



Action against AIDS Germany

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Communities, inequities, resilience, and opportunities: time for donors to step up

By Shona Shonning, Vietnam

This article was written on the occasion of our online conference "Global Health Champion Germany?!" held on World Aids Day 2021. From HIV to SARS-CoV-2. What have we (not) learned?". We asked Shona to report from the Session I "COVID-19: Communities in Action and where do we go from here," hosted by the Global Fund Advocacy Network Asia Pacific (GFAN AP) and moderated by Peter Wiessner (Action Against AIDS, Germany) and Jennifer Ho (Asia Pacific Council of AIDS Service Organizations (APCASO))

Inequalities in health systems across Asia and Asia Pacific

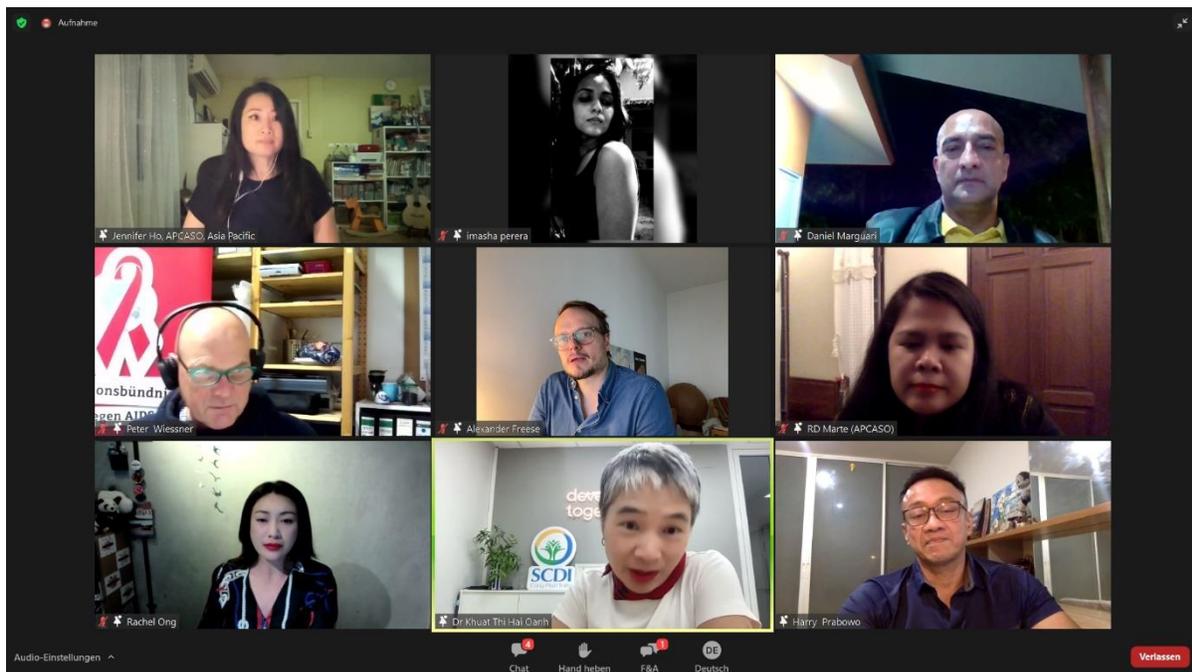


Photo: Shona Shonning

important work the organizations of PLHIV are doing push leaders to do the right thing – and address inequities. He reminded of the essential work that communities of PLHIV in Asia (as well as PLHIV

Rodelyn M. Marte, Executive Director of the Asia Pacific Council of AIDS Service Organizations (APCASO), Asia Pacific which hosts the Global Fund Advocacy Network, Asia Pacific (GFAN) opened the session by pointing out how the COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted weaknesses and inequities in health systems that pre-existed the pandemic. Marginalized communities were both the most likely to get hit the hardest by COVID-19 and the least likely to access care and support. Many of the people who are key populations affected by HIV are dependent on daily income and the pandemic drove them into deeper poverty. Resources from programming for HIV was diverted away from HIV to address the COVID-19 poverty. **Harry Prabowo**, Project Coordinator of the Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV and AIDS (APN+) echoed Marta's message, reminding of inequitable access to COVID-19 technologies including vaccines. He also described the

unions all over the world) do in leading advocacy on programming to reduce inequities and to finance the Global fund is essential.



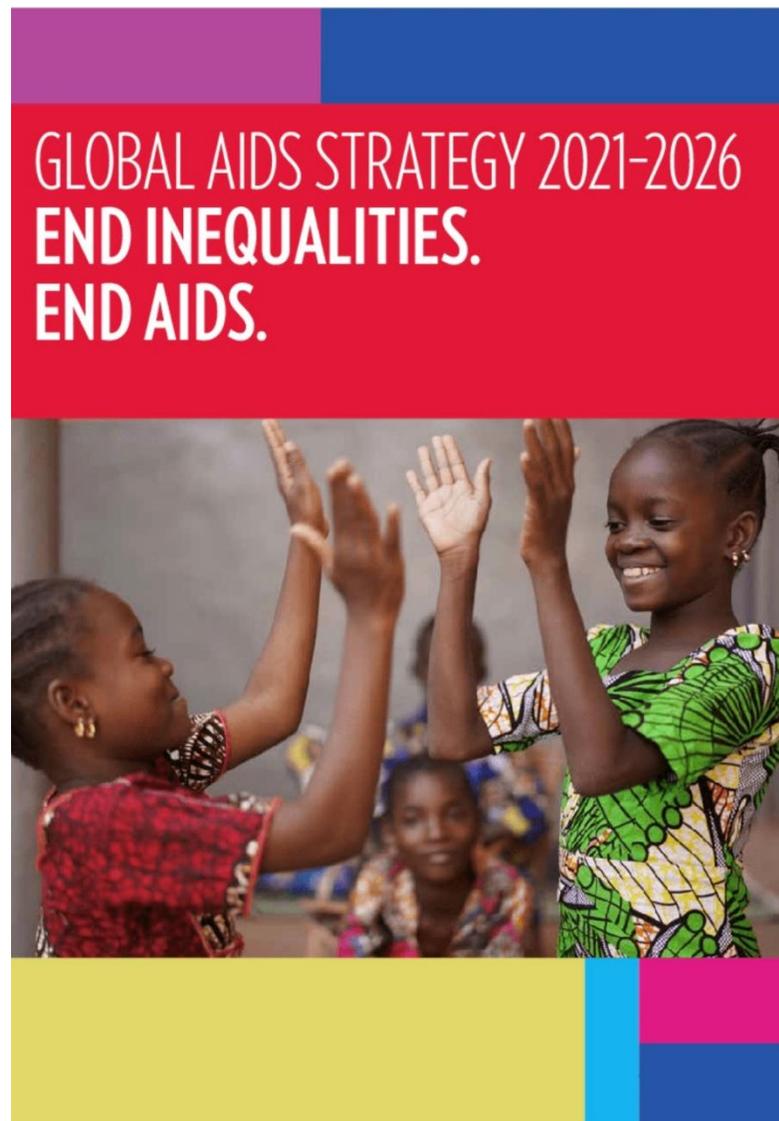
Screenshot Session 1 "COVID-19: Communities in Action and where do we go from here"

Empowerment of Communities

Dr Khuat Thi Hai Oanh, Executive Director of the Supporting Community Development Initiatives (SCDI) Vietnam brought the session down to earth, showing how the community systems that were built to empower communities to respond effectively to HIV contributed to Vietnam's resilience in the face of the COVID-19 epidemic. She told about how a group of people who use drugs mobilized volunteer efforts to cooperate with government to provide food and medicines to those in need during the epidemic. With support from the Global Fund, this community of people who used drugs (who are stigmatized in Vietnam as they are throughout the globe) came together in a spirit of solidarity and mutual assistance to enable access to HIV prevention, treatment and care. And, when the COVID-19 crisis hit, they were able to quickly spring into action when their broader community needed help. **Daxa Patel**, President of the National Coalition of People Living with HIV in India (NCPI+) told how communities in India were quick to respond to India's sudden lockdown by starting up a "war room" to plan how to respond to the crisis and began to interact with national HIV authorities to coordinate how the community would help by delivering food and medicines to those in need. They also were quick to apply their experience in "treatment literacy" education from the field of HIV to COVID, arranging for 257 webinars to teach people about COVID home care.

There are examples like this all over Asia Pacific (many of which are highlighted in APCASO's, [Emerging Issues Of HIV, TB, and Malaria Affected Communities And Civil Society In Asia-Pacific During the Covid-19 Pandemic](#)) and indeed, examples like this all over the world. These stories illustrate that the return on investment into community systems (by the Global Fund and other donors) is beyond its impact on HIV but has a broader impact on solidarity in society and resilience overall.

Global AIDS Strategy: Ending inequalities



UNAIDS Coverphoto Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026

With the [Global AIDS Strategy for 2021-2026](#) focused on “ending inequities,” and with evidence of the importance of community systems in responding to crisis, it would seem logical that donors and governments would invest in programming to build up community systems but stigma, discrimination, and punitive policies continue to inhibit adequate investment. The Global Fund shines as an exception to this tendency. In spite of the central importance that community systems have had in response to HIV and in spite of the heightened vulnerability experienced by key affected populations, stigma and financial strain inhibits governments from investing into.

The role of communities in responding to HIV and COVID-19

The panel discussion engaged with representatives of countries including one of the Global Fund’s largest contributors, Germany and one of the Global Fund’s largest recipients, Indonesia, who, from different angles, emphasized the importance of continued support for

the Global Fund and for Community Systems. [Daniel Marguari](#), Executive Director, Spiritia Foundation, Indonesia highlighted that the community systems supported by the Global Fund will engage with the opportunity by Indonesia’s upcoming presidency of the G20 to advocate for continued investment. It is increasingly important as the impacts of COVID are just beginning to be felt and considerable work to be done for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. [Alexander Freese](#), BMZ, Board member of the Global Fund Acknowledged the important role communities had in responding both to HIV and to COVID as well as their unique contribution to targeting the source of inequities by advocating changes to the legal environment that would alleviate dynamics that cause vulnerability and inequity in the first place. He was glad that Germany had been a major contributor to the Global Fund and praised its support for Community Systems strengthening. In closing, Rachel Ong of the Global Fund Advocates Network called

attention to the Power of More campaign and the upcoming Global Fund replenishment (www.gfanasiapacific.org)

**Global Health Champion Germany?!
From HIV to SARS-CoV-2
International Virtual Conference
1st December 2021, Wednesday
Languages: English, German, and Russian**

**COVID-19: COMMUNITIES IN ACTION
AND WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

06:40 – 06:55 New York / 11:40 – 12:55 Berlin / 12:40 – 13:55 Cape Town / 16:10 – 17:25 New Delhi /
17:40 – 18:55 Bangkok / 18:40 – 19:55 Singapore / 19:40 – 20:55 Tokyo / 21:40 – 22:55 Melbourne

REGISTER

CO-MODERATED BY:

Jennifer Ho
Deputy Director
APCASO, Thailand

Peter Wiessner
Advocacy & Public Relations Officer
Action against AIDS, Germany

WELCOMING REMARKS:

Rachel Ong
Regional Coordinator
GFAN AP, Singapore

On World AIDS Day, this session hosted by Global Fund Advocates Network Asia-Pacific (GFAN AP) will present the perspectives of community and civil society from the AP region to highlight the impact of SARS-CoV-2 on Global Fund programmes, communities, key and vulnerable populations, health and community systems; as well as the responses in dealing with this unprecedented health crises with the support of the Global Fund to mitigate these impacts. In addition, the session will elaborate on the urgency in equitable access to COVID-19 tools in the AP region and the role of donors and implementers in achieving Universal Health Coverage, and ending HIV, TB and malaria as epidemics in the AP region by 2030.

PRESENTERS:

Rodelyn M. Marte
Executive Director
APCASO, Thailand

Harry Prabowo
Project Coordinator
APN+, Thailand

Dr Khuat Thi Hai Oanh
Executive Director
SCDI, Vietnam

PANELISTS:

Alexander Freese
Senior Policy Officer, Global
Health Politics & Financing Division
BMZ, Germany

Imasha Perera
Key Population Coordinator
NTN, Sri Lanka

Daniel Marguari
Executive Director
Spirita Foundation,
Indonesia

Daxa Patel
Executive Board Member
NCP+, India

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#POWEROFMORE #BETTERTOGETHER #GLOBALHEALTHCHAMPIONGERMANY #HIVANDCOVID19 #WHATHAVENOTLEARNED #CONFERENCEWAD2021

GFAN Asia Pacific - Flyer for session 1

The author: Shona has worked to promote health and rights for key populations since 2004. She currently lives in South East Asia though she spent most of her career in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. She believes firmly in the power of civil society groups and in particular groups of key populations to contribute to the creation of effective policy to promote health and rights. Shona has dedicated her work to empowering those communities. Before becoming a freelance consultant, Shona worked as a Programme Director for the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network and, before that, for the Russian Community of People Living with HIV.

She participates actively in a number of advocacy networks, currently as the Co-Chair of the European AIDS Treatment Group's, Policy Working Group and the Advisory Board of the Eurasian Network of People who Use Drugs. Shona's consultancy work often focuses on providing technical support for advocacy work including development of position papers, grant-writing, guideline development. For ASAP, she provided assistance to the Eastern European and Central Asian Union of Organizations of PLHIV to develop a concept note for a regional advocacy proposal to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria aimed at closing the gap in access to services for key populations (source: <http://asapltd.com/2015/01/shona-schonning/>)

More information

Action against AIDS Germany
info@aidz-kampagne.de
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