

Executive Summary

The XVII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2008) was held in Mexico City, Mexico, from 3 to 8 August, 2008, attracting more than 20,000 delegates. The IAS Evaluation Coordinator was responsible for the design and implementation of an evaluation of AIDS 2008 with the objective of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the conference and assessing its immediate and long-term impact.

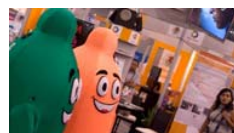
The leading data collection instrument used was an online survey sent to delegates three weeks after the conference had ended. This survey had a high level of engagement, representing the views of 3,605 delegates, most of whom were first-time attendees. A number of other instruments were used to gather information on specific conference sessions, activities and areas. This included online and paper surveys as well as face-to-face interviews administered before, during and after the conference.

The main findings of the evaluation relate to:

A. Attendance and Participation

- ✘ Similar to 2006, surveyed delegates identified the opportunity for networking/collaboration as the most important factor in their decision to attend the conference (more than 40%);
- ✘ More than 80% of survey respondents reported the pre-conference information was good or excellent;
- ✘ The conference website resource most frequently used was the online programme-at-a-glance (82% vs 75% in 2006);
- ✘ The Abstract Mentor Programme helped about 40 conference delegates successfully submit an abstract for AIDS 2008 (80% of abstracts which were reviewed by mentors and submitted to the programme were ultimately accepted);
- ✘ More than 85% of surveyed delegates who visited the PLHIV lounge reported the lounge was very helpful in supporting and maximizing their participation in the conference;
- ✘ More than 70% of delegates that attended AIDS 2004 and/or AIDS 2006 agreed or strongly agreed that overall organization of the conference had improved despite some complaints about sound-proofing of session rooms, some limited catering options and long-walking distances to the Global Village from session rooms;
- ✘ Although the majority of surveyed delegates would choose to attend AIDS 2010 (58%), the main reason for not attending that conference may be lack of funding (48%).

For the first time in the history of the conference, the reach of the conference was expanded through a series of conference 'hubs'. These were session halls in remote geographic locations around the world where conference sessions were downloaded, screened and followed by a moderated discussion. As an indicator of success, most surveyed participants would recommend a friend/colleague to attend similar hubs in the future.



B. Conference Programme

- ✘ Most respondents reported the quality of sessions was good or excellent (86% vs 84% in 2006);
- ✘ The AIDS 2008 programme accepted more abstracts submitted by women compared to 2006 (51.5% vs 48.6% in 2006);
- ✘ The vast majority of surveyed delegates who selected one main track of interest agreed or strongly agreed that their track examined how scientific advances can inform policy and programmes, addressed current questions and presented state-of-the-art science and new findings;
- ✘ The majority of surveyed delegates indicated that the coverage of their area/issue of interest in the conference programme was good or excellent (68% vs 59% in 2006) and that the issues relevant to PLHIV were well reflected in the conference programme (60%);
- ✘ As in 2006, plenary sessions, poster exhibitions, special sessions and oral abstract sessions were the most well attended (more than 80%) while special sessions and plenary sessions were considered the most useful (75%);
- ✘ Surveyed delegates were highly satisfied by the quality of discussions and debates as well as speakers and moderators with more than 80% of good or excellent rating;
- ✘ The majority of surveyed delegates reported having attended a Skills Building Workshop (68% vs 59% in 2006) among which 71% deemed it was useful or very useful. In addition, respondents were more likely to indicate they would like to have more Skills Building Workshops at future conferences (47%);
- ✘ As part of efforts to further engage regions in the international conference, the AIDS 2008 programme featured six regional sessions. Of these sessions, the most attended were those related to the Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America regions;
- ✘ More than 90% of surveyed delegates reported having visited the Global Village, among whom 45% went at least five times. The most visited/attended activities/areas were NGO and market place booths;
- ✘ Although the Engagement Tours were not very well attended, participants and host organizations were highly satisfied with the experience.

C. Achievement of Objectives

At least 70% of surveyed delegates rated AIDS 2008 "very successful" or "successful" (as opposed to "somewhat successful" or "not very successful") in:

- ✘ Providing a forum in which key scientific and practice-based research, best practice, lessons learnt and gaps in knowledge are addressed;
- ✘ Increasing understanding of the contribution made by the HIV global response to broader social, economic and health issues;
- ✘ Maximizing opportunities for the participation in conference and programme planning of those engaged in evidence-based responses – scientists, PLHIV, members of marginalized communities especially those most vulnerable to HIV, including women, girls, and young people;
- ✘ Promoting strategies that will reduce stigmatization and discrimination of PLHIVs and those working professionally across the response to HIV and AIDS;
- ✘ Reaching a wider audience through the webcasting of conference proceedings to regional sub-conferences/meetings and through the availability of conference sessions online;

- ✘ Improving public awareness of the continued impact of and global response to HIV and AIDS through enhanced media coverage.

Fewer than 6% of delegates rated the conference “not very successful” in achieving those goals (vs 10% in 2006).

The objective for which the conference was deemed to be the least successful was presenting strong evidence to influence leaders, including key policy makers and donors (32% of respondents rated it as “somewhat successful” or “not very successful”).

D. Benefits Gained and Anticipated Actions

- ✘ As in 2006, almost 100% of respondents reported to have gained at least one benefit, with new knowledge and new contacts/opportunities for future collaboration the benefits most frequently reported;
- ✘ Most respondents anticipated to use what they had gained at AIDS 2008 to share information with colleagues or peers (87% vs 60% in 2006) while building capacity within the delegate’s organization/network was an intention of 56% of respondents (vs 48% in 2006). Only one percent of respondents would not do anything (vs 4% in 2006);
- ✘ As part of the online delegate survey, a total of 137 delegates had completed an action plan as of 15 December 2008. The objective was to assess the medium to long term impacts of the conference and to contribute to greater accountability/progress tracking. Most action plans focused on knowledge transfer.

In conclusion, the evaluation demonstrated that the XVII International AIDS Conference had a broad and positive effect, reaching far beyond those who were physically present in Mexico. As illustrated by the action plans resulting from the conference, knowledge transfer will significantly contribute to strengthen awareness, education and advocacy worldwide.



Appendix IV Summary of Main Recommendations for AIDS 2010

GOVERNANCE

Committee Composition & Representation

- ✘ Ensure that PLHIV issues addressed by committees are representative and that PLHIV have a meaningful participation in committees;
- ✘ Reconsider the representation of most affected or at risk regions and groups in committees based on updated epidemiological realities.

Committee Work

- ✘ In the selection of members, ensure that all are equally committed to their committee in order to avoid overloading some members;
- ✘ Promote more interaction opportunities among the different committees to avoid duplication and ensure harmonization;
- ✘ Facilitate liaison between AIDS 2010 committees and members who served in previous committees;
- ✘ Better inform committee members of previous evaluation findings.

PROGRAMME

Structure

- ✘ Proportionally have more skills building workshops;
- ✘ Increase interaction between Global Village activities and the conference sessions.

Content

- ✘ Increase the relevance of basic science sessions;
- ✘ Increase the number of discussions on implementation/scaling up;
- ✘ Increase the number of regional sessions;
- ✘ Increase the number of sessions on youth issues/perspectives;
- ✘ Increase the number of sessions on research on women & girls;
- ✘ Better coverage of migration/mobility issues;
- ✘ Focus more on human rights-based responses.

Abstract-Driven Sessions

- ✘ Try to make all tracks equally attractive;
- ✘ Provide appropriate guidelines regarding abstract scoring to reviewers to avoid a wide discrepancy in scores;
- ✘ Refine reviewers' selection criteria to ensure they have the necessary skills and a good understanding of the objectives and 'rules' to effectively fulfil their mandate in an objective/unbiased manner.

SPEAKERS

- ✘ Increase the number of youth speakers;
- ✘ Make the selection of speakers earlier;
- ✘ Better promote the speaker/chair orientation session held before the conference.

SCHOLARSHIPS

- ✘ Make sure all countries who send an application receive at least one scholarship offer, still respecting the selection criteria;
- ✘ Increase the number of international scholarships granted to PLHIV, especially women, young, women & FBO representatives;
- ✘ Increase the number of media scholarships granted to media representatives from developing countries.

GLOBAL VILLAGE

- ✘ Build on and review the current outreach strategy to enhance local participation. This should take into account the Global Village's capacity to hold more visitors because it is already an extremely busy and crowded space;
- ✘ Try to make the Global Village attractive to all delegates regardless of their occupation;
- ✘ Reduce the size of the programme and concentrate on quality rather than quantity;
- ✘ Improve signage in the Global Village to help visitors locate the different activities/areas;
- ✘ Better isolate the main stage so as to reduce noise disturbances;
- ✘ Make sure that the space allocation and information for disabled people is appropriate (flexible with good signage);
- ✘ Enhance promotion of the guide for community involvement for non delegates and the local population;
- ✘ Identify how the Global Village could be better used to hold governments and donor community accountable for their commitment and responsibilities and to provoke discussion on new and emerging challenges in the field.

ENGAGEMENT TOURS

- ✘ Improve the visibility of the programme both on the conference website and onsite, and offer more registration facilities onsite to increase the number of participants;
- ✘ Ensure the tour is long enough to allow an effective exchange between visitors and their hosts;
- ✘ Increase the profile and diversity of tours;
- ✘ Create a space on the conference website where to upload Engagement Tour photographs;
- ✘ Provide an explanation of each specific tour at the host organization site and not in the bus, and equip the latter with microphones.

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

- ✘ Highlight the main added values of the International AIDS Conference compared to other well known AIDS related conferences such as CROI which is perceived by some delegates to be more interesting because of the focus on science;
- ✘ Find innovative ways to better reach out local populations (especially in remote small villages), using other means than internet e.g. SMS campaign;
- ✘ Better promote the conference to young positive delegates;
- ✘ Produce guidelines for communication and outreach activities.





MEDIA PARTICIPATION

- ✘ Better integrate the Global Village and Skills Building Workshops into the conference media infrastructure (many news organizations prefer to work from the Global Village or expressed interest in workshop access or material);
- ✘ Make sure the internet connection, including wireless, functions properly throughout the conference;
- ✘ Improve sound-proofing of the press conference rooms;
- ✘ Produce media kits electronically in addition to printed format;
- ✘ Identify a way to better control the media centre access in order to avoid non media representatives "disturbing" those really working in the centre;
- ✘ Provide more editing facilities to radio journalists;
- ✘ Specify on the badge the media outlet, and not only the country of the media representative.

PLHIV LOUNGE

- ✘ Provide a larger space;
- ✘ Set-up a system to better screen people entering the lounge in order to prevent, or at least dissuade, HIV negative delegates (delegates that are not living with HIV) from accessing the lounge, thus reducing overcrowding and unnecessary frustration from PLHIV;
- ✘ Offer female and male condoms at the Lounge front desk;
- ✘ Ensure translators are highly visible inside the lounge to provide assistance to visitors who are not fluent in English.

CONFERENCE HUBS

- ✘ Better promote the hubs and highlight their added values;
- ✘ Initiate the registration process well before the conference;
- ✘ Increase the choice of sessions;
- ✘ Allocate more time for interactive sessions among hub participants;
- ✘ Provide hub organizers with more guidelines including a toolkit, if possible;
- ✘ Plan for a technological back up system at the main conference venue as well as at the main hub(s);
- ✘ Improve the translation of sessions screened in a hub.

LOGISTICS

- ✘ Improve the sound-proofing of session rooms;
- ✘ Improve signage of session rooms, PLHIV, Interfaith Prayer Room;
- ✘ Ensure more appropriate space for networking and rest spaces;
- ✘ Ensure food diversity (including vegetarian, local and variety) and better access to catering services;
- ✘ Provide a mixed zone for journalists and delegates, near the media centre;
- ✘ Review the overflow area requirements;
- ✘ Ensure appropriate heating and cooling of conference spaces.