

NOTES FROM THE APN+ MSM SATELLITE SESSION 8TH ICAAP COLOMBO AUGUST 20TH 2007

Robert Baldwin welcomed attendees and acted as main facilitator for the meeting¹. The session was hosted by the International AIDS Alliance and co-hosted by the Seven Sisters. The satellite was described in promotional material (refer appendix one) as a safe space for positive msm to meet and share their concerns and hopes but others who have an interest in positive msm issues and are supportive were welcome to join the session. Indeed there was a transgender attendee from Thailand who will continue discussions with the APN+ Secretariat about addressing the needs of positive transgender communities.

The term 'MSM' was proposed as a broad behavioral description for this meeting rather than an identity and most participants appeared comfortable with that use of the terminology.

There were 28 participants at the meeting from the following countries who all provided self-introductions to the rest of the participants:

China, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, India, Japan, Afghanistan, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Guam, USA, Malaysia and Australia.

Some of those present (12) were part of the APN+ MSM Working Group. This Group was established as a working group of APN+ in Bangkok in March 2007 to address the specific needs of the Asia Pacific positive msm.

Robert, via a brief PowerPoint presentation, explained to the participants what occurred at the inaugural meeting in March 2007. It was also explained that The International HIV/AIDS Alliance has provided some funding for the activities of the APN+ MSM Working Group for 2007, and a simple workplan was developed for the year.

Robert's presentation covered the issues that positive msm identified as being important to them, the barriers and challenges they face, and the roles that msm can play. There was a clear implicit priority identified to advocate for the rights of positive msm and for their specific needs to be addressed.

The workplan for 2007 was relatively modest and included six main areas of activities:

 Capacity Building for positive msm;

¹ This satellite session was held in the main conference hotel (Cinnamon Grand) which was not on the conference site, hence there was some delay in starting the meeting due to transport difficulties faced by some participants to get to the venue, however the organizers were pleased with the number and diversity of participants.

- ⓧ Advocacy and collaborations;
- ⓧ Research ('basic') on issues relevant to positive msm;
- ⓧ Activities at the 8th ICAAP;
- ⓧ Communications within the Working Group;
- ⓧ The development of some positive msm resources.

It was noted that the APN+ MSM Working Group had already progressed towards achieving most of the items in the work plan. In particular there were three specific APN+ positive msm events organized at ICAAP, a significant presence and achievement, along with attendance by sixteen members of the Working Group at ICAAP (the Working Group presently has 24 members).

Andrew provided an outline of the initial research project which will cover four countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and India). This research is the first step in what will hopefully become a larger project to determine the needs and gaps of positive msm with a view to develop advocacy strategies and programs to address those gaps. This first phase will be conducted through small positive msm focus groups (the first one has already occurred in Bandung, Indonesia) and is intended to be an initial step to gain information on positive msm issues rather than be a robust research study. It should be seen as a pilot and next year it is hoped more countries will be involved and the project will be developed further.

The current focus group project will concentrate on needs in the priority areas of health, social issues, economic issues and sex. There was some lively discussion among participants at the meeting about the research project with several countries expressing a wish to be involved.

Again it was stressed that this is just the first step. Eventually it is hoped that the msm working group will form collaborations with 'sympathetic' research groups who might assist with their technical expertise.

There was some discussion about whether the workplan was happening at a regional level and an in-country level. It was explained that in these early days at least the focus had been mostly regional with the exception of the focus groups which will happen at a country level but will hopefully provide us with a 'regional' snapshot of what life is like for positive msm.

Elden clarified that initially the intention was to raise issues at the regional level more than address specific issues in every country. The first task is to get positive msm issues on the agenda.

Greg brought up the need to collaborate with other networks and to advocate for msm needs through our own in country PLHIV networks. (Addy already represents the APN+ msm working group on the Purple Sky Network, and dialogue with the newly formed APCOM is taking place).

Hiroshi referred to the diversity within Asia Pacific of positive msm and their issues. There is a large difference between urban and rural settings. Language and different cultural norms need to be also recognized as a challenge for the working group. He asked the question, "How to support the silent majority?"

Paul wondered if there positive ex pats living in the region who also need services and how they might be able to access them. As well, they might be prepared to support the working group, or local HIV services for MSM, financially. Ways to reach them might be thru the many 'gay' tourist websites and other web-based services like dreadedned.com, utopia-asia.com, fridae.com, gay.com, gaydar.co.uk and dragoncastle.net.

It was Raphael who summed it up well when he said that the progress to date had been impressive.

Conversations continued over dinner in the Hotel cafe after the meeting was formally drawn to a close at approximately 8.45pm.

Promotional Flyer

**The International HIV/AIDS Alliance invites you
to satellite sessions at ICAAP**

Session 1:

Men who have sex with men living with HIV

The recently formed Asia Pacific Network of PLHIV (APN+) MSM Working Group, supported by the 7 Sisters Coalition and the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, are hosting this satellite meeting for men in the Asia Pacific Region who are living with HIV and who have sex with other men.

In a friendly, informal and safe environment and through open dialogue we will attempt to develop an understanding of the issues impacting on HIV positive men who have sex with men. The session will explore the challenges and barriers facing us, including barriers to accessing treatment, and the role of positive MSM within the HIV response. It will also identify and prioritize initiatives to improve the lives of positive MSM.

We welcome people who do not identify as positive and/or MSM, however creating a safe space for positive MSM at the meeting will be of vital importance.

When:

Monday, 20 August 7-10pm (including buffet dinner).

Where:

Cinnamon Grand Hotel.

Chair:

Robert Baldwin (APN+)

Co-hosts:

- APN+
- 7 Sisters.