims to be more transparent and involve both CSOs, their representatives and KPs actively in the ROP process.

⁴ [Indonesia AIDS Coalition \(IAC\) Executive Director at the PEPFAR Asia Regional Operational Planning Meeting 2019](#)

⁵ [HIV Advocates at the 2019 PEPFAR Regional Operational Plan Meetings](#)

⁶ https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/eu-cs-slide-prod-recordings/aids2020/189/v/969_1p.mp4



What are CSO's views of the ROP process and engagement opportunity

CSOs have welcomed the move towards greater, and more meaningful, engagement with civil society institutions and with KPs. All those who attended the regional planning workshop in 2019 in Bangkok and those who responded to the survey expressed excitement at the multisectoral approach, the 'opportunity to have their voices heard', 'to learn from, and link with, other CSOs' the 'positive and 'the process of community systems strengthening'. There is hope that this participatory, inclusive forum will provide greater accountability and that sharing experiences and agreeing mutual goals and direction will consequently lead to increased efficiency; increased investment of funding through local CSOs; less duplication and less confusion on the ground.

"We appreciate political leaders' recognition of the importance of CSO and their support through political commitments"

"The ROP planning was eye opening for civil society as our voices are being heard"

"It was helpful for both parties to strategize how to collectively work as a team"

What are the gaps in the PEPFAR ROP process and program from a CSO/KP perspective?

Some CSOs and KPs expressed concern that the ROP process was felt to be more focused on improving care cascades and increased case finding and that there was no long-term commitment to, or funding for, organisational/institutional development of KP/CSO led initiatives, ownership and sustainability.

There was a worry that the process for engagement might be perfunctory/symbolic and that opportunities for involvement appeared to be limited for both CSOs and KPs but especially for KPs. This concern was compounded as during the ROP engagement workshop participants felt that the timeslots were limited and too short; there was little time for exchange of ideas, experiences and learning; They asked for a safe space during discussions to talk and be heard without judgement. Language was a barrier especially for many KPs and there was a request that for future events PEPFAR facilitate interpreters be present so that a fuller discussion be possible and that all key documents be available in multiple languages. There was also a request to ensure transparent and equitable representation of KPs from all regions within a country, that these representatives be chosen by CSOs who have closely engaged and worked with the KP communities and to ensure that donor funding support also not be restricted to the capital cities only.

Success was felt to be a double-edged sword as progress towards 90/90/90 was followed by a decrease in donor funding.

"Cambodia has been successful in HIV/AIDs response, so the fund has been declined by many donors including USAID and the GFATM"

CSOs and KPs expressed a fervent need for increased investment of funding through local CSOs, for greater clarity (i.e costed routemap) on how communities can meaningfully participate in the ROP process' and for greater flexibility allowing CSOs to be involved in the decision-making process and have greater autonomy over project implementation.

Alongside this there was a request to empower, coach and build the skills of KPs/CSOs in keeping with the sustainability agenda and to provide guidance and mentorship to KP/CSO especially regarding strategic decision making and how to apply for direct funding opportunities as these arose.

"Most of the strategies are top-down approaches. Sometimes allow for bottom-up approaches where PEPFAR can hear from the communities what they need"

"Getting all donors to talk collectively when working with KP. There are a lack of communication and overlapping of programs which we need to address collectively"

What additional challenges and opportunities has the COVID-19 pandemic presented to CSOs delivering the ROP2019 strategic plan.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the need for better online engagement and demonstrated the opportunity for a much broader reach via virtual platforms.

Consultation and collaboration opportunities with, and between, CSOs and KPs have been more limited and progress slower during COVID-19 as organisations worked to access on-line communication platforms and to connect with their communities and other organisations. Face to face services, including outreach were severely reduced during lockdown measures. Rates of essential testing dropped, access to ART was severely impacted due to difficulties in transportation of resources and restricted KP mobility. CSOs recognising that many KPs lost their livelihoods during the lockdown redirected financial resources, where feasible, to both supporting essential day to day living (food, shelter etc) thus strengthening relationships. At the same time, many innovative opportunities to engage with their communities have been implemented– novel on-line support and education, multi-month dispensing, motorbike ARV delivery systems whereby HIVST kits and PrEP can also be delivered. Many CSOs have also proposed or implemented clinical training to help providers manage HIV-COVID-19 considerations and other trainings have also been moved to online often providing a broader reach.

The process of collecting information and insights to the PEPFAR program has also been challenging due to the uncertain situation and lack of internet access. PEPFAR through its country programs (e.g. LINKAGES program in Indonesia) has developed several innovative programmes and these are having some impact though due to everchanging national policies and regulations progress is slow.





Recommendations

“Community organisations are ready to facilitate and lead the community engagement and participation in terms of both policy and operations”. At this time, however, in the Asia ROP2019 countries, governments are not able to provide the level of funding that is required to strengthen the involvement of the communities in the HIV response by themselves. Therefore, it is critical that donors like PEPFAR, and government stakeholders, focus on investing in development of local peer networks and community organisations which will be held accountable for service provision and governance as major international donors reduce their presence in the region in relation to HIV.

CSOs recognise that currently there is a continued need to seek technical assistance from donors and bilateral partners to maintain and scale up use in order to become sustainable. This is especially so in regard to sophisticated technologies.

CSOs and KPs articulated their requests of PEPFAR and their support and commitment to the ROP2019 strategy:

- The government should implement the nine recommendations in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity or expression in the 2019 United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) (Third Cycle). This includes introducing an anti-discrimination law that guarantees equality and explicitly prohibits discrimination of all kinds, including on the basis of religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or sex characteristics. It also includes adopting effective measures to combat discrimination and violence of people because of their sexual orientation or gender identity and bringing perpetrators to justice;
- “Provide long-term commitment to organisational and institutional development of KP and CSO led initiatives, ownership and sustainability” Collective voice
- “Partnership between community with the Global Fund, PEPFAR, USAID, UNAIDs and other partners is really essential to ensure our country will be on the right track to achieve 90-90-90” IAC
- “It is our greatest expectation that PEPFAR will still maintain its important role, side by side with the community of KPs and PLHIV to ensure the government pledges and fulfils their commitment” IAC
- “PEPFAR should invest its funding not only through international NGOs but also through local community organisations. Our community has the ability to handle resources for the HIV response and it will help make our organisations more sustainable” Myanmar
- “There are barriers (S&D) that our communities face every day that hinder KP programs. We need help from higher authorities to support us in PNG. ... We want our government to be accountable to key affected populations by addressing our legal barriers, stigma and discrimination. By addressing these we envisage will reduce the rates of STI and HIV in our country” PNG
- “Consultation with the community are always need to be done whilst maintaining good relationship with the government” IAC
- “Community to be part of the watch dog for progress on meaningful engagement and implementation, and also informing reprogramming” xxx

APCOM along with other regional networks, CSOs and KPs look forward to further strengthening their partnership with PEPFAR and working together to both achieve 90-90-90 and end the AIDs epidemic by 2030.

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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