Creating an Enabling Environment for Key Populations: Pushing Efforts Forward

In 2017, UNAIDS with its partners maintained a sustained effort to consolidate achievements made in the previous years to fast track the HIV response while upholding the rights of key populations (KP) in Myanmar. A specific focus was put on moving the reform agenda forward through continued multi-level advocacy which resulted in drafting more protective laws. Advancing the harm reduction agenda was another priority with a view to increasing acceptance and scaling up this public-health and human rights approach, including in prisons. Another highlight was the implementation of innovative combination prevention strategies across the continuum of HIV services. An ‘enhanced HIV prevention outreach’ comprehensive learning programme, introduced to HIV implementing partners throughout 2017, yielded promising results, including improved HIV testing uptake especially among men who have sex with men (MSM) and sex work (SW). 3MDG support contributed to the success achieved in these different areas of the HIV response among KP.
HIV Law Development

**Achievement:** The draft Law on Rights of People Affected by HIV (referred to as the “HIV Law”) aimed to be submitted to Parliament in the course of 2018.

This new piece of legislation resulted from a multi-level advocacy effort that started in 2014 and was successfully continued through to 2017 with the active contribution of multiple stakeholders. The support of the Legal Affairs and Special Issues Assessment Commission and the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Sports were crucial factors in speeding up discussions and increasing involvement of different ministries in the draft HIV law. The wide engagement in the review meetings enabled different stakeholders such as ministries, UN agencies, people living with HIV, key population networks and community-based organizations to provide inputs and reach a consensus on the language and provisions of the draft law. Discussions on the adequate responses to human rights violations of PLHIV in health, employment and education settings took up a lot of time and delayed the review process. In late 2017, during a meeting on the HIV Law, an agreement was reached to propose administrative proceedings and establish committees at different levels in charge of dealing with complaints.
Ratification of the Revised ‘1993 Drug Law’ by the Parliament

Achievement: The revised ‘1993 ‘Drug Law’ was ratified by Pyithu Hluttaw in November 2017. Key amendments included: (1) removal of compulsory registration for drug users; (2) shifting from a punitive to drug treatment approach; and (3) inclusion of the harm reduction approach in the law. This revised law which results from a comprehensive advocacy effort led by UNAIDS, UNODC and partners is more progressive than the previous one.

Although the amended law puts a greater emphasis on public health, several areas of concern remain. The provision exempting drug users from prison penalties for possession of small amounts of drugs for personal use raises serious public health concerns as it undermines efforts to reduce drug-related health and social harms, including prison overcrowding.

Advocacy efforts will be pursued in 2018. UNAIDS, UNODC and partners will be closely following up the drafting of bylaws to ensure that it is inclusive and that they address the concerns mentioned.

Drafting of A New Law for The Protection of Sex Workers

Achievement: The draft law for the Protection of Sex Workers was developed in 2017. It is expected to be finalized by a review process in the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and submitted to Parliament in 2018.

During the review of the draft HIV Law, several issues relating to the access of sex workers to HIV services were also discussed. The importance of reviewing the “Suppression of Prostitution Act” was touched upon as the existing law contradicted the provisions of the draft HIV Law. The first meeting on “Suppression of Prostitution Act” held in Legal Affairs and Special Issues Assessment Commission concluded that a new law is required to be developed instead of amending the existing Act. This decision resulted from extensive advocacy efforts led by UNAIDS, UNFPA and partners to decriminalize sex work and provide better protection for sex workers. A draft law was developed throughout 2017 with the strong commitment and support from the Commission and in close cooperation with civil society partners and community networks. The final draft was transferred to the Ministry of Social Welfare Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR) in late 2017. In a meeting with UNAIDS Country Director in November 2017, the Minister of MSWRR committed to finalize the draft of the law in 2018 after a wide-ranging consultation to consolidate inputs from different ministries.
Involvement in High-Level Policy Events

UNAIDS also actively contributed to the two following events:

Advancing Drug Policy Reform in Myanmar
Yangon, April 2017

The UNAIDS prevention officer facilitated discussions during this event jointly organized by the Global Commission on Drug Policy (GCDP) and the local Drug Policy Advocacy Group (DPAG) in Yangon. The chair of the GCDP and former President of Switzerland, was a special guest speaker in the event which gathered a large audience of CSOs, UN Agencies, representatives from the drug users and opium farmers communities, political parties, media and government officials, such as the Head of the Department of Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) / Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), and NAP Programme Manager.

Adoption of the National Drug Control Policy
Nay Pyi Taw, November 2017

The Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control / Ministry of Home Affairs organized a consultation in Nay Pyi Taw to validate the National Drug Control Policy that has been developed in 2016 with the support of UNODC, UNAIDS and partners. During the development process, UNAIDS was engaged in two working groups and provided technical advice in the areas of harm reduction and human rights, to promote and support a public-health and rights-based approach to drugs.

The final policy document includes five thematic areas:

1. Supply Reduction and Alternative Development;
2. Demand and Harm Reduction;
3. International Cooperation;
4. Research and Analysis (Evidence informed); and
5. Human Rights as a cross-cutting issue.

The consultation was attended by relevant government representatives, parliamentarians as well as CSOs, members of the drug user networks, DPAG and UN agencies.
Towards improving Health in Prisons in Myanmar

Progress on the Joint Prison Programme

UNAIDS, UNODC and WHO combined efforts to enhance health in prisons, which resulted in a detailed workplan that was approved by the Ministry of Health and Sports in February 2017. A specific focus was put on Lashio and Myitkyina prisons where nearly three-quarters of all inmates are imprisoned on drug-related charges and overcrowding is of particular concern.

Achievement: A set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) was developed to guide and build the capacity of medical and non-medical prison staff. Renovations and construction of medical facilities were also undertaken throughout 2017 to better answer the needs of the detainees.

Study tour on best policies, programmes and practices

Jakarta and Bali, Indonesia, August 2017

Achievement: Ten high-level officials from the Ministry of Home Affairs (Prison Department and CCDAC) and Ministry of Health and Sports (including the MMT Programme Manager) attended the study tour organized by the UN agencies to Indonesia. A specific focus was put on the sub-national level with the participation of representatives from Shan and Kachin States, two high drug-use areas.

The study tour provided a broad overview of both government-led services in prisons (including MMT) and NGO projects (e.g. community-based drug dependence treatment center) from which delegates drew the following recommendations for Myanmar:

i) implement a drug control policy on rehabilitation for users in possession of defined amounts of listed drugs;
ii) develop harmonized guidelines and SOP;
iii) upgrade treatment facilities, including infrastructure and human resources;
iv) initiate MMT in prison settings;
v) strengthen the system of testing and treatment for HIV, TB and Hepatitis;
vi) strengthen linkages with partners and community for post-release to ensure continuum of care.
Contribution to International Harm Reduction Conferences and Meetings

Myanmar under the spotlight at the 25th Harm Reduction International Conference
Montréal, Canada, May 2017

Achievement: Myanmar received much international interest at the 25th International Harm Reduction Conference in Canada with at least 20 delegates from NGOs, MoHA/CCDAC, development partners and UN agencies attending this major event to present their initiatives in various areas (advocacy, policy, practice and research). UNAIDS, through a presentation on embedding harm reduction in law enforcement practices, showed how through the local partner Sao Mon successfully engaged with the law enforcement sector. In a poster on the progress made towards pushing harm reduction forward, UNAIDS highlighted the pivotal role it has played in many of the key areas of the HIV response (law reform, capacity building, high-level advocacy...).

The International Harm Reduction Conference was also a great opportunity to learn from other countries’ best policies and practices, ground-breaking research and effective advocacy campaigns as well as to share experience with people from over 70 countries and identify interventions that may be relevant in the Myanmar context.

Asia Pro-bono Conference
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Sept-Oct 2017

Seven representatives from Myanmar attended this two-day conference which aimed to promote Pro-bono legal assistance for drug users and increase their access to legal aid services. Discussions focused on overcoming challenges and legal barriers in contexts where drug use is criminalized.

In order to support discussions, representatives from the Asian Network of People who Use Drugs (ANPUD) shared experiences and best practices from the Asia and the Pacific region. Myanmar participants included: two officials from the Office of the Attorney General including one from Shan State Government, one Co-chair of the National Drug User Network in Myanmar, one representative of Sex Workers Network in Myanmar, one lawyer from Wai Maw, Kachin State and one youth advocate.

UNAIDS and HIV Alliance were also part of the delegation and helped facilitate discussion and networking.

Expert Group Meeting on Harm Reduction on Stimulants
Bangkok, Thailand, November 2017

UNAIDS was actively involved in this important meeting held by the Global Partnership on Drug Policies and Development (GPDPD)*. The main objective was to look at the growing problem of amphetamine-type substances (ATS) use and discuss various approaches for tackling this issue that affects more than 37 million people globally.

*The GPDPD is a global multi-sectoral programme implemented by the GIZ in cooperation with different partners, including the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC).
Quiet on set, please!

UNAIDS engaged in the development of the 3MDG harm reduction video by indentifying for potential interviewees and relevant locations for filming in Kachin. The video aimed to increase public awareness on the effectiveness of harm reduction measures.

Engaging Government Stakeholders in the Harm Reduction Response

**Police Trainings**

**Achievement:** In 2017, over 450 police and government staff were trained on HIV, drug dependency and harm reduction in cooperation with the local NGO, Sao Mon. A total of ten trainings were organized in high drug use areas/areas with a high burden of HIV (Kachin, Northern Shan State, Sagaing Region). Aside from Police and staff from the General Administration Department, various key stakeholders from local authorities, health sector and NGOs and CBOs attended this one-day training so as to encourage dialogue and multisectoral cooperation.

This training initiative resulted in: substantial gain in knowledge (average pre-test at 54.6% and post-test at 83.2%, yielding a difference of +28.6%); better understanding of how police activities can negatively impact the delivery of harm reduction services and increased awareness of health service providers where drug users may be referred. Involving different stakeholders helped improve coordination at local level. As a result, partners reported fewer difficulties when conducting outreach activities, reduced bureaucracy to enroll clients in MMT in some areas, and reduced harassment of peer educators by police.

In Mandalay and Yangon - two cities with large populations of men who have sex with men and transgender, specific sessions on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities (SOGI) were added to raise police and General Administration Department staff’s awareness on issues faced by KPs.

**Harm Reduction Township Steering Committees**

Intense advocacy work by UNAIDS and UNODC resulted in MOHA/CCDAC’s decision to form HR Township Steering Committees (HRTSC) in Lashio, Myitkyina, and Kalay in 2016. During 2017, UNAIDS actively took part in several HRTSC which involved local representatives from law enforcement and health sectors, NGOs, CBOs, representatives from drug users network, religious and community leaders. By including a broad range of local stakeholders, the HRTSC meetings helped improve the coordination in the high drug-use areas; increase the coverage of HR services; and trouble-shoot issues in a collaborative way. Although this local coordination mechanism is supported by USAID, this activity complements the framework of the UNAIDS/3MDG project which fully falls within and reflects multi-donor / multi-stakeholder cooperation.
A Comprehensive Learning Programme

**Achievement:** UNAIDS and Save the Children’s joint initiatives to fast-track the HIV response through introducing innovative HIV prevention approaches for key populations yielded promising results.

Monitoring data from Jan-June 2017 showed significant improvement in HIV testing uptake and HIV test positivity, especially among MSM and FSW, when compared to Sub Recipient performance during the same period in 2016. These positive results were largely attributable to the comprehensive enhanced outreach learning programme that was implemented by UNAIDS /Save the Children in cooperation with the National AIDS Programme. During the first half of 2017, in the framework of this programme, HIV service providers and community networks were provided with a series of trainings, consultations and field mentoring to begin operationalizing new HIV service delivery approaches for KP.

**Trainings on Human Rights based and Gender Sensitive Approaches to HIV and on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) for KP**

**Achievement:** 225 participants from NAP, NGOs, KP networks and CBOs actively engaged in the trainings organized by UNAIDS and shared their personal experiences and stories of discrimination in the discussions and group work. In total, seven trainings were conducted throughout 2017 in various parts of Myanmar (Kayin and Shan States, Tanintharyi and Sagaing Regions).

The combined curriculum was developed with the LGBTI rights network Colors Rainbow, following one of the key recommendations from the MSM/TG situational analysis (2015), which was reiterated as a priority during the development of the National Strategic Plan on HIV and AIDS (NSP III).

Feedback from the participants indicated that they increased their knowledge and understanding about the human rights framework; the linkages between rights of marginalized populations and advocacy to promote human rights; human rights and health; as well as the concept of SOGI and would include these critical aspects as part of programme implementation.

In August 2017, a review workshop was led by UNAIDS in Yangon to assess the outcomes of the trainings and amend the curriculum based on the feedback and recommendations from the attendees. In total, 27 participants from various NGOs (MSI, PSI-Top Centre, PGK, MANA) as well as KP networks (SWIM, 3N, MPG, NMDN) contributed to this review. The main recommendations were to: i) be less theoretical and use clear, concise and easy to understand language in presentations; ii) use pictograms to understand negative impact of discrimination, so as to facilitate discussions and encourage out-of-the-box thinking among participants. The training curriculum was revised based on these recommendations and adjusted accordingly.

Consolidation workshops were organized with partners to reflect upon and share feedback about the learning process and outcomes of the training and coaching programme that has been implemented throughout 2016 and 2017. During these workshops, participants had the opportunity to share experience and validate the findings of individual consultations and field visits; discuss best practices and new approaches; collect inputs of stakeholders and work towards a consensus on the strategies to be taken. Hidden challenges observed during field-visit implementation were also discussed and recommendations were made to support, follow-up and monitor strategies as they were being rolled out.
Legal Literacy Trainings

Yangon, July and Mandalay, October

Achievement: A total of 66 participants took an active part in these trainings organized by UNAIDS in cooperation with the local NGO Legal Clinic Myanmar. Two trainings were organized with the objectives of increasing sex workers’ access to legal assistance, counselling, health and social services by enhancing the capacity of lawyers and para-legals to handle human rights cases. These trainings resulted in a substantial gain in knowledge about the legal system (average pre-test at 45-50% and post-test at 75-80%, yielding a difference of +30%). Feedback from participants indicated that the training provided a safe place to discuss legal challenges faced by sex workers; gain knowledge about legal procedures; identify police good practices and malpractices; and learn about the court process. Participants evaluated the training as very useful to understand the role of para-legals in HIV response and better support KP and requested to receive similar training with a focus on LGBT-related issues.

Human Rights and Gender Working Group

Achievement: UNAIDS convened three working group meetings that were attended by representatives from NAP, I/NGOs, KP networks and UN. Main topics discussed included: updates on the ongoing legal reforms (drafting of the HIV law and on the Suppression of Prostitution Act); and on the Operational Plan for creating an Enabling Environment. The working group is under the framework of the HIV TSG in MHSCC.

Workshop on Strengthening KP Access to Legal Assistance and Representation

Yangon, August 2017

Achievement: A total of 36 participants, mostly lawyers attended this three-day workshop aimed to share regional expertise in providing legal assistance to KP affected by HIV. This event was organized by UNAIDS in cooperation with HIV/AIDS Alliance Myanmar and Bridges Across Borders Southeast Asia Community Legal Education Initiative (BABSEACLE), with a view of ensuring wider access to legal representation for KPs in Myanmar and through fostering the system of legal aid. Drawing on the varying experiences of lawyers in social justice and criminal law, this workshop created a space to discuss challenges and opportunities in providing legal services to KP and PLHIV. The lead trainers/facilitators were Anand Grover and Tripti Tandon, from the Lawyers Collective in India with extensive experience in litigation and policy advocacy around HIV and laws pertaining to KP.
Journalists that were trained during the previous phases of the project (2014-2016) were continuously engaged by sending regular press releases and updates affecting harm reduction and the HIV response. They were also regularly invited to key events such as Zero Discrimination Day, launch of the NSP III and launch of the new Global Report on AIDS.

**Workshop on Press Release Writing for Community Networks**

Yangon, February 2017

**Achievement:** 20 representatives from nine different KP/ PLHIV networks were trained on press release writing. This workshop organized by UNAIDS was a follow up to the two-day workshop that was held in September 2016 to enhance the understanding of CSOs on the role of the media in raising awareness through HIV advocacy. This time the focus was on equipping participants with the basic technical skills needed to attract media attention. Participants were trained to think like a reporter, make a strong quote and write an impactful press release through interactive sessions and sharing tips. A session led by the local head of Internews focused on the Dos and Don’ts in press release writing. Key outcomes of this one-day workshop were to show how best community organizations can use the media to promote their activities; ensure that their voices are heard; and mobilize political support to reduce stigma and discrimination against PLHIV and key populations and fast-track the HIV response.

**Small Grants Programme for Journalists**

**Achievement:** Eighteen (18) stories on key issues pertaining to HIV and drugs resulted from this programme undertaken in cooperation with the NGO Internews. They were released on different media including: DVB, Myitkyina News Journal, Myanmar Now, 7 Days, the Voice journal, The Myanmar Times Journals, The Marnagar Journal, The Thanzin Pan Khine Journals, and The Asia Heart New Journal. A total of eight (8) small grants were disbursed to select journalists to allow them to do more in-depth coverage on HIV and drug-related issues. For this purpose, a field trip was organized in Kachin to produce stories with support from the Technical Officer on HIV prevention, Communication Specialist from UNAIDS and journalist trainers from Internews.
Advocacy Brief on the Proposed HIV Law
This advocacy brief/update was developed to complement efforts towards moving the draft Law forward. It aimed to raise Parliamentarians’ awareness about the key provisions of the HIV Law and highlight how these provisions can contribute to reducing stigma and discrimination against PLHIV. The brief was developed in both Myanmar and English languages and was distributed in Parliamentary Committees meetings.

Update and Reprint of Key Documents
The Policy Briefs and the Fact Sheets on Drug Use and HIV developed in 2015-2016 were revised to update epidemiological data and highlight outstanding changes such as the amendment of the Excise Act.

Developed jointly with partners

Advocacy Toolkit for Key Populations
The advocacy toolkit was developed in conjunction with the Community System Strengthening project funded by USAID as it was more effective, technically and financially, to combine efforts. It was designed as a comprehensive yet user-friendly document package tailored to the needs of community networks. It includes practical guidance and evidence-based information derived from the Myanmar context so as to make their advocacy work more focused and impactful.

Operational Manuals on Enhanced HIV Prevention Outreach
Two operational manuals for HIV service providers were developed jointly with Save the Children-PR as part of the comprehensive learning programme on enhancing HIV prevention outreach. It provides partners with a set of practical interventions to close gaps across the HIV service continuum.