
Terms of Reference

APCOM South Asia Strategic Information Advisors (ASASIA)

1. Background

APCOM strives to improve the development, availability and use of strategic information as one of its key goals. Generating this knowledge can also serve to strengthen its advocacy messages. Since its inception in 2007, APCOM has generated policy and information briefs on a variety of issues and topics, such as the need to allocate significant resources to MSM and transgender people HIV programming, the need for effective involvement of communities in research, and mappings of the HIV situation and response among MSM and transgender people in South Asia and Insular Southeast Asia.

The policy environment has been significantly improving in recent years, partly due to advocacy work by APCOM in partnership with the United National Development Programme (UNDP), UNAIDS Regional Support Team Asia Pacific Region, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), World Health Organisation-Western Pacific Region Office (WHO-WPRO), Hivos (Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation), USAID Regional Development Mission/Asia and others. While APCOM has been a growing voice for the diverse communities of MSM and transgender people in the region however, there remains a strategic research gaps, which takes into account and reflects the complexities of MSM and transgender identities in the region. Although there is growing availability of epidemiological data on MSM and transgender people, contextual (qualitative) and quantitative social research knowledge and information about male-to-male sex remains relatively rare. Whilst APCOM is increasingly recognised as an important and crucial player in the region, it must continue to improve and strengthen effective advocacy. One of the ways it can do this is through strengthening its knowledge base and the development of different working groups of APCOM, which led to the development of the APCOM Knowledge Reference Group in 2012.

A 'visioning meeting' was subsequently held to help plan a process towards taking this forward, including further discussions that APCOM should have with stakeholders. The outcome of this was a recommendation to develop two brief scoping papers intended to look critically and strategically at the current state of MSM and transgender knowledge in Asia and the Pacific (as well as globally), and identify centres where that knowledge is currently held.

Further more, as informed by the Outcome Assessment commissioned by Hivos and UNDP, APCOM has conducted its Strategic Plan consultation and in developing its new Strategic Plan 2014-2019, this is an opportune time that this consultation feeds into the Goal 3 (strategic information gathering and dissemination) of APCOM.

In order to strengthen its presence in South Asia, APCOM has joined the second phase of the multi-country proposal (MSA-910-G01-H) to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund) under the Phase II of the Round 9 Call for Proposals which UNDP is the Principal Recipient (PR). The Grant will support regional advocacy initiatives and country level advocacy and capacity building activities with civil society partners in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. To ensure specific South Asia research agenda on MSM, Hijra and transgender people, APCOM is organising and convening an APCOM South Asia Strategic Information Advisors (ASASIA).

2. APCOM South Asia Strategic Information Advisors (ASASIA)

The Reference Group is a small panel of experts convened to identify the main principles for development that are crucial for effective, evidence- and rights-based HIV programming for MSM, Hijra and transgender people. The members are to be responsible for taking decisions on the items listed below. Members are asked to neither concern themselves with nor limit their thinking in any way by ignoring the issues of finance, budgeting or management processes that will be needed after the consultation. The members have been asked to also act as advisors during the course of the project and including to help review the drafts of the scoping papers that will form the background evidence for the meeting.

Roles and responsibilities:

- Guide and prioritisation of knowledge gaps in South Asia on MSM, Hijra and transgender people to be pursued further
- Engage with APCOM to promote its advocacy platform, website and social media to help strengthen South Asian voices
- Identification and selection of the best-qualified consultants for other research papers that could arise from discussions
- Guide APCOM and the consultants, such as the specific extent and process (e.g., the geographic coverage, priorities of areas and topics) and review the drafts
- Be a possible guide to the country sub-recipients in their endeavour to develop knowledge products that can be shared across the region
- Review regional strategic documents output under the Global Fund grant, including South Asia Seven-cities study and South Asia Violence against sexual minorities study
- Connect APCOM to other centres of knowledge relevant to MSM, Hijra and transgender people

Members were drawn from diverse qualifications, experiences and sectors with policy, research, program development, organisational management and regional experience. In order to ensure that APCOM reaches out to strategic stakeholders, ASAA members should not be from one of the SRs under the Global Fund grant. The number will be kept to about five people to ensure robustness.

Two of APCOM's Executive Committee members will also join the group to ensure consistency across the APCOM Knowledge Reference Group, and APCOM Secretariat will coordinate the ASAA.

Principles of the ASASIA

1. To serve as the key linkage to existing knowledge sources and hubs so as not to duplicate efforts or publications
2. To identify and help fill critical knowledge gaps that serve APCOM's vision and mission
3. To be a reliable source of up to date, accurate, verifiable and trustworthy information
4. To be multi-sectoral in its approach, bringing together expertise from a diverse range of sources particularly from the community sector

The members will be asked to attend a face-to-face meeting over two days in 2014, and another one in 2015, to develop consensus and make concrete recommendations for APCOM's strategic research priorities in South Asia.

APCOM will explore ways to co-host the consultation meeting by the involvement of its strategic partners in South Asia and across the Asia Pacific region and will involve the PR in the meetings too.