

Report of the Regional Consultative Steering Committee
February 2018

A regional consultation of 55 religious leaders from 14 Caribbean territories with the support of the Coordinating Unit of PANCAP that was convened in February 2017, focused on the contributions that religious leaders can make towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. The consultation identified prevention gaps in the response, and suggested the promotion of healthy living and well-being of all ages as a means towards ending the epidemic. A ten-point action plan was developed and a regional consultative group was charged with the responsibility of ensuring the implementation of the plan. The action plan included:

- Promoting healthy living of people at all ages of the life cycle by placing emphasis on plugging the prevention gaps includes stressing family values, age appropriate sexual education, creative communication approaches and the dissemination of information to reach various audiences;
- Facilitating best practices through the process for effective support and leadership in the area of treatment and care, paying particular attention to achieving the UNAIDS 90-90-90 targets for 90% of persons living with HIV (PLHIV) to know their status, 90% of those who have tested HIV positive to be on treatment and 90% of those on treatment to achieve undetectable viral loads
- Establishing the foundations of a Network of Religious Leaders interconnected with national focal groups to achieve a more consolidated approach to ending AIDS with a mechanism for effective communication and dissemination of information;
- Seeking to engage representatives of key populations including men who have sex with men, sex workers, drug users and others in programmes aimed at identifying respective rights and responsibilities involved in the process toward the elimination of AIDS-related stigma and discrimination.

At the conclusion of the Consultation, participants agreed to:

- 1) establish a regional consultative group working virtually toward the implementation of the recommendations;
- 2) discuss the recommendations for action with their national religious councils and provide a progress report to the regional consultative group by 1 July 2017;
- 3) share information on activities, initially using the PANCAP website; and
- 4) consider the possibility of follow up regional workshops, 'think tanks' and consultations.

Since the February consultation, the regional consultative group of **xx** persons was established, national consultations have been done, and participating countries have been placing information on the PANCAP website.

The Terms of Reference for the Committee that were developed stated that the Committee should be interdenominational and interreligious and should include a member of the key

population group. The main role of the Committee being to ensure the implementation of the recommendations from the consultation, to facilitate the collection of data from religious networks/focal groups in each territory, and to oversee the development of a proposal for resources to fund the activities of the action plan.

The Committee is chaired by Canon Garth Minott of Jamaica. Alternate representatives to the Committee were recommended. The Committee has had three meetings since March 2017.

Survey results

The Committee developed a survey to solicit information on the involvement of religious leaders in the HIV response. The survey identified prevention, care and support, promotion of safer sexual practices among key populations, capacity building of religious leaders in the areas of counselling, prevention and anti-stigma in the national response.

Meeting of regional parliamentarians

The PANCAP regional parliamentarians forum convened in Kingston, Jamaica in May 2017 brought together 60 parliamentarians from different territories in the Caribbean. Government ministers and members of the opposition participated. The Forum, under the theme *What Parliamentarians can contribute to ending AIDS*, was a platform for parliamentarians from across the Caribbean to assess their role as parliamentarians in promoting healthy living and well-being for all ages, and to suggest strategies that parliamentarians might adopt and advocate to end AIDS by 2030. At the end of the session, parliamentarians agreed that issues involving the role of stigma and discrimination in perpetuating HIV transmission should be non-partisan and every effort must be made to protect vulnerable populations susceptible to HIV transmission including youths and LGBT.

Anti-discrimination legislation

The CARICOM legislation for anti discrimination was shared with members of the Regional Consultative Steering Committee as well as among the focal groups and other local groups and comments sought on the content of the legislation. The overall benefit of the legislation would be the protection of vulnerable populations, and is meant to ensure that more key populations would access health services and testing for HIV, resulting in the reduction in HIV transmission and deaths from AIDS. In Jamaica, an attorney of the Inter-faith Counsel and attorneys who are congregants of member churches of the JCC have been asked to review the document and

make comments on its content. However, the Regional Consultative Steering Committee has not been consistent in following up on action that might have been taken.

Champions for Change Initiative: Ending AIDS by 2030

The Champions for Change Initiative was first launched in 2004 with the aim of establishing policies and programmes designed to eliminate stigma and discrimination. A re-launch of the Champions for Change initiative was convened in Guyana in July (September?) 2017 to examine possibilities for institutional strengthening and partnerships for sustainability. Participants identified the major areas, programmes and related goals to be championed and agreed on mechanisms for supporting Champions to deliver on targets, timelines and goals. These include the need to ensure religious leaders, parliamentarians and civil society are equipped with the knowledge and skills for promoting healthy living, prevention of transmission, the empowerment of adolescents, children and women, and peer counselling.

Sixteen advocates for ending AIDS from across the region within civil society organisations, National AIDS Programme Managers, faith leaders, academia, youth, regional parliamentarians were recognised by PANCAP for exceptional work in advocacy.

Proposal for the implementation of the recommendations of the February 2017 regional consultation

A proposal for the implementation of the recommendations of the February 2017 regional consultation of religious leaders was approved by the Regional Consultative Group at its meeting in September 2017. The proposal provides a framework for action by national programmes, regional technical support agencies, regional civil society, as well as private sector and international partners. Within this framework, the activities that are identified respond to regional needs and capacity building priorities that are necessary in the response to address the prevention, and care and support gaps through the promotion of healthy living and the well-being of all as a means to ending the epidemic with a focus on establishing policy guidelines for reducing stigma and discrimination, preventing HIV transmission and providing counselling, care and support.

The **goal** of the programme is to contribute to the achievement of the global targets for the elimination of AIDS by 2030, by equipping religious leaders with the necessary skills for the promotion of healthy living and the well-being of men and women, boys and girls in Caribbean societies.

The **purpose** of the programme is to increase the capacity of religious leaders to deliver HIV prevention education and awareness programmes, within a policy framework that would lead to a reduction in the level of stigma and discrimination against PLWH and to the spread of HIV in the Caribbean.

The main **objectives** of the programme are:

1. To contribute to the development of a policy framework towards improving an enabling environment for access to prevention, counselling, care and treatment services.
2. To promote treatment adherence and HIV testing as a means of reducing the spread of HIV in the region.
3. To contribute to the increased provision of counselling, care and support services for people living with and affected by HIV & AIDS.

A workplan and budget are to be prepared for the implementation of the proposal.

Financial support from the European Union

Following the successful negotiation of the PANCAP secretariat with the European Union, funds were received from the EU for the implementation of the PANCAP Caribbean Regional Strategic Framework on HIV and AIDS 2014-2018 (CRSF) with priorities for prevention, treatment and sustainable financing.

(Garth, I am not sure if this forms part of the work of the Regional Consultative Group. Will fill in details on your advice)

World AIDS Day 2017

World AIDS 2017 was observed across the region under the global theme *The Right to Health*. Activities included a health fair in Jamaica and a statement by the PANCAP Champions for Change.

Regional consultation with religious leaders and key populations

A second regional meeting will bring religious leaders and representatives of key populations to the same table to increase understanding of

- a) the effects of stigma and discrimination on health outcomes;
- b) the public health rationale for work to improve the enabling environment, including law and policy reform;
- c) PANCAP's efforts in this area.

This event will be the first at a regional level to bring together key populations and religious leaders. It is expected to open the door for further dialogue at both the regional and national levels, and increase support for efforts to reduce stigma and discrimination, including law and policy advocacy efforts.

Presented by

Canon Garth Minott

Chairperson

Regional Consultative Steering Committee

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