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APCOM PREPARES BRIEFING DOCUMENTS FOR KEY POPULATIONS IN ASIA PACIFIC

Communication between the Global Fund and organizations working on male sexual health issues in the Asia-Pacific is the biggest obstacle keeping at-risk populations from joining the conversation on how to respond to HIV, according to the Asia Pacific Coalition on Male Sexual Health (APCOM).

To overcome these communications challenges, APCOM has developed a series of briefing documents to arm at-risk populations with the most complete information possible about Global Fund processes, and how to be engaged and active participants in ongoing country dialogue.

The fact sheets, developed in collaboration with a team from the Global Fund Secretariat, provide details about how advocacy groups for men who have sex with men and transgender populations can engage in the new funding model (NFM) processes.

The guidance documents detail the various stages of the NFM process. They are intended to explain when and how organizations can get involved in each step, from country dialogue to grant implementation, according to Inad Rendon, an advocacy officer with APCOM: the leading regional advocacy group for HIV issues and how they affect the MSM and transgender communities.

The Global Fund is using the NFM as a lever to encourage wider civil society participation in its processes; a decision that APCOM's executive director, Midnight Poonkasetwattana, endorsed as a way to ensure that the NFM process is 'robust and inclusive'.

“For the community to understand and strategise their collective priorities effectively, consultation at the community-level prior to national dialogue process is very important,” Poonkasetwattana said.

“The community should be given the space and funding to hold their own dialogues to feed into the national processes.”

Yet the documents, which were reviewed by Aidsplan, do not contain any advice or language specific to the needs and risks confronting MSM or transgender organizations, to help support the need for these groups to be included in the decision-making processes. This is because there is no language or information specific to the needs of MSM or transgender communities in documentation provided by the Fund, Rendon said.

Nor are they differentiated for each country, beyond the provision of contact details for organizations or networks, meaning that rather than providing a tailored, country-specific approach, the briefing documents are very basic and one-size-fits all.

Poonkasetwattana said the contact details were provided to help communities participate better in national processes, and added that it would appear that APCOM is the only network to have produced briefing notes in this way for their national partners.

Rendon said that when producing the documents, APCOM tried not to deviate from what the original documents tried to convey to their target readers. APCOM plans to follow up with further details for MSM and transgender groups to be available on the organization’s website, he added.

The fact sheets were developed with the support of Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as part of APCOM’s Headlight Series project in which they packaged and distributed information relevant to MSM and Transgender groups around the region.

Poonkasetwattana said that current documents are not in languages that the majority of the people working on the ground understand and hence their participation is “minimal and tokenistic”.

Yet the documents have been produced in English and have not yet been translated into any other languages. Poonkasetwattana said APCOM is planning to work with groups in its network to translate the documents.

Rendon said that on past projects, the translation process itself has posed significant challenges because some of the jargon used in advocacy work is not easily translated. He said translating a document can take up to five months to complete.

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