

38th UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board (PCB) Meeting Communique by the NGO Delegation

CHAPEAU

By Angeline Chiwetani



The UNAIDS PCB held its 38th meeting last June 28-30, 2016.

UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibe's report highlighted the recent milestones in the Joint Programme, including the recently concluded UN High Level Meeting (HLM), as well as the challenges relating to the financial crisis affecting UNAIDS Secretariat and the Joint Programme. Our post-HLM reflections reflect

the diverse and mixed reactions of civil society, on what was achieved and not. The exclusion of some key population organizations from participating at the HLM was deemed unacceptable by the NGO Delegation.

Contentious issues at the PCB included the NGO Report on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Key Populations in the context of Development Rights and the revised Unified Budget Review Accountability Framework (UBRAF). The NGO report, which was postponed from the 37th PCB meeting, still encountered severe resistance from some Member States, prompting us to reframe our decision points. Indeed, if the language issue around SRHR puts people more at risk than the actual HIV burden, there is need to refocus our engagement to reach the goal of ending AIDS. The NGO Delegation affirmed the call to fully fund the UBRAF so that the Fast Track Strategy gets meaningfully implemented.

Leaving out community will not make any impact in this fight against HIV globally

This PCB's Thematic Segment brought reality closer to home, as we focused on the role of communities in ending AIDS by 2030. Good examples of community engagement in the HIV response were showcased. The NGO Delegation endeavored to have strong and diverse representation of community and civil society speakers from various regions. Apart from constricting spaces for civil society to engage, one other big challenge that was noted in the Thematic was that most of these organisations are operating on a shoe-string budget, which makes it very difficult to see ending AIDS being a reality.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

By Erika Castellanos and Lumumba Musah

The Executive Director's Report focused on the 2016 Political Declaration and the achievements that the Joint Programme had registered to date. Mr. Sidibe appreciated the support extended to the Joint Programme at the 2016 High Level meeting (HLM) on HIV and AIDS in New York. The UNAIDS EXD referred to the Political Declaration as "bold, ambitious, forward-looking and balanced," He reiterated the fact that the **zero** draft was inclusive of everyone's interests; however, Member States had to negotiate and agree on what was acceptable, which meant that compromises had to be made.



Mr. Sidibe also noted that the Political Declaration emphasized that people living with HIV (PLHIV) and those impacted by the epidemic are critical in implementing the UNAIDS Strategy to end AIDS by 2030. In addition, it also strongly called for investment in civil society and service providers to reach people who are left behind.



The report recognized the achievements of the Joint Programme to date, but also gave a clear warning that more needs to be done to end AIDS. He noted that the fight against AIDS was not over yet, as many challenges are still being faced in the response, including the high numbers of new HIV infections especially among adolescent girls. In this regard, he called on countries to embrace a human rights approach, as well as building strong systems for health.

In response to the EXD's report, the NGO Delegation took the opportunity to affirm the need for creating a policy environment that supports provision of information through comprehensive sexuality education, as well as availability of the right services at the right time for all people. The NGO Delegation also read a statement written by West and Central African (WCA) civil society, comprised of organizations that were blocked from the HLM. The statement raised issue against a "two-speed" HIV response in Africa, where West and Central Africa are at risk of being left behind.

Mr. Sidibe also recognized the precarious financial situation, but constantly reminded PCB members of the need to act immediately. To access the full report click [here](#).

NGO REPORT: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of People Most Affected by HIV: The Right to Development

By Jeffry Acaba and Simran Shaikh



The NGO Delegation presented its [NGO Report](#) with goal of educating Member States on the UNAIDS Board – and get them to take action -- regarding the inextricable link between SRHR and the ability for key populations to develop to their full capacities and participate in the political, social, economic and cultural resources of their countries. This was done by documenting examples of SRHR violations that continue to shape the lives of people living with HIV and key populations.



The proposed Decision Points (DPs) focused on calling Member States to recognize and support the linkages between SRHR, HIV, and right to development; on UNAIDS to produce an economic analysis on the impact of non-recognition and non-inclusion of SRHR; and on UNAIDS and partners to increase funding and technical support to civil society organizations and communities.

Intense discussions about the report and the proposed DPs began weeks before the meeting. Conservative Member States objected to the focus on SRHR and key populations while Western Member States objected to the focus on the right to development. Based on our dialogues with Member States, the NGO Delegation felt that compromise was possible, particularly on the proposed economic analysis and support for civil society organizations. However, in the informal meetings, prior to the Report's presentation, some Member States from each side refused to budge from confrontational rhetoric, making agreement impossible. In the end, we were unsuccessful in getting any DPs passed beyond the one calling for increased support for civil society.

At the PCB, the NGO Report was presented and debated on the floor. Member States were divided, including within regions, with some expressing strong support and others accusing the NGO Delegation of not caring about people living with HIV or about women and girls and of pushing an ulterior agenda focused on sex and promiscuity. In our response, we expressed how offensive such accusations were and insisted that we stood in solidarity with all key populations and would not be drawn into inflammatory rhetoric that seeks to divide women with HIV from other key populations. There were also fears that the Delegation's right to fully participate in the PCB would be challenged again, but ultimately no Member State made a challenge and a number of Member States vocally supported us.

Funding of the Joint Programme and the Unified Budget, Results and Accountability Framework (UBRAF) 2016-2021

By Ferenc Bagyinszky and Laurel Sprague



Besides sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and the right to development, the other big elephant in the room during the 38th PCB Meeting was the issue of funding. The Joint Programme has suffered severe budget cuts, particularly in the last year, which has reduced the UNAIDS Secretariat's core funding by 30% and the funding that the Secretariat provides to the Cosponsors by 50%. Prior to the PCB Meeting, a Financing Dialogue took place. Simran Shaikh (Asia Pacific) and Laurel

Sprague (North America) spoke on behalf of the NGO Delegation, emphasizing the necessary role played by the Joint Programme in pressing for the political, legal, and social environments that make the HIV response possible. Despite the pleas for further funding, no significant further pledges of financial support were made by Member States.



Given the dire financial situation facing UNAIDS, the Board engaged in a series of contentious negotiations to create Decisions to stabilize the financial situation of the Joint Programme. The NGO Delegation's priorities were to ensure that any decisions about budget cuts were based on actual budget numbers and scenarios and were based in knowledge about the differences in roles played by the Secretariat, the Cosponsors, and other partners such as the Global Fund, by region. The NGO

Delegation led the way in brokering a compromise that set minimum budget numbers and percentages for the Cosponsors for a short interim period, until budget estimates and scenarios can be presented to the Board for further decisions.

In our interventions, the NGO Delegation highlighted the same concerns we have expressed for the last two board meetings about the inadequate and unsustainability of funding that endangers the 90-90-90 targets and the objective of ending AIDS by 2030. The NGO Delegation and several NGO observers also pointed out the importance of proper funding of all pillars of the HIV-response, including funding communities.

Funding for community services and especially advocacy is constantly decreasing; its sustainability is not secured in transitioning countries; and it is always vulnerable to changing political climates and policies. Finally, the NGO Delegation called on Member States to stop criminalizing our communities and argued that this would release all the funds needed to fully fund the HIV response.

During the UBRAF section of the agenda, a revised set of UBRAF indicators were introduced. The difficulties in measuring the work of the Joint Programme, particularly the human rights work and the work in which multiple partners play a role in any outcomes, remain. However, the NGO Delegation welcomed the simplified indicators combined with a clearer accountability framework and theory of change in the new UBRAF. We believe that the new indicators will be easier for civil society organizations to use to understand the priorities and monitor the work of the Joint Programme. Our deep gratitude goes to the two technical experts from civil society, Luisa Orza and Dr. Michael Arnold, for the tremendous amounts of time, expertise, and goodwill, they provided as volunteers into the development of the indicators.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND STAFF ASSOCIATION

By Trevor Stratton



As the UNAIDS staff, management and contractors work to deliver on the targets of the UNAIDS Strategy 2016-2021, it has become obvious that they are being asked to do “less with less” even after reducing overall staffing levels by 5 % since April 1, 2015.

The NGO Delegation acknowledged UNAIDS Secretariat for its work in supporting its staff and in enhancing their

capacities. For example, the UNAIDS Secretariat *Human Rights Defenders Awards* has once again recognized outstanding UNAIDS staff who demonstrated leadership in promoting human rights in different categories. The Delegation also appreciated the *UN for All*, a new series of training modules designed to address stigma and discrimination in the UN workplace that was launched by UN Cares. The Greater Involvement of People living with HIV (GIPA) was also adopted into the UNAIDS Secretariat workforce through their own GIPA Policy Brief, which enshrined the more meaningful engagement of people living with HIV. The UN Plus, the UN System HIV Positive Staff Group and their work toward a compilation of good practices on access to treatment, care and support and a mapping of support resources is underway for use in cases of HIV-related harassment and discrimination.

The NGO Delegation also highlighted the Gender Action Plan that has been recognized as an example of best practice within the UN system in achieving gender equality and empowerment of women staff in the Secretariat. In response to our request that this Gender Action Plan be extended to trans people, staff within the Secretariat immediately approached the Delegation to ask for tools or mechanisms that have been developed for trans gender equality.

The NGO Delegation is cognizant that as we ask UNAIDS to do more and more, the UNAIDS budget is experiencing a shortfall of revenue to the tune of 30%. And although the UNAIDS Secretariat Human Resources Strategy has been updated and extended for the period of 2016-2021, these projections were based on a fully funded UBRAF.

THEMATIC SEGMENT

By Sasha Volgina and Simon Cazal



The 38th PCB Thematic Segment was on “the role of communities in ending AIDS.” During the preparations, the NGO Delegation endeavoured to bring grassroots and community-based organizations to showcase their work in advocacy, monitoring and service provision. The NGO Delegation also raised the recent challenges faced by communities such as underfunding, lack of sustainability during the

transition period, e.g., from Global Fund funding to domestic financing, hostile environments (including stigma and discrimination faced by key populations) – which do not enable communities to be rightful partners in the HIV response. Several studies from all over the world that show data on effectiveness of the work of communities were shared, and among the most interesting were from Asia. One insightful presentation of partnership between communities and governments was provided by Mr. Agustín López González, Director of Prevention and Social Participation of the Mexican National Center for the Prevention and Control of HIV and AIDS. That example showed opportunities, mechanisms of cooperation and great results.

Various speakers from the community raised the important issue of community engagement as a form of volunteerism, when it should be considered as a paid regular and professional activity. There was also a discussion of challenges in the transition period, e.g. for middle-income countries. The main call was for Global Fund to leave the countries when sustainability is ensured and that partnership dialogue between communities and Governments is achieved.

Civil society observers from the floor spoke about examples of good work done by communities and whose work is now threatened by discrimination, such as negative attitudes toward sex workers and inclusion of community organizations into the ‘list of foreign agents’ in some countries.

In the last session that was devoted to advocacy issues, PEPFAR announced the intention to create a special support programme for communities. When asked about the need to support the work of communities, Global Fund responded by saying that their funding is not structured to finance community and grassroots organizations.

Overall, the NGO Delegation was pleased with the conduct and facilitation of the Thematic Segment. Special thanks must also be conveyed to the inputs and

contributions of the Civil Society Advisory group who supported the work of the NGO Delegation.