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# MSM Regional Network



**Above and below photos:** MSM in-country meeting held in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 18-19 January 2007.



## BACKGROUND

In 2005, the Thailand-USCDC Collaboration found an HIV prevalence of 28.3% among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Bangkok. This increase from 17.3% in 2003, along with a long-standing lack of HIV policy attention for MSM and poor HIV prevention coverage across the region, sent out an alarm to the entire region.

In response, USAID, CDC/GAP, Family Health International (FHI) and UNESCO conducted a regional “*Strategizing Interventions among MSM in the GMS*” workshop in Bangkok in February 2005, attended by over 50 participants, to conduct a mapping of MSM interventions and agree on the minimum package for HIV prevention, care and support interventions targeting MSM in the GMS. This meeting was followed by a regional consultative forum in August 2005 which resulted in the development of a two-year vision plan for MSM interventions in the GMS and the formalization of an MSM Regional Network through the establishment of the Regional Coordinating Secretariat (RCS) with continued support from USAID, CDC/GAP, UNESCO and FHI. It was hoped that this network would draw upon local and regional human resource capacity in advocating for the reduction of HIV and STI transmission and better HIV/AIDS prevention interventions and care and support services for MSM. This MSM network has become known as the Purple Sky Network (PSN) and its members currently consist of organizations working with MSM in the six countries in the GMS; Cambodia, Yunnan and Guangxi provinces of China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

## ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

In early 2006 and with USAID/RDM/A funding through FHI, TREAT Asia was appointed to perform the role of the RCS and enhance and strengthen the capacity of the regional and in-country MSM working groups in Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. To achieve this, the RCS has been providing assistance to the MSM in-country working groups in support of the achievement of the specific two-year vision and workplan for HIV prevention and care interventions for MSM in the GMS. This assistance has included a number of in-country meetings facilitated or attended by the RCS:

- July 2006: The National MSM Network Planning Workshop in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Subsequently, the National Technical Working Group on MSM was formed and is chaired by the National AIDS Authority.

## MSM Regional Network - Continued



**Above and below photos:** *National Consultation Meeting in Yagon, Myanmar, 2-5 April 2007.*



### ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION--continued

- November 2006: A meeting of MSM groups in Kunming, Yunnan, China that resulted in a draft MSM provincial strategic framework and formation of a technical working group to coordinate MSM interventions in the province.
- January 2007: MSM meeting in Vientiane, Lao PDR to develop a national MSM workplan for 2007 and to form an MSM national task force consisting of representatives from a wide range of organizations involving in MSM and HIV/AIDS work in the country.
- April 2007: The National MSM Consultation Meeting organized by PSI and Alliance in Yangon, Myanmar brought together MSM groups from the entire nation to discuss and develop appropriate strategies to address sexual health needs for MSM.

In order to strengthen the regional network, RCS coordinated financial support and technical inputs from USAID/RDM/A, CDC-GAP and FHI to conduct a follow-on “*Regional Network Meeting: HIV Interventions for MSM in the GMS*” held in Bangkok on 31 July – 1 August 2006 with participation of local CBOs, governmental and non-governmental organizations at local, regional and international levels, donors and experts in the region.

In response to the need for training in advocacy for groups working with MSM in the GMS, Health Policy Initiative in partnership with FHI, using fund from USAID/RDM/A, conducted a regional training workshop in HIV Advocacy and MSM in the GMS in Bangkok, Thailand in May 2007. more specifically, this training aimed to improve the understanding of members of PSN country working groups on how advocacy relates to issues concerning HIV prevention, treatment and care. It also assisted PSN members in the identification of priority issues and the development of the practical skills and advocacy techniques that could be used to overcome obstacles to addressing HIV vulnerabilities.

To strengthen existing networks and further promote improved prevention interventions and care and support services for MSM, a number of further activities are planned:

- MSM regional meeting: to revisit the existing two-year vision plan and develop a follow on plan for HIV prevention, care and support among MSM in the region.
- A mapping update on MSM programs in the GMS that will inform the objectives and discussions at the coming regional meeting.
- A meeting of MSM groups in Guangxi, China.