THE ROAD AHEAD

Report of APCOM’s Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Initiative under the Multi-Country South Asia Global Fund HIV Programme
Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

1.1 About APCOM

APCOM amplifies the voices of men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender people in South Asia. It prioritizes and highlights HIV issues that affect their lives, invests energies in strengthening their capacities, consolidates their voices and takes it to the wider world – of donors, governments, civil society. In this way, the organization acts as a representative of MSM and transgender people and advocates for their health, rights and well-being.

Founded in 2007, APCOM functions as a coalition of members – governments, UN partners, non-profits and community based organisations from eighteen countries in South Asia 

Over the past years, it has established itself in the region as:

- A strong advocate for the needs and rights of MSM and transgender people;
- A hub that strengthens a range of CBOs through providing technical and capacity building assistance and developing quality knowledge products;
- An influential representative of the MSM and transgender people within the global community of donors, governments, policy makers and civil society.

1.2 About the Multi-Country South Asia (MSA) program

Initiated in 2011, the Multi-Country South Asia Global Fund HIV Programme (MSA) is a regional HIV programme operating in seven countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The overall goal of the programme is to reduce the impact of, and vulnerability to, HIV of men who have sex with men (MSM), hijras and transgender people through Community Systems Strengthening (CSS).

With UNDP BRH as the Principal Recipient of the Grant till 2016 and Save the Children, Nepal from January 2017, MSA promotes and protects the rights of key populations of MSM and transgender people and is building a foundation to ensure that regional and country-level community networks continue to be essential partners in the HIV response. It focuses on strengthening community systems to improve coordination with local governments and health care providers, deliver concentrated and quality capacity development support, and provide technical assistance to ensure high intervention impact and sustainability.

At the national and sub-national level, community strengthening and advocacy activities are directly implemented by the following community Sub-Recipient organisations:

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1 Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Lao, Cambodia, Malaysia, Hongkong, Pacific Islands, Malaysia
The MSA programme is based on a CSS framework, which focuses on strengthening community systems for scaled-up, good-quality, sustainable community-based responses. This includes strengthening community groups, organizations and networks, and supporting collaboration with other actors and systems, especially health, social care and protection systems. Given this context, the primary approach adopted in conducting this assessment was to examine APCOM’s work with the country partners in keeping with the core components of community systems while acknowledging that there would be overlaps. These components, as outlined in the CSS Framework document published by The Global Fund in February 2014 includes the following:

- Providing services for care, support and protection of key population: This includes aspects such as cultural competence of team members, community level promotion of health literacy, social and psychological support, changing harmful sociocultural practices and outreach to key affected communities and individuals.

- Developing an enabling and responsive environment: This includes work to improve the social, cultural, legal, financial and political environments through policy dialogue and/or advocacy as well as the day-to-day factors that enable or hinder people’s search for better health. People may seek, for example, better access to health services, education, adequate, food, water and shelter, sexuality and family life, and security. At the same time, people also need freedom from harassment, discrimination, violence, harmful sociocultural practices and other barriers to health.

- Networking, coordination and partnerships: This includes efforts to address inequalities, social hierarchies, discrimination and competiveness, which operate among community organizations, and between them and government structures.

- Institution strengthening: This includes leadership development, capacity building of staff and other community workers on monitoring, evaluation, planning includes, situation assessment, evidence-building and research, learning, planning and knowledge management.

Community systems strengthening (CSS) is an approach that promotes the development of informed, capable and coordinated communities, and community-based organizations, groups and structures. CSS involves a broad range of community actors, enabling them to contribute as equal partners alongside other actors to the long-term sustainability of health and other interventions at the community level, including an enabling and responsive environment in which these contributions can be effective. The goal of CSS is to achieve improved health outcomes by developing the role of key affected populations and communities and of community-based organizations in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of services and activities related to prevention, treatment, care and support of people affected by HIV, tuberculosis, malaria and other major health challenges. (source: Community Systems Strengthening Framework Revised edition, February 2014, The Global Fund To Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria)
1.3 APCOM and MSA

APCOM, joined the MSA programme in April 2014 as a regional Sub-Recipient of the grant, to carry out a mandate to support high-level regional and national-level policy development and advocacy, technical support and research activities so that the regional and country-level community networks strengthen and grow as essential and effective partners in achieving improvements in the quality of services offered to MSM, hijra and transgender people in seven countries in South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka).

The main objectives of the MSA programme implemented by APCOM are:
- To improve the delivery of HIV related services for MSM and TG across South Asia
- To improve the policy environment in regards to MSM, TG, and HIV related issues across South Asia
- To improve strategic knowledge on MSM, TG, and HIV related issues across South Asia

The organization worked to fulfil these objectives through:
- Implementing a range of capacity building initiatives,
- Providing technical assistance on organizational systems,
- Supporting partners in advocacy and research efforts,
- Creating and sustaining a regional online resource hub.

1.4 About the document

The overall purpose of this document is to capture how APCOM’s activities under the MSA program has contributed in bringing about anticipated changes/impact, to examine which factors have proved critical in helping or hindering change and to draw lessons for the future.

Overall, the document seeks to:
- Capture how has APCOM’s has supported the MSA country partners to build capacities.
- Examine how APCOM has contributed in the development of knowledge and in filling knowledge gaps.
- Draw lessons for future programming.

The study was conducted between November 2017 and December 2017 and included a desk-based document review, key informant interviews and surveys with different stakeholders. Details on how these methodologies were implemented follows below:
- Desk Review: a document map, linking key documents to the main areas of review for the evaluation was drafted and information obtained from documents was mapped against the areas of review/evaluation questions and key data extracted to inform analysis.
- Key Informant Interviews and surveys: Either or both were conducted with 11 country partners in 7 countries. Respondents included heads of partner organizations, national implementing partner staff as well as deputy director and project staff at APCOM.
Limitations

Although significant efforts were made to interview as many relevant respondents as possible during the course of this evaluation, a number of logistical and practical factors prevented this from being entirely successful. Some of the limitations of this evaluation are as below:

- Since the assessment was undertaken at the end of the year, partners in most countries were unavailable for KIIs. Many were busy with their own project closure commitments while a number of them were on annual leave. Therefore, it was not possible to conduct KIIs with all of them as planned and information from a number of them had to be collected via email using the questionnaire form.
- There was no time to visit any partner and to see any project under implementation.
2. Looking Back: MSA program in the period 2014-2017

2.1 Year 2014

- APCOM came on board the MSA program late in 2014, 3 years after the project was launched. The year saw APCOM initiating its work to support organizations in the seven countries in a way that they strengthened their capacities, systems and accountability mechanisms. Towards this,

  o In November 2014, UNDP BRH and APCOM co-organized a Sub Recipient Finance Regional Training in Bangkok where it trained finance managers and staffs of sub recipient organisations with tools and resources needed to transparently and effectively manage the finance of HIV service delivery and advocacy.

  o APCOM undertook a survey to identify the SR organisations’ communications needs in order to develop effective programs in the coming years. It is through this initiative that APCOM identified that developing advocacy tools, conducting media outreach, and writing press release and opinion pieces were the skills in which organisations needed assistance the most.

- Also, from the first year itself, APCOM could be seen focusing on amplifying the voice of the region through its online hub through bringing the spotlight on the work of five country partners, namely, Lhak-sam BNP+, Voluntary Health Services, Blue Diamond Society, The Humsafar Trust, and FPA Sri Lanka. It could also be seen disseminating two films produced by UNDP BRH on the community work of Pakistan’s Naz Male Health Association.

- Simultaneously, the organization could be seen working to contribute in strengthening knowledge at the regional level. Acknowledging the need of peer review for the knowledge products generated under MSA to strengthen quality and contribute to APCOM’s core mandate on the development of strategic information, the organization established APCOM South Asia Strategic Information Advisors (ASASIA) - a group of South Asian technical experts drawn from diverse background and expertise. The organization also served as a reviewing committee for UNDP’s “Regional Study on Violence against Sexual Minorities in South Asia,” which aimed to provide an overview of the situation regarding protection of the rights of sexual minorities in South Asian countries. The organization also initiated a project to develop country snapshots, for which it developed linkages with AIDS DataHub for support and a project to update a policy brief on the legal environment in relation to MSM and transgender people.

- Finally, APCOM’s plans and reports also reveal that a significant part of the organization’s first year as a part of the MSA program was focused on strengthening itself as an organization. The process spanned from registering itself to reconstructing or putting in place appropriate systems, processes and manuals for internal controls and accountability, including developing the Institutional Manual, Human Resources Policy, Governance Package, Monitoring and Evaluation framework and Finance Manual of the organisation. The task was intensive, and the organization successfully undertook its commitments and prepared itself with full focus as a credible technical partner in the large multi-country program. These efforts not only equipped APCOM with robust mechanisms for transparency, accountability and being inclusive, it also contributed in building the organization’s credibility in the region as a technical expert.
2.2 Year 2015

Year 2015 saw APCOM deep diving into activities that were relevant in the region and that could address needs and build capacities of the country partners:

- In May 2015, APCOM conducted “Turning the Corner”, a workshop on resource mobilisation & sustainability with 29 community advocates/programme managers/officers from 24 organizations in the region. Developed with the understanding that maintaining financial stability is a major challenge faced in the grassroots service delivery, this workshop aimed to:
  
  o Improve the participants’ understanding of what financial sustainability and resource mobilization entail:

  o Provide inputs for expanding and diversifying income sources to raise project and unrestricted income,

  o Equip the participants with the knowledge and skills to develop a resource mobilisation strategy and support the organizations to finalize their organisational specific Resource Mobilisation Plans.

Following up on the workshop, APCOM together with the workshop facilitator assisted the country SRs in conducting similar training programs for their downstream CBOs, which enabled approximately 235 community members to develop skill and knowledge on resource mobilisation.

“The workshop helped us to think out of the box and to think of innovative ways to generate sustainability” – FPA SL

“This workshop helped me how to introduce to the donor very innovatively and shortly and also smartly. The second thing I learned from this workshop is the concept note principle... I think it will help us in resource mobilization” – BSWS, Bangladesh

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3 http://apcom.org/2015/06/25/msm-transgender-communities-paving-the-way-to-sustain-their-income/
Recognizing the need of PrEP4 to be integrated into programmes in Asia, APCOM organized a three-day consultation titled “PrEPARING Asia” in September 2015. This was the region’s first community-led dialogue exploring the roll out of PrEP in Asia as a part of the regional rolling out of the new WHO Guidelines. The purpose of the Dialogue was:

- Increasing understanding surrounding the science and practice of PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis)
- Building capacity to promote PrEP as an additional prevention tool for men who have sex with men (MSM)
- Exploring opportunities to roll out PrEP in selected countries
- Building consensus among the stakeholders in attendance to formulate a set of common PrEP messages

129 participants, including 13 PrEP-supportive community advocates from SR partners in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka attended the meeting along with other community advocates, representatives from national AIDS programmes, health service providers, community groups academia and policy makers from 17 more countries. The discussions in the consultation drew upon lessons learned from pilot projects across the region.

Subsequent to the workshop, APCOM produced and disseminated a range of materials to increase PrEP awareness, including printed materials, videos, and webcast series, and consulted with a range of country partners in the region to assist in tracking and supporting community-led activities aimed at increasing PrEP awareness and access for MSM and transgender people.

In the period, APCOM also organized a three-day workshop to improve South Asian community advocates’ organizational skills on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) with thirty potential/incumbent M&E staffs from nine community organisations from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan and Nepal. The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Increase the participants’ knowledge and understanding on the Global Fund’s Progress Update/Disbursement Request (PUDR) and its supporting processes
- Increase the participants’ understanding of theory of change and monitoring and evaluation planning
- Provide the participants with the competencies to able to apply concepts of monitoring and evaluation, including frameworks and components of M&E, selecting indicators and collection, how to measure advocacy, communications and social mobilization, and use information for M&E for learning and decision-making.

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4 PrEP or Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, is an HIV prevention approach where HIV-negative individuals use antiretroviral medication in the form of a daily pill to significantly reduce their risk of becoming infected if they are exposed to the virus. It has shown up to 90% effectiveness in preventing the transmission of HIV in people at substantial risk, including gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM), HIV-negative people whose partners are living with HIV, transgender women and people who inject drugs. A common brand of medication used for PrEP is called Truvada.

5 https://apcom.org/2015/12/23/preparing-south-asia/
As per report, the workshop could enable participants to:

- Increase knowledge and understanding of the PUDR and its supporting processes.
- Increase understanding of theory of change and monitoring and evaluation planning.
- Obtain skills to apply concepts of organizational monitoring and evaluation, including results-based and logical frameworks, generating information linked to the level of M&E system, how to select indicators and collect data, how to monitor and measure advocacy interventions, and use information for M&E for learning and decision-making.

Following up on the workshop, APCOM’s M&E officer continued the support to the 13 CBOs in drafting their own M&E plans, 10 of which could be finalized in the next year.

In the same year, APCOM was also found to be undertaking a range of other significant initiatives to contribute in developing relevant knowledge and information in the region. Towards this:

- APCOM brought together ASASIA (APCOM South Asia Strategic Information Advisors), the advisory group consisting regional experts with experience in policy, research, program development and organisational management over an intensive meeting to provide guidance in the development of strategic information. The group reviewed a host of ongoing knowledge products and research studies under the MSA, identified several key area gaps, and explored potential topics and areas of focus for future APCOM and country partners’ knowledge products. It also made recommendations on programming directions for the future.

- The organization continued to serve in the reviewing committee with UNDP for the “Regional Study on Violence against Sexual Minorities in South Asia,” and also started working with UNDP to undertake a 7 City Scan on HIV services for MSM & TG population and Sexual violence against MSM & TG population.

- APCOM supported the facilitation of a number of strategic sessions in the ILGA Asia 2015 conference including on useful tools for advancing human rights of LGBTI persons in Asia, Christianity, Sexual Diversity and Access to Health and led a side event on “Innovative HIV Campaign”.

Finally, in the same year, APCOM started making efforts to provide technical assistance to its SR partners in need based and customized ways. Within this context, APCOM supported The Humsafar Trust (India) in developing their organizational policy documents and also supported the participation of 13 members from MSA national sub recipient organizations in the PrEP consultation.
In 2016, APCOM continued its efforts to contribute in strengthening organisational and technical capacities of 13 national sub-recipient organisations and their downstream community-based organisations through offering a range of critical capacity building programs.

- In January and October, APCOM organized two intensive workshops to strengthen the skills and capacities of the MSA partners in programme management. 46 programme managers and officers from SR partners in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and their downstream CBOs were trained through these workshops, which included training in constructing well-designed Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and Risk Management Plans (RMP). Post workshop, APCOM continued its follow up efforts and provided technical capacity assistance to the participants in developing and finalising their respective organisation’s SOPs and RMPs. The efforts resulted in community organisations in five countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan) successfully developing their own SOPs and RMPs in 2016, which were endorsed by their Board or senior management team.

- A study on HIV programmes for MSM and TG in seven cities in South Asia which revealed the need to strengthen community leadership skills for effective HIV Service Delivery programmes and advocacy work. Also, the UNDP National Human Rights Institution Workshop Report, which specified the need for strong political leadership at the regional as well as national level to advocate against stigma and punitive laws and secure equal opportunities in all aspects in society. Informed by these findings and recommendations, APCOM organized a workshop on solidifying leadership skills in August with participation of 26 HIV service delivery project managers and officers from Nepal, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The workshop’s objective was to increase the participants’ leadership capacities especially in relation to good governance, and following the workshop, 21 participants created action plans for developing second line leadership in HIV and programming. APCOM extended support to them for implementing the activities.

- In October, APCOM provided exclusive technical assistance to 19 participants from 6 Pakistan SR partners to strengthen programme management systems for CBO’s in Pakistan to equip them to be a cadre of second line managers to assist in designing and implementation the projects they would be or were already implementing.

- During October, APCOM also conducted a 3-day M&E workshop with 24 incumbent/upcoming M&E staff from country SR partners and their downstream CBOs from across six countries to address the identified gaps knowledge and skills on M&E – particularly the expertise to capture the qualitative indicators and simultaneously build strong organisational M&E plans that align with the organisation’s strategic plans.

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6 UNAIDS strategy for 2016-2021, Fast-tracking to Zero
Further during the year, in keeping with its commitment to act as a producer and broker of information that helps its communities to advocate for better sexual health services and a more enabling legal environment, APCOM made efforts to scrutinise the existing knowledge gap and produce knowledge products to minimise the gaps.

- APCOM brought together ASASIA (APCOM South Asia Strategic Information Advisors) a second time over an intensive meeting to provide guidance in the development of strategic information and knowledge around MSM and transgender issues and to brainstorm on the research priorities for APCOM in the future. Ongoing and expected strategic knowledge products of APCOM and the partnered agencies were presented to the Strategic Information Advisors to jointly explore mechanisms to improve the quality and the dissemination of the knowledge products.

The following areas for future focus by APCOM emerged by the end of the meeting:

- Focus on the syndemics within the MSM community such as mental health issues, alcohol and drug abuse and taking a life course approach in understanding their impact on HIV vulnerabilities
- Generating strategic information on related issues such as the intersection among MSM, Tuberculosis and Hepatitis C
- Gender-based violence related to MSM and transgender people and realities of MSM and transgender people in disaster situations including contexts of internally dispersed persons due to war.

- APCOM started working on developing/updating a human rights booklet, legal policy briefs, and country snapshots and also undertook a significant initiative to develop an organizational knowledge management strategy.

- APCOM developed “From Yogyakarta with Love” a short animation video to promote the use of the Yogyakarta Principles. Yogyakarta Principles is a set of principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, which were drafted by a group of distinguished international human rights experts in Yogyakarta, Indonesia 10 years ago. The video shows how the Principles have been an instrumental advocacy tool by the community advocates across the globe to fight inequality among LGBT people and how one can make use of the Principles. APCOM uploaded the video on its Facebook page and YouTube channel and made it available with captions/subtitles in more than 22 languages, including the main five UN languages, Hindi, Mongolian, Nepali, Pashto, Persian, Sinhala, Tamil, and Urdu. By the end of 2016, “From Yogyakarta with Love” was found to have reached more than 37,000 views on APCOM’s Facebook page. The video was also used as an advocacy tool or a lecture material by some community organisations and academia, including the ARC International’s Principles in Action global platform, Heinrich Böll Foundation’s YP+10 web dossier, and South Korea based SOGI Academy.

- APCOM collaborated with Youth Voices Count to produce Jumping Hurdles – an advocacy video on the prominence of youth friendly HIV services. Captioned in several national South Asian languages such as Bangla, Hindi, Nepali and Sinhala along with the languages of non-South Asian countries, the video was screened at AIDS 2016 Conference, ILGA World Conference 2016, and the regional training on sensitization of health care service conducted by a collaboration among APCOM, YVC, and MSMGF. It was also presented in country small scale projects under YVC’s IGNITE! Mentorship Program. By the end of 2016, the video garnered more than 23K views on YVC’s and APCOM’s YouTube channel and Facebook page.
In 2016, APCOM was also seen to be heightening its advocacy efforts and amplifying regional needs and concerns as well as the voice of its partners in large forums:

- APCOM participated in 21st International AIDS Conference (IAC)\(^7\) with two of its country SR partners (from Bangladesh and India) and facilitated a range of sessions/dialog/poster exhibitions to amplify the learning and challenges in the region and advocate to improve the policy environment. Some of the significant contributions were:
  - Islam and Christianity on Sexual Diversity and Sexual Health: A session of faith-based community advocates showcasing faiths as a mean to improve HIV services among sexual minorities, followed by a knowledge exchange session among the participants on how they have worked with communities of faith
  - Handing over Health: A session discussing key topics on increasing HIV domestic funding and political will in countries that will experience significant reduction of international AIDS funding due to their income status transition
  - No Money, No Honey: Investing in MSM to end AIDS: A series of presentations by capacity building experts and experienced community advocates spotlighting investment that kickstarts and strengthens an effective HIV response among MSM and transgender communities.
  - Creating an enabling environment to reduce vulnerabilities of MSM towards HIV/AIDS through key stakeholder sensitizations (Presented by MSA partner The Humsafar Trust, India)
  - Impact of decentralized and reduced government funding on HIV/AIDS program for MSM and TG population in India (Presented by MSA partner The Humsafar Trust, India)
  - Let’s Lead Our Own Campaign: A workshop that trains community advocates with campaigning skill level of beginner to intermediate on building impactful digital online campaign
  - Strategies for Improving Services and Programmes to Address Gender-based Violence against MSM and Transgender Persons in Dhaka (Presented by MSA partner Bandhu Social Welfare Society, Bangladesh)

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\(^7\) First convened in 1985, the International AIDS Conference, is the biggest gathering of experts, opinion leaders and community advocates on any global health or development issues in the world, continues to provide a distinct platform for the intersection of advocacy, human rights and science in eradicating the epidemic.
In the 28th ILGA World Conference, APCOM organised three sessions under the MSA program:

- **My Sexuality and My Faith:** This session aimed to present and discuss APCOM’s discussion paper on Islam and Christianity and their influence on sexual health and diversity, to provide faith-based/related experience from the community’s work and to identify entry point for dialogue and engagement with faith leaders.

- **PrEPing Young Gay Dudes:** The session’s goal was to reiterate that Pre-Exposed Prophylaxis (PrEP) is a factor of empowerment in the lives of the young gay men by allowing them to take control of their sexual health.

- **Media Engagement and Reporting on Sexual Violence among GBT communities:** The objective of the session was to present and discuss sexual abuse cases faced by the GBT communities to the international media, as well as to sensitize the media for increased coverage, reporting of such incidents and explore partnerships for stronger advocacy responses.

These sessions at the ILGA World Conference were live streamed via APCOM’s Facebook page and YouTube. By 31st December, a total view of the MSA-supported session had reached 94 views.
The MSA program saw a change in 2017, with Save the Children, Nepal coming in and UNDP BRH moving out as the Principal Recipient. Despite this change, APCOM could be found continuing committedly as the technical partner in the program and undertaking significant initiatives for building capacity and amplifying the voice of its MSA partners as key advocates for the health and rights of MSM and transgender people in the region.

- In 2016, with support received from MSA, APCOM had developed its Knowledge Management Strategy. In April, the organization not only oriented its staff to the strategy and related projects, it developed a roll-out plan including timeline. Quickly after that, in August, APCOM organized a Knowledge Management & Communication Workshop for its SR partners where 25 MSA community advocates from 15 MSA country partners and their downstream CBOs participated. The workshop not only culminated with the participants better understanding and appreciating knowledge management and communication, but also facilitated the participants to develop the first draft of their organizational knowledge management plans and equipped them with the skillsets to develop organizational communication strategy, branding guideline, etc.

- In June, APCOM brought together 20 community advocates/leaders from South Asia to explore ways to strengthen South Asia’s HIV Response through Partnerships. The meeting focused on:
  - Facilitating linkages between national, regional and global initiatives
  - Exploring potential partnerships
  - Collectively developing a draft plan for advocacy for the period 2017-2019

The meeting was marked with deep discussions on country-specific issues and challenges that affect HIV intervention programmes and LGBTI well-being, facilitating cross learning. Partners in the meeting could collectively identify diverse unpredictable factors in the country and regional contexts, which affected their operating environments, discuss and map factors that threaten their ability to operate successfully as organizations, and together develop a regional partnership strategy as well as create in-country action plans.

The following outputs could be achieved through this significant exercise:

- Basic Priorities for declaration
- Four areas of regional collaboration/strategic partnerships
- 7 Individual Country plans
- Peer Matrix

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8 A bi-annual world conference on LGBTI rights Conference organized by the International Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans and Intersex Association, a worldwide network of over 1,200 organisations for human rights of LGBTI people.
In September, APCOM brought together 46 community advocates/leaders from South Asia in two batches for "Changing Gears", an intensive workshop to improve existing HIV prevention and treatment interventions with new evidences, strategies, tools and techniques so that they contribute to National Programmes more effectively. Adapted from Changing Gears, APCOM’s Guidelines developed with support from UNAIDS-RST and reviewed by UNDP, WB, FHI, Unicef and community organizations, the workshops sought enhance relevant skills and knowledge of those implementing services in the region.

As reports and evaluation of the workshops make it evident, by the end of the workshop, the participants had:

- Gained exposure to various successfully tested HIV intervention approaches and strategies for MSM and TG/ Hijra people
- Developed a better understanding of their own programmatic and cultural contexts and reviewed what can be adapted from the various successful strategies for MSM and TG/Hijra people within their country situations;
- Developed a better understanding on how to use the data and treatment cascade tools to analyse country specific situations and how to practically use UIC in informing the intervention gaps and analysis and accordingly restructure staff efforts and strategies.
- Learnt how to use social media and online cruising platforms to reach untapped population and disseminate safer sex messages and promote testing and condom/lube.
- Learnt about PrEP and its relevance in MSM & Transgender /Hijra intervention programmes as well as looked into issues of advocacy around PrEP at the institutional and community levels.
- Developed a strategic understanding on how to facilitate a local response in addressing stigma, discrimination and violence for smoother facilitation of interventions, reduction of barriers to accessing services and to strengthen referral linkages.

During the year, APCOM was also found to be providing context technical assistance to its partners and making efforts to highlight the work and the voice of its partners in large forums.
In August, APCOM undertook an intensive exercise to strengthen capacities of Lhak-Sam (BNP+), the SR partner in Bhutan, for which, APCOM undertook an in-country visit and supported the organization to produce road maps to determine the organisation’s advocacy priorities and capacity strengthening in a process-driven manner.

This technical support process comprised of three key exercises:

- **Organization Rapid Assessment:** With facilitation support from APCOM, 8 key members of Lhak-Sam (BNP+) undertook an intensive self-assessment process to identify their capacity and technical needs in the areas of Governance and Strategy, External Partnerships, and Program and Technical Capacity for Advocacy. This exercise culminated with the production of a comprehensive Rapid Assessment report with recommendations/suggestions, and provided a clear picture on the strength and needs of the organisation in terms of governance, programmes, partnership and advocacy. The exercise also enabled Lhak-Sam to identify its advocacy priorities and technical partners who they may be able to work with to achieve the advocacy goals.

- **Stakeholders Meeting:** Following the Rapid Assessment and based on the recommendations emerging from it, APCOM in collaboration with Lhak-Sam (BNP+) then organized a stakeholder’s meeting with 9 participants comprising key stakeholders and community members, in which it presented the identified organizational gaps of Lhak-Sam (BNP+) and sought the stakeholders’ recommendations in addressing these. This exercise culminated with the conceptualization of the agenda for a multi-stakeholder Round Table Consultation.

- **Round Table Consultation on Health, Well Being of MSM/Key Affected Population (KAP) Programming in Bhutan:** Finally, APCOM in collaboration with Lhak-Sam (BNP+), conducted a Round Table Consultation in Bhutan in September with 37 participants comprising several government agencies, the UN, CSOs and members from the LGBT community. In this consultation, Lhak-Sam (BNP+) and APCOM jointly focused on:
  - Highlighting the key issues that confront the Key Affected Population (KAP) in Bhutan
  - Developing partnership and exploring opportunities and resources for the advocacy priorities.
  - Developing a road map for capacity strengthening of key organizations.

During the consultation, diverse issues/challenges were identified and intensive group work presentations enabled participants to widely discuss and draw recommendations on barriers that MSM and TG communities experience for accessing health and welfare services, develop road maps for resource mapping, identify areas for capacity strengthening of key organizations, undertake an intensive stakeholder analysis and mark our advocacy priorities. APCOM on its part committed to provide support in implementing/executing developed road maps.

Overall, besides strengthening Lhak Sam (BNP+) in terms of its programme, management and partnership for advocacy, the technical assistance to Lhak-Sam (BNP+) also made an impact on its partners, with the Round Table Discussion being the first of its kind in Bhutan, which brought the community and technical agencies together to map out ways to address identified advocacy issues and form partnerships.
In keeping with its mandate to be the voice of the community in the region and also to highlight and recognize the work of the MSA partners in the region, APCOM in 2017 supported the participation of 14 MSA advocates/representatives in the ILGA Asia Regional Conference, 2017 and also supported the participation cost of about 50 participants from South Asia in the RRRAP Summit, which it hosted in November to take stock and navigate a viable course of action for the next 10 years to move Asia and the Pacific closer to a sustainable future free of HIV and inclusive of all sexualities and gender identities.

Finally, during the year, APCOM also continued to focus on enhancing community access to strategic knowledge and information in the region, APCOM focused on developing/updating a range of significant knowledge products, which were as follows:

- **Country Snapshots (MSM and transgender epidemiology and behavioral data) of South Asia**: APCOM had produced a series of country snapshots, containing 2012 epidemic data. With the more recent epidemiological changes that have been documented by WHO and UNAIDS, APCOM worked to publish an updated snapshot series to provide MSM and transgender communities in 7 MSA countries with updated evidence on HIV epidemiology, sexual and health seeking behavior and programmatic situation that can be utilized in country specific advocacy on investments and for strengthening service delivery.

- **APCOM co-organized and co-hosted the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOT) Commemoration event** in Thailand with the Ministry of Justice of Thailand, the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand and the World Bank Group, UNESCO, the Embassy of Canada, and civil society, private sector and development partners, where, in keeping with the year’s theme of “family”, released a video titled “Love Starts at Home.” The video encourages parents of LGBT children, particularly from Asia, to educate themselves about the journey of discovery that their child is undertaking and to highlight the benefits of supporting them through that process with unconditional love and acceptance. APCOM also expected the video to be used as a visual advocacy product by community advocates working with LGBT rights and/or for children and family, and by then end of June 2017, the video received 20,499 and 10,772 views from across the region on APCOM’s Facebook page and Youtube channel, respectively. 82% of the YouTube video viewers were parents, which was the specific target demography for the video.
3. Achievements and Challenges

The main objectives of the MSA programme implemented by APCOM were:

- To improve the delivery of HIV related services for MSM and TG across South Asia
- To improve the policy environment in regards to MSM, TG, and HIV related issues across South Asia
- To improve strategic knowledge on MSM, TG, and HIV related issues across South Asia.

Also, as mentioned earlier in the document, MSA as a program is based on a CSS framework with the main focus areas encompassing:

- Providing services for care, support and protection of key population: This includes aspects such as cultural competence of team members, community level promotion of health literacy, social and psychological support, changing harmful sociocultural practices and outreach to key affected communities and individuals.
- Developing an enabling and responsive environment: This includes work to improve the social, cultural, legal, financial and political environments through policy dialogue and/or advocacy as well as the day-to-day factors that enable or hinder people's search for better health. People may seek, for example, better access to health services, education, adequate food, water and shelter, sexuality and family life, and security. At the same time, people also need freedom from harassment, discrimination, violence, harmful sociocultural practices and other barriers to health.
- Networking, coordination and partnerships: This includes efforts to address inequalities, social hierarchies, discrimination and competiveness, which operate among community organizations, and between them and government structures.
- Institution strengthening: This includes leadership development, capacity building of staff and other community workers on monitoring, evaluation, planning includes, situation assessment, evidence-building and research, learning, planning and knowledge management.

This section explores how APCOM has met its program objectives, contributed in strengthening communities based on the CSS framework, and thereby contributed in strengthening the results of the program in the following areas:

- Increased capacities of CBOs/community advocates and health workers on latest prevention methods and tools for quality outreach;
- Increased and higher quality contribution of CBOs to policy, programming and service delivery;
- Increased availability of, access to, and utilisation of strategic information in policy, programme and service delivery design.

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9 MSA Programming proposal
3.1 Achievements

3.1.a. Strengthening the HIV response in South Asia through developing a cadre of leaders

APCOM’s consistent engagement with the MSA SR partners - providing a range of capacity development activities, offering technical and strategic support, engaging them with larger global processes and movements - contributed in the development of a cadre of leaders in the region. This support has been extremely significant, especially for countries like Afghanistan or Bhutan, where HIV response is nascent or in countries like Pakistan where 6 new CBOs joined the program as late as in 2016.

Some of the activities undertaken by partners in the different countries in 2017 is shared below to give a sense of the significant work being undertaken in the region:

- **Training on PLHIV Case Reporting and Drop Out Analysis, Afghanistan:**
  In August, YHDO trained 18 healthcare managers and/or workers, including doctors and nurses, from medical facilities from across the country on skills relating to HIV case reporting and analysis of cases and factors of the treatment’s drop out.

- **Safety and Security Training for Human Rights Activists, Bangladesh:**
  To ensure that the community activists in Bangladesh always put their safety on priority, particularly during threatening times, Bandhu organised a security/safety training for 25 activists from across the country in June. Strategy to reduce personal stress and how to deal with cyber violence are among many key safety insights learnt by the activists during the training.

- **New Episode of “More than Birds and Bees” TV Show Highlighting LGBT Issues, Bhutan:**
  Lhak-Sam has been collaborating with Bhutan Broadcasting Service, the national TV and radio broadcaster of the Kingdom of Bhutan, to produce a series of videos, titled “More than Birds and Bees,” that aim to improve the access to and education on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) among young people. Their latest episode shines a light on LGBT topics.

- **Sensitization Workshop for Officials of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), India:**
  To encourage the inclusion of LGBTQ students in the university, The Humsafar Trust organized a sensitization workshop for the officials of the Regional Centres of IGNOU, the world’s largest university by enrollment, in June. The officials were taught the human rights-based concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity and expressions and reminded of their role in eliminating the challenges faced by LGBTQ community in educational settings. Subsequent to the Workshop, the Registrar of IGNOU issued an action to exempt fees for transgender students from all of their academic programmes.

- **Sensitization Workshop for Chandigarh’s Judiciary Staff, India:**
  Following the landmark initiative by the State Legal Service Authority (SLSA) to provide free legal service to the transgender individuals in Chandigarh, on July 22, VHS organised a sensitization workshop to help the judiciary staff further understand the legal conundrum, in both sexual health and human rights aspects, faced by the trans communities in Chandigarh.

- **Gaijatara Pride Celebration, Nepal:**
  With the theme of “My Friends and Family Celebrates Me”, Blue Diamond Society (BDS) marched with the communities in the Gaijatra LGBTI Pride on August 8 in Kathmandu. The festival of “Gaijatra” is one of the oldest festivals celebrated by the Hindus/Buddhists of Kathmandu Valley that has become a staple of SOGIE diversity celebration. Joining the BDS contingent was a minister of the country’s Ministry of Woman, alongside hundreds of LGBTI people from across the country and their family members and friends.
• Transgender Rights Protection Bill 2017 Presented before the Senate, Pakistan: Khwaja Sira Society, with the assistance from the Feminist Collective, has drafted the Transgender Rights Protection Bill (2017) to pursue the legal conversation against gender disparity with the lawmakers. On July 7, the members of the task force approved all the recommendations of the drafting committee and presented the Bill before the Senate.

• Training on Children Safeguarding Policy, Pakistan: KSS conducted a training that aimed to create and improve the protection of transgender children and teenagers from emotional and physical violence and negligence in August. The participants included teachers, legal experts and trans activists from the CBOs across the country. A part of the training curriculum was understanding the reporting mechanism when an incidence of violence happens.

• International Youth Day & National Independence Day Celebration, Pakistan: Parwaz combined two occasions, International Youth Day (12 Aug) and Pakistan’s Independence Day (14 Aug) into one valuable community gathering. The gathering brought up a facilitated discussion based on Tedx Talk of Dr. James O’Keefe that gives a narrative to Why Homosexuality is About Survival, Not Sex.

• Engagement at “Drug Prevention and Life Skills Education Programme for Teachers,” Pakistan: Pireh delivered a lecture on human rights, humanity, social justice and how these can be achieved through life skills at Drug Prevention and Life Skills Education Programme for Teachers hosted by Drug Free Pakistan Foundation. The programme was attended by government school teachers from across Karachi.

• Interpersonal Skill Building of “Tolerance” for MSW and Transgender Persons, Pakistan: Humraz gathered its male sex workers and transgender members to be involved in an interpersonal skill building of tolerance. Through lecture, opinion exchange discussion and role play activities, the participants were aspired to develop a more tolerant outlook in living their lives within a society that’s filled with diversities such as Pakistanis.

• Workshop for Experts on Laws, Policies, Systems & Services to Reduce the Impact of HIV, Sri Lanka: FPA Sri Lanka has established a Technical Hub on HIV, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identities and Human Rights, which comprises laws, policy and healthcare experts from diverse backgrounds. A workshop to strengthen and expand the membership of the Technical Hub was conducted by FPA Sri Lanka team from 16th to 18th of June.
3.1.b. **Linking South Asia with other pieces of strategic work**

Through a range of activities, APCOM has successfully linked South Asia with other significant work taking place worldwide. The opportunities that APCOM created for its partners in participating in large international events such as the ILGA or the IAC conferences, enabled the SR partners in finding platforms to not only present their countries’ situations and their work, but also to voice their needs to concerns to a larger audience. Needless to say, such opportunities created visibility for the partners and also gave them exposure to new strategies and opened doors for forging partnerships and gain new learnings. Most partners acknowledge this as a significant opportunity they gained, the value it brought for their work and the support these enabled them to garner.

“APCOM has provided a platform where Dareecha can portray its work to the whole world at different international summits, conferences & workshops.” – Dareecha Male Health Society, Pakistan

In 2017, APCOM also brought its partners together for an extensive consultation for developing a regional advocacy strategy and establish inter-country linkages, which has laid the foundation for the South Asian work for gaining momentum in the coming period.

Moreover, APCOM’s work has also created significant intangible results in areas of partnerships, cross-learning and exchanges, and this has happened through the process of APCOM repeatedly bringing the partners together for different programs. Partners have gained exposure to international platforms, learned about each other’s work, exchanged knowledge and organically found ways to connect as well as find recognition.

In 2017, APCOM launched HIV, Equality and Rights, the HERO Awards to acknowledge the outstanding service to the HIV response in Asia and the Pacific, and to the region’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities. Bandhu Social Welfare Society, Bangladesh won the HERO Award in the Community Organization category, and found recognition for its exceptional work as an internationally respected provider of HIV programs, sexual health services and human rights advocacy for LGBT people and communities throughout Bangladesh. On this platform, APCOM also honored Ashok Row Kavi, the founder of The Humsafar Trust, India as one of Asia’s leading advocates for the health and rights of LGBT people and people affected by HIV with the inaugural Shivananda Khan Award for Extraordinary Achievement following a lifetime devoted to improving the lives of LGBT people and people affected by HIV across India specifically and throughout Asia more broadly. The award is named after late Shivananda Khan, the founder of APCOM and a pioneering hero of the Asia Pacific response to HIV and LGBT health and rights.
3.1.c. Supporting partners as a collective and individuals

APCOM has succeeded in tangibly benefitting the partners not only as a group, but also as unique independent entities. The partner focused technical support activities that the organization offered provides evidence on how APCOM has made genuine efforts to meet their needs in diverse ways. For example, while Blue Diamond Society, Nepal acknowledges and appreciates APCOM’s support in designing the “Treatment as Prevention” workshop, The Humsafar Trust, India acknowledges the support it received for putting in place its organizational process documents and Bandhu Social Welfare Society, Bangladesh talks about APCOM always being there to offer “timely suggestion.”

Throughout the program period, APCOM has focused on creating evidence of good practice – be it in highlighting the work of its partners, advocating for working with faith leaders, or in building capacities of its partners for strengthened service delivery and advocacy. Through the program, APCOM has also pro-actively drawn learnings from its other initiatives and brought these to the SR partners for strengthening their work. For example, APCOM brought synergy between MSA and its other flagship advocacy initiative titled Test BKK, when it brought the learnings from the latter to the MSA partners in the communication workshop.

As another example, APCOM developed the Changing Gears workshop based on the needs expressed by the partners when they were introduced to “Changing Gears: A guide to effective HIV service programming for gay men and other men who have sex with men in Asia,” a 2nd generation prevention framework APCOM developed in 2016. The guidebook aimed at strengthening the ongoing national and regional efforts to revive the HIV response in Asian countries and to serve as a resource to design and assess comprehensive HIV services. It contained a combination of various good practice models in addressing HIV and other syndemic factors in a CBO setting along with self-assessment checklist indicators. The Changing Gears workshop, based on this framework sought to familiarize the partners with the new evidence, strategies, tools and techniques for strong HIV prevention and treatment programmes, and was delivered over two batches to the MSA partners from the seven countries. As the following quote makes evident, the workshop supported partners to gain insights into how service delivery interventions can happen in more creative, innovative ways and informed partners on what could possibly work for them in their own unique country contexts and how they could leverage these to address the needs of the most underserved:

“APCOM has organized a workshop Changing Gears – Reanimating HIV services for MSM and Transgender/Hijra Communities. Through this workshop we were able to identify our current services gap especially in counseling services. After this workshop, we have a lot of successful case studies.” – Khwaja Sira Society, Pakistan
APCOM could successfully work with the country partners to propel country level actions. Reports and discussions with stakeholders make it evident that they benefitted in many ways from the PrEP consultations, which APCOM delivered to strengthen service delivery and advocacy at the country levels. Many of them also received customized support from APCOM in developing activities and plans for the period 2015 and 2016, and as the table below makes evident, these plans were based on the country contexts and community needs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>A PrEP consultation was held at Khulna division reaching 65 MSM and TG youth. Before concluding the workshop, a small discussion was held to identify benefits, challenges, and concerns on PrEP in relation to the country context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>Inviting active community members who have poor knowledge on PrEP, in order to raise awareness and create PrEP advocates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Has convened PrEP consultation workshop(s) targeting community leaders, government officials, doctors, scientists and youth leaders. Raising Awareness regarding PrEP among LGBTQ youth and the urban Indian LGBTQ population in general. Advocacy efforts to include PrEP as a part of NACO’s strategy to end AIDS, targeting politicians and scientists engaging with the Health Ministry and NACO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>Initiatives aim to reach the Government, health service providers, MSM and transgender communities as PrEP knowledge is low amongst these stakeholders. Plans to reach targeted populations through conducting the following activities, events, workshops, and programmes: 1. Sharing of the PrEP consultation recommendations with the National Centre for AIDS and STD Control. 2. Publishing articles about PrEP in the media. 3. Educating community members, YMSM and TG about PrEP. 4. Development and distribution of IEC materials. 5. Orientation about PrEP with health service providers. 6. Organising a multi-stakeholder meeting about PrEP and a national consultation about PrEP with UN agencies, government official health service providers and the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>PrEP advocates organised 3 training workshops in diverse districts in Pakistan, delivering strategic information to 30 participants in each training session. Participants included LGBTQI members, rights activists, community leaders, students and government medical officers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Service providers, stakeholders, and community members demonstrate inadequate knowledge on PrEP and its effectiveness. The National AIDS Programme convened a meeting and highlighted a concern that professionals and doctors are ignorant of the existence of PrEP. Thus, the following activities are proposed: 1. Meeting with doctors affiliated with the National AIDS Programme 2. Awareness meeting for the selected donors at National AIDS Programme about the situation in Sri Lanka.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reports also make it evident that following the consultation, country advocates conducted follow up actions to promote PrEP in their countries, and that within 2 months of the consultation, partners/participants had further outreached to and built capacities of 417 people in four countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>MSA SR Partner Organization</th>
<th>Outreach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Bandhu Social Welfare Society</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>Blue Diamond Society</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>The Humsafar Trust</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Naz Male Health Alliance</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above information becomes important especially since it provides evidence of the cascading nature of APCOM’s work. The stories below further enumerate the energy that APCOM’s work could generate for propelling further action:

Under the umbrella of the Naz Male Health Alliance in Pakistan, Tamzil Rehman conducted and facilitated advocacy sessions on PrEP under their behaviour change communication training program for outreach workers. In October, these sessions took place in various cities in Pakistan targeting different community members. Sessions were conducted in Lahore, Karachi, Hyderabad, Larkana and Rawalpindi with 10 to 50 community members attending each session. A session about PrEP was also conducted on World AIDS Day 2015 in five different cities of Pakistan. A total of 300 Pakistani people were reached out through the session.

Rofiqul Islam, a PrEP advocate from Bangladesh set out to share his experiences and what he learnt from the Dialogue to his counterparts in Bangladesh in order to successfully advocate for PrEP in his hometown Dhaka. He dedicated the entire month of October to meeting with various stakeholders and partners and engaging in other activities to promote the use of PrEP. During this time, he arranged a discussion with 27 staff members of Bandhu Social Welfare Society (BSWS) who work towards the health improvement of the MSM and Hijra community in Bangladesh as well as held a learning session under the BSWS’ Sexuality and Sexuality Resource Centre attended by 16 participants. Within the sessions, the drug was introduced and the discussions relating the cost, side effects, drug resistance and its limitations followed. Rofiqul made recommendations to BSWS on how they could assist in advocating for PrEP. Five variations of posters in Bengali were also created for circulation online in order to spread the awareness of PrEP.

Source: APCOM website

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11 Source: APCOM website
Throughout the MSA program period, APCOM undertook a number of interventions with its country partners on various aspects of communication and advocacy and all of these were found to have been consciously focused on building a more responsive and enabling environment. It was found from the interviews and surveys that these initiatives contributed significantly in enabling the country advocates to talk to duty bearers in the respective countries - with the NACP on how the key population can be best served in the national programs, with the law enforcement agencies to address stigma and discrimination, with key stakeholders to better provide outreach services or with the Global Fund and other donors to create a sustainable revenue stream for their own interventions.

“APCOM helped us in connecting with multiple donors and strengthen our organization, which helped us in lobbying with the Government to be a part of our national grant and for the recognition of MSM in our health care policy... APCOM contributed a lot in institutional strengthening of Dostana at every level from outreach strategy strengthening to advocacy on national and international level.” – Dostana Male Health Society, Pakistan

“Approaching The Global Fund for extension of MSA program: Draft of Letter of support prepared by HST was shared with APCOM. APCOM has been lobbying actively with Save The Children and The Global Fund to continue the existing grant beyond September 2018.” – The Humsafar Trust, India
Most significantly, APCOM worked very closely with Lhak Sam (BNP+) in 2017 to identify the critical capacity building and advocacy gaps existing in the organization, broaden its partnership base in the country – with UN, the government and other community organizations, and draw a road map for priority advocacy areas. Overall, APCOM, through its work in Bhutan, could contribute significantly in building the country’s presence on the South Asia map for HIV response.

“APCOM’s guidance, technical assistance and capacity building to Lhak-Sam has been very beneficial. It has enabled Lhak-Sam to build further partnership and competency for the smooth functioning of the organization toward attending its desired goal of reducing the risk and vulnerability of HIV and STIs on the MSM and TG people.” – Lhak Sam (BNP+), Bhutan
APCOM invested significant energy in the period to organize a range of need based regional capacity building initiatives for SR partners and conducted diverse workshops including on Resource Mobilisation and Sustainability regional workshop, Programme Management and Monitoring & Evaluation workshop as well as Knowledge Management and Communications and Leadership workshop towards this. These workshops contributed significantly in community systems strengthening because not only did the partners benefit from these, they also took the learnings forward to their organizations and to their countries and further trained others.

Yashwinder Singh, a CBO member from Pahal Foundation had attended the ‘Turning the Corner: Regional Workshop on Resource Mobilisation & Sustainability, held from 25 to 27 May 2015 in Bangkok. It was the first such workshop aimed at enabling financial sustainability among the CBOs working on advocacy and service delivery on HIV and LGBT rights across South Asia. Post the workshop, Yashwinder replicated the same model with INFOSEM network partner CBOs, and conducted training on Resource Mobilization and sustainability in Delhi with CBOs in May 2016 and in Goa in Aug 2017. Yashwinder mentioned it was the best learning experience with APCOM, the consultant Barapani also visited Pahal Foundation and reviewed the income generation/ resource mobilization plans of the organization. Yashwinder also jointly developed the RM plan for each of the CBOs and reviewed it. The CBOs have also successfully demonstrated e.g. Saarthi Trust, Nagpur generated fund using online resources for Nagpur Pride, and Pahal Foundation generated fund from Transcend photo exhibition. – The Humsafar Trust, India

APCOM provided the required capacity building and technical assistance to the project staff of FPA Sri Lanka. – Family Planning Association, Sri Lanka
APCOM’s engagement in the development of evidence-informed strategic information has contributed in reducing the HIV response gap in the region as well as showcasing South Asia’s work to a wide audience. In the course of the program, APCOM has not only produced significant policy briefs and country snapshots (based on the recommendations of the NHRI Workshop, which specified the necessity to simplify the language on important policy reports relating to punitive laws and equitable rights so that the community advocates can understand, and thus, utilize it in their work), it has also invested in making these user-friendly through translation. The organization has also taken up a number of relevant research studies, convened ASASIA as an advisory body as well as produced a range of video material to advocate for issues of relevance in the region. It has also invested in proactively disseminating the knowledge it has generated through a range of appropriate channels and used its website as a platform to highlight the MSA partners and their work. All this has enabled APCOM to successfully bring focus on the work happening in the region besides taking the voice of the MSA partners to a much larger international audience.

APCOM’s role in the MSA program was a unique one. It was established as a part of the program to primarily bridge the knowledge gap in the region. As captured above, in the course of the program, APCOM not only played this role, it expanded the role to include active engagement, advocacy and amplifying the voice of the region. This not only strengthened the organization as a key stakeholder in furthering the health and rights of the MSM and transgender community in South Asia, in fact, it led to the strengthening of the work and the voice of the region.

However, APCOM’s journey in the MSA program has not been devoid of challenges. Shared below are the key challenges that have been articulated by the organization:

- A key challenge for APCOM in its role of a technical partner lay in managing sheer diversity – of the country realities, of the partners operating within these countries as well as of the nature of challenges that are faced by the MSM and TG communities in these countries in achieving their health and rights. The sizes of the MSA partner organizations vary from over 700 (in Nepal) to 14 (in Pakistan) and the contexts within which the partners operate also vary widely. Further, each of the countries and the MSA partner organizations working within these countries have different realities, different objectives, different challenges. To manage this diversity and being able to build value has been an ongoing challenge as well as an opportunity for the program.

- Another challenge that APCOM faced was the absence of any monitoring or accountability mechanism. While APCOM was mandated to support partners with capacity building, information and advocacy, the absence of monitoring or accountability mechanisms made it challenging for APCOM to measure the impact of its interventions with partners. Over the program period, APCOM had to depend on relationships and goodwill to ensure that its work with SR partners was carried forward at the country levels. While APCOM could succeed in meeting this end, it posed an ongoing challenge.

- APCOM also faced specific challenges while working in specific countries:
  - Working in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan was challenging especially because travel to these countries was difficult. Also, getting partners to travel for regional meetings etc. posed ongoing challenges.
  - In Sri Lanka, APCOM did not work with any community organization/network, and that made it difficult for APCOM to access or amplify the voices of the community. In 2017, APCOM had planned for undertaking a scoping exercise in Sri Lanka to identify two CBOs, but the initiative could not happen.
  - In India, APCOM felt that it was not enough to be working with only two organizations, given the diversity and geography of India.

4. Stories from the field

- Challenged for working with the MSM community

In Afghanistan, social stigma and taboo surrounds homosexuality and makes it immensely difficult for organizations to work on MSM issues. YHDO, while implementing the MSA project, faced severe challenges and was stigmatized to such an extent that the high-level authorities of Ministry of Economy (where local NGOs are registered) decided to dissolve YHDO because it was promoting homosexuality by providing services to the MSM community. It took YHDO an immense level of advocacy, lobbying and providing proofs to convince the Deputy Minister of Economy on the need for the program and services, to refrain from dissolving the organization, and allowing YHDO to continue its pioneering work with the MSM community within the difficult circumstances in Afghanistan.

YHDO, Afghanistan

- Marking ‘X’ in the gender box

Arifa Yeasmin Moyori, is the president of Shiri Somaj Kollan Songho, which is located in Jamalpur district and one of the progressive CBO maintained and guided by the Bandhu Social Welfare Society. She is a role model and great leader of Hijra community. Among her many remarkable achievements is that she successfully made her passport by marking ‘X’ in the gender box, marking a great win for her community.

Through her dedicated work, Arifa Yeasmin Moyori has proved that if transgender people are given the opportunity, they can play an important role for their family, society and also for the nation. As a result of her strong determination and dedication, she has become very famous and successful in her territory.

In 2016, Arifa Yeasmin Moyori received the JOYEETA Award from the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs for her contribution to society. This prestigious award by the Government has paved the way for her movement and bring honor for all the Hijra community members in Bangladesh.

Bandhu Social Welfare Society, Bangladesh

- A space for love, compassion and kindness for PLHIV

In 2017, Lhak-Sam opened a community based care house in Dhamsima in Ganeykha, Thimphu for people to shelter key affected people including people living with HIV (PLHIV), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersexual (LGBTI), and recovering addicts who are without home.

Lhak-Sam acquired the five-acre government land on user right and the organisation is in the process of designing and making proposal to expand the community based care centre and inaugurated the centre accompanied by the lama and monks of Chezhi goenpa in Ganeykha.

Lhak Sam envisions the centre to be a place to practice love, compassion and kindness and while it has already constructed a smaller centre, plans to build a much larger centre over time. The centre will provide PLHIV with treatment and care, host meditation programmes, invite religious heads to talk on life, and offer a range of other programmes to empower the affected people. The centre will also have green houses where seasonal flowers will be planted and at least 20 people will be employed in the green house. The income from the sale of flowers will be used to sustain the care home and people at the centre.

Lhak Sam (BNP+), Bhutan
Replicating capacity building workshops

Yashwinder Singh, CBO member from Pahal Foundation had attended the Turning the Corner: Regional Workshop on Resource Mobilisation & Sustainability, held from 25 to 27 May 2015 in Bangkok. It was the first such workshop aimed at enabling financial sustainability among the CBOs working on advocacy and service delivery on HIV and LGBT rights across South Asia. Organized by APCOM under the multi-country South Asia HIV programme, the workshop facilitated 29 community advocates from 24 organizations across Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Yashwinder has replicated the same model with INFOSEM network partner CBOs, and conducted training on Resource Mobilization and sustainability in Delhi with CBOs in May 2016 and in Goa in Aug 2017. Yashwinder also jointly developed the RM plan for each of the CBOs and reviewed it. The CBOs have also successfully demonstrated e.g. Saarthi Trust, Nagpur generated fund using online resources for Nagpur Pride, and Pahal Foundation generated fund from Transcend photo exhibition.

Indian mother accepting her gay son

Muthukumar Natesan is the Director of Lotus Sangam, a community-based organization that supports the rights and well-being of gay men and transgender people in rural areas in Kumbakonam, a semiurban area of Tamil Nadu in India. The organization is a partner of The Humsafar Trust, India.

Muthukumar’s mother hailed from a small village and Muthukumar was born to him when she was 24. As her little boy entered adolescence, she, along with all her neighbors, noticed his 'effeminate' behavior. She tried hard but could not make the boy let go of his effeminate manners. When her boy was only 15, she had to stop his education because of a huge financial burden on the family. The boy learnt the craft of weaving and started supporting his family financially by weaving silk sarees.

As the boy turned 23, the mother started talking about his marriage. He refused every time she opened the discussion but she never stopped. Like every mother unaware of homosexuality, she believed that her son was not normal and marriage was the only solution to this problem. And when he told her that he felt like a girl and wanted to change himself to become one, and that his male friend, in fact, was his ‘husband’, she was devastated and told him to leave home. And he did.

He moved three streets over and continued weaving for his livelihood. She rented out various portions of her house and managed without his financial support. She had thought that he would be out-casted, but on the contrary, he gained acceptance in his neighborhood.

Two years later, when the mother came to know that her son was acutely ill, letting all her inhibitions go, she sent him food and called him back. Eventually she started supporting him when he quit his weaving business to work a community organization working for the rights and well-being of gay men and transgender people. She was proud when her son and his team were selected for a World Bank project to conduct educational performances in villages. She started spending time at his community office watching the performers rehearsing and soon, she became a part of the community. Happily serving coffee, food and snacks to the members, she also helped them in small administrative tasks.
On the completion of their project, when the community group published a booklet at a function, she volunteered to be its first recipient. It was attended by over 150 people and she stood proudly in front of media and panchayat leaders. It was a moment of such joy and pride for her, to see her son and everyone with him successful, that she got teary-eyed when she was asked to garland her son.

Muthukumar’s mother is a true trailblazer in Tamil Nadu – a mother who accepted her gay son, his community and their work with all her heart. It is our hope that many more families will come forward in supporting their children who happen to be different from the majority. Because an end to discrimination in wider society and true acceptance starts from home.

Story from India

• Policy Level Change in Nepal

On 15 September 2017, the Supreme Court issued a long awaited judgement that those who have received citizenship, can change their sex from that stated at their birth according to the gender they feel later. The Supreme Court stated that the existing citizenship law that provides scope to change citizenship, would also now provide for change in gender. However, in order to ensure that such scope is not misused the SC also ordered to make necessary arrangement to amend in the law. Further, the SC also issued a directive to the government that all other identity documents such as school certificates must also be changed accordingly.

Now those who want to change their gender and name, can apply for such changes once the Home Ministry issues circular to all District Administration Offices based on this judgment. This has been possible because of efforts undertaken by organisations like BDS and others.

Blue Diamond Society, Nepal

• From sex work to online pet shop – a shift in livelihood

As part of the work under MSA, one of the regular people coming to KSS is Preeti, a sex worker. She likes to interact and tries her best to learn new things. She takes interest in attending different sessions held at the drop-in centre and has good awareness about HIV and AIDS. On one of her visits, Preeti expressed a desire to learn how to operate the computer & Android cell phones. The DIC Coordinator offered to help her.

Preeti loves animals and so, while learning computer, she also asked the DIC coordinator to teach her how she could sell and buy pets through internet. Over time, Preeti started using Google and OLX and decided to start a pet business rather than do sex work. The DIC Coordinator supported her in her efforts.

Now Preeti is very happy because she is doing something she loves and is earning more than before. She has saved money and she utilizes some of the savings to expand her business and has also brought in other transgender women at KSS to build their capacities and to get advice for their future life.

Khawaja Sira Society (KSS), Pakistan
Trans Protection Bill, 2017 in Pakistan

The Trans Protection of Rights Bill 2017 had been presented in the Senate as a Private Member Bill. However, the Bill lacked critical feedback from the transgender community and relevant stakeholders. Hence, following the directives of the National Task Force established for working on legislation for transgender people, the National Commission of Human Rights (NCHR) was tasked with re-drafting the bill in consultation with the community. For this purpose, some civil society organizations (CSOs), community-based organizations (CBOs) and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were consulted. However, the draft still lacked valuable feedback from the grassroots level, i.e. transgender people, who would be affected most by the implementation of this bill.

Khawaja Sira Society (KSS) coped with many challenges and worked on this. The KSS team was led by transgender people and also comprised of allies, legal and policy experts and researchers. By analyzing the significant gaps and shortcomings in the initial drafts, the team conducted extensive consultations at the grassroots level to involve all members of the community in the process of drafting this bill, especially those who are underrepresented and disenfranchised.

The Interventions done included lobbying with Senators and political parties, preparing the supporting document to address the expected questions from the bill, networking with other CSOs, activists, lawyers, media persons etc. and consulting with the community elders (gurus) who constitute the panchayat of the community as well as transmen and gender non-conforming individuals living on the margins. Based on this feedback, the team drafted the Bill anew with advice from legal professionals.

Finally, when members of KSS with help of the legal team from The Feminist Collective (TFC) re-presented the Bill, it was accepted by the National Task Force.

This is a huge development in Pakistan that aims to take forward the Supreme Court judgement of 2009 that recognized a third gender status. If passed, this bill will set a legal base upon which further work can be done and will give great momentum to the transgender rights movement in Pakistan. It will allow for equal rights and dignity of all citizens to be recognized regardless of their gender identity and/or expression.

Khawaja Sira Society (KSS), Pakistan

Intervention with the Police

As a result of the implementation of MSA Global Fund HIV Programme, a circular was drafted on prevention of discrimination and stigmatization of TG people in police stations in all parts of Sri Lanka. FPA Sri Lanka started discussions with the Deputy Inspector General of Police regarding the discrimination and harassment faced by TG people at police stations. As a result, FPA Sri Lanka was given the opportunity to organize a sensitization workshop for all the high level police officers including the Inspector General of Police.

This sensitization workshop allowed high level police officers to understand the relation between public health and rights and law enforcement in the country. As a result, a circular was drafted. At present, the circular has been circulated in all the police stations across the country. Upon the circulation of the TG circular, FPA Sri Lanka contacted selected individuals representing TG people in Sri Lanka to get their feedback about the implementation of this circular. As per the feedback received, it is clear that discrimination and harassment experienced by TG people is less after the issuance of the circular.

FPA, Sri Lanka
5. Way Forward

Today, while HIV epidemics in South Asia have reduced in severity, HIV epidemics among MSM and Transgender people continue to either be stable at unacceptably high levels (for example, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) or are getting worse (Pakistan). By 2020, UNAIDS predicts that, without an effective intervention to the current epidemic trend, MSM will account for almost half of all new HIV infections in Asia.

Four countries in South Asia that have a national HIV prevalence greater than 3% among MSM and Transgender people are India\(^{13}\) (MSM 4.43%, TG 8.82%); Nepal\(^{14}\) (MSM 3.8%, TG 6.8%); Pakistan\(^{15}\) (MSM 10.9%, TG 5.2%) and in Sri Lanka\(^{16,17}\) (TG 16.4%; relatively low among MSM but concentrated in tourist destinations).

While APCOM, through the MSA program, has addressed the unfavourable situation of MSM and transgender people in the region in multiple ways, it needs to continue its efforts into the future and build on the work it has already undertaken so far in the country. In keeping with its key mandate to strengthen the voice of the region and to continue to address the knowledge and information gaps, APCOM would need to continue working with its partners to build technical proficiency and also advocate for more funding for HIV programming in the region targeting the MSM and Transgender population.

Going forward, APCOM would invest energies in the following areas:

- Sustain engagement with the MSA SR partners towards building a more responsive environment
- Support partners in key areas of organization and programme strengthening
- Promote cross-regional knowledge exchange and learning

- Sustain engagement with the MSA SR partners towards building a more responsive environment

Under the MSA program, APCOM had undertaken an extensive exercise to strengthen partnerships for advocacy in the region. The process had culminated with the partners developing a peer matrix, building consensus on specific areas for regional collaboration as well as developing country advocacy plans for each of the seven countries. This had formed the first step towards a comprehensive process to strengthen not only the HIV response in the region, but contribute in amplifying country advocacy efforts as well as promote cross country learnings. Going forward, APCOM will take this partnership dialog forward and would look at these culminating in joint programming in the region.

APCOM has also supported its partners in areas of strategic planning or resource mobilization, and will continue its connect with the partners in the same role. APCOM will also develop it further and explore possibilities of co-developing programs with select partners and jointly mobilize resources for the same.

APCOM will also continue to lobby with relevant government and policy makers for incorporating CSO funds and activities in their relevant country plans and programs.

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13 India HSS report 2014-2015  
14 IBBS in Kathmandu, 2012  
16 MSM Country Snapshot Series - Sri Lanka  
17 IBBS Survey Sri Lanka, March 2015
Further, APCOM has always operated with the mandate of building advocates. In the past it has also built focus in the region on developing young leaders. In the coming period, APCOM will continue with this agenda and explore launching a focused project that would create opportunities for young MSM and TG leaders in South Asia to strengthen their leadership capacities, undertake projects at the country as well as the regional levels and gain a stronger voice in the region as advocates.

Finally, APCOM will deepen its work in select countries and extend technical assistance in mutually agreed areas.

- **Build capacities of partners in key areas of organization and programme strengthening**

  APCOM in the last cycle, had implemented a range of need-based regional capacity building initiatives for SR partners including conducting Resource Mobilisation and Sustainability Regional Workshop, Leadership Workshop, Programme Management and Monitoring & Evaluation workshop, Knowledge Management and Communication workshop, etc. Partners have reported significant gains from these processes and has put forward their recommendations and expectations for further support at the end of each of these workshops.

  In the coming period, APCOM will undertake an exercise in analyzing the needs and recommendations that have been articulated by partners and based on these, design a range of cutting edge training programs for the partners. The learning areas would include but not be limited to themes and areas that have been articulated by the partners/APCOM in the past in its various program reports and internal documents. Following is an indicative list:

  - Changing Gears workshop at each country level
  - Strategic planning
  - Leadership
  - Leading community initiatives in the context of religious conservatism
  - Communication and knowledge management
  - Designing advocacy projects for impact
  - Writing better proposals/reports/case studies in the development context
  - Master Training in the key areas of Instruction Design and Facilitation Skills to ensure that partners are able to design and deliver optimally effective training programs
• Promote cross-regional knowledge exchange and learning

APCOM, with support of the MSA grant, has strengthened knowledge and learning in the region through producing a range of innovative knowledge products. These have not only supported the SR partners, but have also filled a void for critical information to a larger base of stakeholders in the region.

In the coming period, APCOM will continue with the same mandate, and will

• Streamline processes and practices related to strategizing and developing knowledge products
• Invest in systematically expanding the scope and range of products
• Use technology more efficiently for improving means of curation and processes of dissemination.

Further, APCOM will also invest energy to ensure that the knowledge products it curates are strategic and responsive to on-ground needs through:

• Undertaking focused research activities to map the knowledge and capacity needs and gaps in the region, and identifying and prioritizing critical knowledge most in need of curation, preservation or replication.
• Mapping innovations and best practices based on the needs and gaps and curating them creatively.
• Identifying and consolidating existing sources, resources and expertise for mission specific knowledge and skillsets in the region.

APCOM will also focus on making knowledge more accessible to its diverse stakeholder base. Towards this, it will:

• Translate its new publications into at least two other languages than English.
• Increase use of other forms of media and technologies, e.g., blogs, vlogs, podcasts, animation, apps, etc. for communicating knowledge in byte-sized and easily accessible pieces.

Finally, APCOM will support its partners in the area of knowledge management and support them in the development of knowledge that is contextually and culturally relevant. This is to ensure that the knowledge is locally accepted and applied by its partners and stakeholders for enhancing quality and effectiveness of projects, programs, policies and advocacy. For this, APCOM would promote innovative processes to co-create learning as well as establish mechanisms for pooling and curating regional knowledge.
We are united in advocating for issues around HIV and those that advance the rights, health and well being of people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.