



A Pathway to COP/ROP23?

Communities' Lessons Learned and Recommendations arising from engagements with PEPFAR Country Operational Plans/ Regional Operational Plans (COP/ROP) 2022



With support from:



APCOM extends sincere gratitude to our community partners in the countries. Without your trust and confidence in the work that we do, we are not able to continue to provide useful resources and technical assistance. We acknowledge the contributions and inputs of our key populations and community partners into these processes.

Thank you to the following regional key population networks for their active collaboration:



What led to #KeyPopAsiaCOP?

The COVID-19 pandemic made a huge impact to the processes which were significant to fight the existing HIV epidemic. The Country Operational Plans 2021 and Regional Operational Plans 2021 (COP21/ROP21) set to be a face-to-face meeting for the approval of COPs were shifted to an all-online engagements at all levels. The engagements with the key population communities were pushed to a very minimum, if not absent. There were no alternative mechanisms that were provided for communities' engagements. Even if there were, the technical and time bounded nature of the COP/ROP will make the county processes very challenging.

The COP/ROP21 was given a pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The processes resumed in April 2021. Although the Virtual COP/ROP21 Guidelines required the participation of the key population communities both at the country and regional processes, the processes followed a very tight timeline and further limited the participation of the communities due to limited to internet access.

In February 2021, APCOM, with the support from PEPFAR RDMA, led a regional townhall with key populations and communities.

In February 2022 and March 2022, a year after the regional CSO Townhall, APCOM will once again host an online discussion with the communities to follow up on the recommendations from last year's CSO townhall as well as to design a regional strategy on sustainability in the delivery of services such as HIV Self-Testing (HIVST), Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART).

The Country Operational Plans (COP) present a significant opportunity for civil society organisations and key populations to be meaningfully involved in all phases the country level processes, particularly for those who will be representing key populations.

The engagement of the key population with the COP is crucial to ensuring that the needs of their communities are appropriately addressed and budgeted for the fiscal year. Yet clear, concise and community-friendly information and pointers for their involvement remain to be very limited. Pro-active development and dissemination of these resources, and consistent engagements with key populations are needed to impart communities with knowledge and skills to raise their voices and communicate their needs in this particular forum



What is #KeyPopAsiaCOP22?

[Check out more](https://www.apcom.org/keypopasiacop22-let-key-population-lead/)

<https://www.apcom.org/keypopasiacop22-let-key-population-lead/>

The #KeyPopAsiaCOP22 is a series of data collection and consultation with key populations and their networks at the country and regional level. The main component of activity is the direct linking of key population networks and PEPFAR offices during the consultations.

#KeyPopAsiaCOP22 will highlight the challenges that KP-led organisations face regarding sustainability:

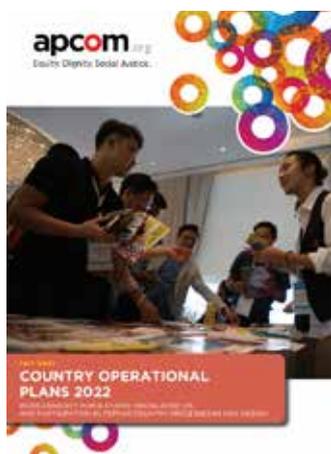
- Challenges in diversifying the HIV services offered to fully meet the needs of key populations.
- Inadequate capacity to develop business plans for sustainability.
- Lack of access to capital on preferential terms.
- Difficulty to fully integrate into national health systems and insurance schemes, thereby limiting their ability to sustain themselves and provide diverse and quality services.
- Difficulty accessing quality assurance and accreditation processes and tools due to the nature of funding and targeted service delivery
- National policies and practices that do not support key population programming and/or legal, functioning, and transparent social contracting mechanism.
- Addressing human rights barriers and legal environment

The main problem is related to the language barrier of our activists. Many do not speak the language, and do not have the opportunity to go to the online resources, so it is difficult to participate and express their thoughts.

Farihtamoh Gulova
 Director, Equal Opportunities
 Tajikistan



We continued what worked from COP21 engagements



1. Developing a Fact Sheet for COP22 Guidance and welcome inclusions

Where to access:

https://www.apcom.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022_Factsheet-COP_20220310_v3.pdf

The COP/ROP21 and COP/ROP22 Fact Sheets are few of the first summarized information about the PEPFAR Country Operational Plans developed with the primary purpose of enhancing key population's and their representative's understanding of the processes regularly practiced by PEPFAR. The fact sheets aim to assist in enabling meaningful engagements of key populations during the process.

In addition to visual presentation of the COP/ROP22 process, the guides also contain tips and suggestions to the key population and their communities on how they can effectively engage with their respective country processes. This material is also linked to APCOM's online resources which the communities can use as examples or guides in tailoring their engagements.

The COP/ROP22 Fact Sheet picked up progressive use of language in the COP/ROP22 Guidance and Planning Level Letters. The use of language is intended to assist key population representatives to advocate for increased investments and increased programming for key population.

The COP/ROP22 presents a significant opportunity for civil society organisations and key populations to be meaningfully involved in all phases of the planning process. The key populations must ensure that a seat or seats is dedicated to civil society representative/s in the country planning processes. This Fact Sheet also serves as a guide to inform the key populations and communities on how to make their participation more meaningful.

If possible, involve more quantity of community and activist members in this kind of round table discussions in the country, as it would more helpful with COP processes.

Adilet Alimkulov
Executive Director, Kyrgyz Indigo
Kyrgyz Republic



2. Regular consultation with the key population representatives from the country level

Where to access:

<https://www.apcom.org/keypopasiacop22-let-key-population-lead/>

Building on from the established engagements during the COP/ROP21, APCOM led #KeyPopAsiaCOP22, an initiative which consists of series of consultations with key population and their communities and data collection to ensure consistent engagements which are meaningful, and community led. This initiative equipped the key population representatives with knowledge and skills to raise their voices and communicate their identified program needs.

The #KeyPopAsiaCOP22 consultations focused on key population engagement at the COP/ROP22 processes, the roles of the regional networks to increase the engagement at the country level, human rights and legal environment, regional sustainability in terms of advocacy for the continuous and community-led delivery of PrEP, HIVST and ART, and integration of the services of the HIV and the other services with transgender women and people who inject drugs.

For a broader perspective on the priorities and needs of key population, APCOM organised sub-regional consultations which convened key population-led organisations and stakeholders. These sub-regions are:

- Greater Mekong (Burma, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand)
- Insular South East Asian Nations and the Pacific (Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, The Philippines)
- South Asia (Nepal, India)
- Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan)

The sub-regional consultations set the context of the country and sub-region in relation to the key populations and the HIV program. It identified priorities and proposed approach to scale up and/or sustain community-led interventions in terms of HIV service delivery, structural barriers and legal environments and organizational capacity.



3. Coordination with the Regional Key Population Networks

Unlike the Global Fund Funding Model which also requires the meaningful participation of the key population and PLHIV communities, the COP/ROP guidelines do not provide clear process for the communities to follow. The COP/ROP Guidelines require participation of the key population and PLHIV networks, but it do not provide straightforward directive as to how the key population and PLHIV communities will be engaged. This non-clarity is a precursor to the non-engagement of the key population at the country level.

One of the mandates of the Regional Key Population Networks is to support or assist their respective country-based networks in their meaningful engagements in national discussions related to Global Fund Funding Model and PEPFAR's COP processes. Even though the regional networks have been providing support to country-based organisations, it was only in COP/ROP21 that specific engagements were designed and implemented. The collaborative effort of the regional networks produced a Regional Statement as a response to the approved ROP21 especially highlighting on the other issues of key population which remain unaddressed.

As a regional key population network, we are concern that with the completion of KPIF last year, we need to continue advocating for a dedicated funding stream for key population both regionally and nationally."

Francis Joseph
Regional Coordinator, NAPUD
Asia Pacific Region



We introduced new components for our COP22 engagements

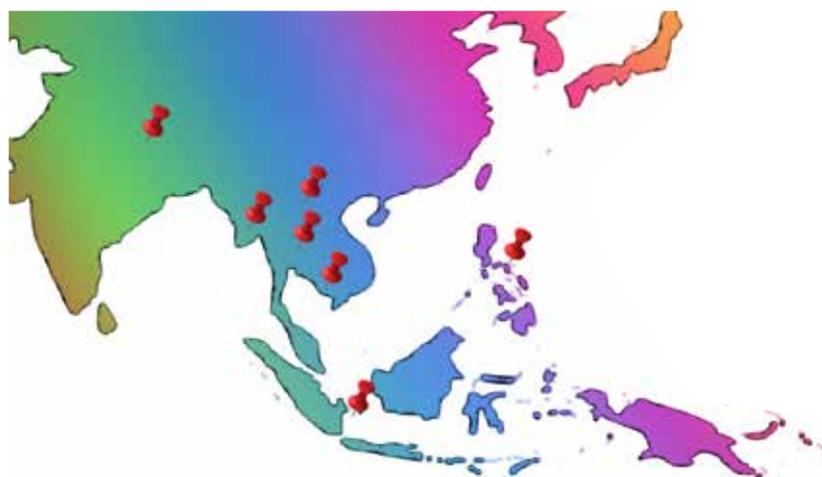
1. Presence as observers of Regional Key Population Networks

The planning steps for COP/ROP22 will commence from the multistakeholder consultation facilitated by PEPFAR OU. This preliminary phase of process is encouraged to be with meaningful engagement from key population and PLHIV networks. The multistakeholder consultation reviews in-country individual level data may help identify best sites follow up, and what sub-groups were most at risk including issues on low uptake of testing, loss to follow up, level of viral suppression level, stigma and discrimination.

With the support from USAID RDMA and PEPFAR Asia, APCOM requests PEPFAR Operational Units (OUs) to allow regional representation through regional KP networks as observers to ensure community engagement in the COP process. Information from the observation will contribute to the design a regional strategy on sustainability in the delivery of HIV services as our input into the ROP22. Any information we get from the COP meetings will greatly contribute to our regional approach.

The following are the dates and the regional representation for the pre-COP22 country meetings.

| Date | Country | Regional Key Population Representation |
|--------|-----------------|--|
| 02 Feb | Burma (Myanmar) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW) YouthLead |
| 03 Feb | Indonesia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asia Pacific Network of People living with HIV (APN+) |
| 03 Feb | Thailand | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> APCOM |
| 03 Feb | Cambodia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> APCOM |
| 04 Feb | Philippines | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> APCOM Asia Pacific Network of People living with HIV (APN+) |
| 04 Feb | Nepal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Community of Women Living with HIV-Asia Pacific (ICW-AP) |
| 04 Feb | Laos | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW) YouthLead |





2. Huddle for big hustle: Broader involvement of KP and communities

Where to access:

<https://www.apcom.org/big-huddle-for-big-hustle-key-populations-regional-online-sounding-board-session/>

The key population engagements during COP/ROP22 were proactive at the regional level. However, Asia Region still faced a continuing decline of investments into HIV programming despite the inclusion of strategies and commitments towards ensuring KP-led programs and their sustainability. A few days before the COP/ROP22 approval meetings, and few significant concerns from the key population remained unaddressed.

Through this online sounding board session, the communities shared their personal and professional experiences regarding their involvement in this process. The key population representatives were able to share the biggest challenges in engaging with the COP22-related discussions. They also assessed their own engagements during the COP22.

Part of the recommendations, for example, in Nepal, the implementing CBOs are not part of the COP process in the country. Although some of the CBOs were given opportunity to provide inputs, they are not sure whether their inputs were included and that there must also be strict implementation of CLM (community-led monitoring) in the country for active watchdogging in the improvement of quality of HIV services.

Another recommendation is that the spaces and fora where discussions and consultation happen have to be community-friendly which allow open and honest conversation. These spaces and for a should promote an environment for the community members to feel that their voices and contributions are crucial, and that actions will be taken as the process moves forward.





3. Analysis of PEPFAR Funding Structure

Where to access:

Trends in PEPFAR Resources and Investment

https://www.apcom.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/2022_Trends-in-PEPFAR-Resources-and-Investment-in-KP-for-Asia_v4.pdf

The Country Operational Plans / Regional Operational Plans 2022 (COP/ROP22) operate through progressive language and highlight the inclusion of programs and activities that are community-focused, community-led and services that are community-delivered. This shift towards broader inclusion of key populations and integration of other services into HIV program has underscored the greater involvement and participation of the key population and their networks in the COP/ROP22 processes.

However, in contrast to PEPFAR's progressive language and inclusive strategy in COP/ROP22, investments in Asian countries are flatlining or continuously decreasing.

In order for key population and their networks to effectively participate in the development of their respective countries' Country Operational Plan, more detailed knowledge on investments is required. The following data are estimate COP/ROP budget approved and spent of Asian countries during COP/ROP21, and their allocated budget for COP/ROP22. The data also presents the amount of funding from a country's COP/ROP21 budget which was allocated to key population programs.

For the key population and the PLHIVs, the cascade of HIV services including prevention, testing, treatment and care are more than health programmes. These HIV services have impact and affect their everyday lives. For most, these services are life savers.

This context has given the phrase 'nothing about us without us' more meaning and power. The key population and PLHIV community, through their first-hand experience, possess the knowledge on what needs to be improved if we aim for wider access and quality of HIV services. Although the phrase may have been used countless times by advocates from key population and PLHIV community, it remains to be the mantra in the HIV advocacy to put the affected population in the middle of the response. This is very important because those who have first-hand lived experience must lead the way.

The lessons and experiences from the COP/ROP21 prompted for an early planning for COP/ROP22. APCOM, together with PEPFAR Asia and USAID RDMA, did a stock take of previous engagements and agreed the COP/ROP22 provides more opportunities for proactive and intensive engagements both at the regional and country level.

The activities that follow are the engagements that the regional key population networks partook through the leadership of APCOM.



We are still falling behind

Considering the absence of community leadership, the significant decrease of investments, and overlooked priorities, Asia Region is falling behind set targets.

Asia Region is facing a continuing decline of investments into HIV programming despite the inclusion of strategies and commitments towards ensuring KP-led programs and their sustainability. At the opening of the PEPFAR ROP/COP 2022, 28 February 2022, Power of Partnerships stated that PEPFAR values the voices of the people from the ground to ensure prioritization of interventions, and accountability to the community, and we hope we count on PEPFAR leadership. We are still only beginning to scale up KP PrEP and optimize KP-led approaches in many countries - we are at a critical time following the disruption from Covid-19 and we must finish the job and protect our gains.

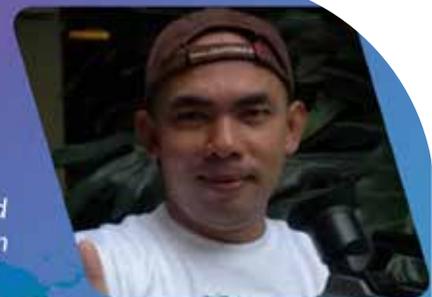
The discontinuation of the **Key Population Investment Fund (KPIF) and Accelerate and Scale the Asia Program (ASAP)** funding posed problems to the community clinics in providing continued HIV services to the key population. The funding cuts will inevitably cause a roll-back on the success these programs have in reaching the 95-95-95 targets while significantly pushing the quality of life for transgender people to the end of the margins.

While PEPFAR-funded programs have implemented strategies for working with key populations at risk of and living with HIV, they have often overlooked people who use drugs, who are among the highly vulnerable community central to PEPFAR's mission. While global health discussions have begun to shift from a 'war on drugs' framework to a harm reduction one, laws, culture and funding have been slower to change – and around the world, punitive environments surrounding drugs and a lack of social support for those who use them pose a serious problem for public health.

In addition to dramatic disruptions due to COVID-19 pandemic, key population-led and community-led organizations in the Asia region remain unable to access domestic and public resources particularly for prevention programs.

The need of the community itself, and not the need of the project holder [should inform the COP]... Ideally, if possible, preparing the next COP should come from issues and discussions from key populations at the grassroots levels – that can be coordinated by and for the key population organization or network.

Slamet Rahardjo
 Executive Director, GWL-INA
 Indonesia



RECOMMENDATIONS

- For the next COP/ROP23, the process of community engagement must begin at the earliest time or during the drafting of the COP/ROP23 Guidance. It is recommended that the PEPFAR Asia Coordination Unit (PARCU) continue its engagements with the key population networks even after the COP/ROP22 approval.
- Consult with key population representatives in developing new strategies of PEPFAR and include the representatives in the drafting of the guidelines for COP/ROP 23. Review COP guidelines and monitoring mechanisms to ensure PEPFAR country teams/coordination units engage a wide range of KP CSOs including small and local KP and community groups
- **Regional networks to play as the coordinating body for countries:**
 - between key populations and PEPFAR
 - Key populations, PEPFAR and Global Fund
 - Promote accountability and sustainability
 - Upgrading infrastructure to support community-led and -based service delivery
 - Generate demand for the HIV prevention combination – PrEP, HIV Self-testing, ART
- **Standardizing the language across the countries**, and at different levels. Build a common understanding at all levels, especially with the key population, the use and coverage of a 'term' applied within the COP/ROP Guidelines
- Key population leadership. **Add a seat for the Key populations in the COP** in the current structure (oversight committee)
- Disseminate and make accessible knowledge materials on the COP process, which are **translated into local languages**, to local KP and community groups
- Disseminate information on PEPFAR country teams/coordination units to ensure **that KP and community groups know where to ask for support and information on COP engagement**
- Review COP guidelines and monitoring mechanisms to **ensure that the safety of KP and community groups, especially vulnerable groups are protected throughout the COP process**
- Enhance engagement with small and local KP and community groups to **identify their needs for resources and capacity-building for COP engagement**

