



Minutes of the Annual Meeting of aidsfocus.ch, the Swiss platform on HIV/Aids and international cooperation

December 2, 2008, 14.15 p.m. – 16.45 p.m., Kornhausforum, Kornhausplatz, Berne

Agenda

Part 1: Formal Part

1. Minutes of the Annual Meeting 2007
2. Annual Report 2007/08 (till June 2008)
3. Accounts 2007
4. Strategic plan 2009 - 2011
5. Activities planned for 2009
6. Theme of the aidsfocus.ch conference in spring 2009
7. Election / confirmation of members of the Steering Committee

Part 2: Sharing of experiences and discussion

- **The role of Faith-Based organisations in the response to HIV and AIDS, with an input by Emery Mpwate**, AIDS coordinator of mission 21 in Cameroun, DR Congo, Nigeria, Sudan and Tansania.
- Varia

Participants:

Steering Committee: Vreni Wenger (SRC), Rao Satapati (CO-OPERAID), Ignacio Packer (Fondation Terre des homes), Daniel Bruttin (Swiss AIDS Federation), Coordinator: Helena Zweifel (aidsfocus.ch /MMS).

Partners: Ulrich Bachmann (TearFund), Johnson Belangenyi (AEMRN), Frank Boshold (Kindernothilfe Schweiz), Beatrice Bürge (Bethlehem Mission Immensee), Markus Bütler (terre des hommes Switzerland), Gabriele Hansch (SRC), Linus Jauslin (Aids & Child), Tony Jungo (INTERTEAM), Emery Mpwate (mission 21), Daniel Schwitter (World Vision Switzerland), Charles Senessie (AEMRN), Christina Stucki (STI).

MMS: Martina Staenke (Minutes).

Guests: Nathalie Vesco (SDC).

Apologies: Irene Abderhalden (Int. Federation Blue Cross), Esther Bodenmann (World Vision Switzerland), Irene Bush (terre des hommes Switzerland), Svend Capaul (SolidarMed), Jochen Ehmer (SolidarMed), Sepp Kaspar (SRC), Claudia Kessler (STI), Jochen Kirsch (mission 21), Martin Leschhorn (Medicus Mundi Switzerland), Susann Mäusli (Swiss Aids Care), Mark Moser (Int. Federation Blue Cross), Maya Natarajan (IAMANEH), Julien Reinhard (Berne Declaration), Stefan Siebenhaar (Bethlehem Mission Immensee), Maria Winiger (Caritas Schweiz).

Welcome

Helena Zweifel welcomes the participants in the name of aidsfocus.ch and leads through the assembly. 14 of 33 partners are present as well as representatives from SDC and MMS.

Part 1: Formal Part

1. Minutes of the Annual Meeting, October 23, 2007

The minutes are approved.

2. Annual Report 2007/ 08 (till June 2008)

In the German version there is a mistake on the last page. The word "und" should be deleted.

The annual report is approved.

3. Accounts 2007

Helena Zweifel reports that 2007 was a good year for aidsfocus.ch and income and expenses are balanced. She gives special thanks to the Swiss AIDS Federation for an additional contribution to the conference and the forum. The conference 2007 has been less expensive than budgeted. The coordinator also thanks SDC for the generous contribution of CHF 76'000.- annually, the Swiss Red Cross for an annual amount of 6000.- CHF and to all the partner organisations for their total contribution of CHF 24'000.-.

The accounts 2007 are approved.

The coordinator emphasizes that aidsfocus.ch looks hopefully in the future. SDC agreed to support the platform in 2009 again with the same financial amount.

Reorganisation within in SDC: Nathalie Vesco, SDC, informs briefly about some changes within SDC regarding health and HIV/AIDS. The health focal point (which includes HIV/AIDS) is now located within the division East and Southern Africa. The implementation of the changes will be a great challenge, especially concerning mainstreaming HIV and Aids in all of SDC, beyond the East and Southern Africa division.

Discussion: What happens to the SDC HIV and AIDS Strategy 2008-2012? is a question raised by Rao Satapati. Nathalie Vesco informs that the HIV and AIDS strategy presently is "on hold". The second question: Switzerland contributes 5 Mio Swiss Francs to UNAIDS annually, but how is the work of Swiss NGOs estimated? SDC values the work of NGOs, but is also committed to large financial contributions to multilateral organisations.

4. Strategic plan 2009 - 2011

Focus (as before):

- **Objective 1:** To increase sharing of knowledge and experience, and to build synergies among actors in the field of HIV/AIDS and international development

New emphasis:

- **Objective 2:** To strengthen skills and capacities. Stronger orientation towards transference and implementation of knowledge within organisations and with South partners: to promote good practice.
- **Objective 3:** To create awareness and to mobilize commitment to ensure access for all to comprehensive prevention, treatment, care and support, in recognition of the human right to health and life. More effort will be put into the information of a wider public, advocacy and dialogue.

Instruments to reach **the three objectives:**

1. *Conference:* The annual conference will be continued as a key activity that addresses a large number of experts and organisations.
2. *Forum and Meeting Point:* Both forms are places for sharing and exchange of experiences. The difference is mainly in size.
3. *Website* www.aidsfocus.ch
4. *aidsfocus.news* and *aidsfocus.flash*
6. *Working groups as per need.* The only working group that works well in the moment is the advisory group created to accompany the preparation of the conference.

Objective 2: More attention will be paid to implementation of knowledge gained and promotion and application of good practice in own area of work, in own organization and especially in collaborations with the partners in the south. "Learning from practice" is a key concept of the learning events organized by aidsfocus.ch. The platform perceives itself as a facilitator or moderator. The development of new instruments - e.g. e-learning courses, toolkits – is also considered.

Questions and discussion: Daniel Bruttin informs that the Swiss AIDS Federation is developing an **e-learning** course on HIV and AIDS. This could be developed further and adapted for use in developing countries.

One participant raises his concern on how to reach all these objectives. What are the resources to rely on? The coordinator leaves no doubt that without the participation and contribution of the partner organizations the platform will not be able to succeed. Another question concerns the finances. The Coordinator is confident as SDC confirmed its financial contribution for the next two years, a good basis for additional fundraising. Vreni Wenger from the Steering Committee adds that the development of a strategic plan does not depend on the financing, and that we have to look forward.

5. Activities planned for 2009

- Annual conference in April 2009
- Meeting Points /forum with guests
- Website and aidsfocus.news

Ideas:

- Support of amnesty international campaign on violence against women, HIV/AIDS and human rights in South Africa
- Memory Work: Film by Christa Graf and/or exhibition „Unser positives Leben“ cum Workshop on Body Maps
- Assessment of needs and tools available in support of implementation and transference into practice, development of new tools (e-learning, toolkit, etc.)

Questions and discussions:

Memory Work: Nathalie Vesco inquires about the target audience of the exhibition and the workshop on Body Maps. According to the coordinator, the primary target group are people from development cooperation, which could be extended to representatives from colleges of higher education who are involved social and therapeutic work in the context of HIV and AIDS and other diseases. The main objective is to disseminate information about this effective therapeutic tool and to sensitize a broader audience. The workshop could also be linked to the topic „Violence against women“. Working on the Body Maps means for the actors working on their own experiences which often are experiences of sexual violence.

6. Theme of the aidsfocus.ch conference in spring 2009

The coordinator introduces the seven themes proposed by the Steering Committee.

1. **Cultural approaches to HIV and AIDS:** Conceptions of health and disease, and related beliefs, traditional practices and the use of medicinal plants have an impact on behaviour and how people cope with the epidemic. Responses to HIV and AIDS need to be culturally appropriate, gender and age responsive, grounded in human rights and involve people living with HIV at all stages. Cultural sensitive approaches to prevention, treatment, care and support of partner organisations.
2. **HIV/AIDS and its impact on developing countries:** The impact of the epidemic has not been confined to the health sector, but impacts on the social, economic and demographic foundations of development: effects on labour supplies, saving rates, national security and social cohesion. AIDS is preventing both men and women from providing their full contribution to development, maintaining the structure of families and to sustaining productive capacity. Discussion of the HIV/AIDS problem in a broader development context, with country case studies.
3. **HIV/AIDS and food security:** The epidemic affects all dimensions of food security - availability, stability, access, utilization. AIDS is taking back progress in rural development, while it is causing significant increases in rural poverty and destitution. It mostly affects the productive age group, and its loss severely affects household capacity to produce and to buy food, the passing of knowledge to the younger generation and the ability to cope with disasters. Case studies.
4. **Climate Change and HIV/AIDS** are two of the most important long wave global issues and are likely to interact and to reinforce each other. HIV and AIDS as well as Climate Change increases vulnerability of the population, leads to loss of productive workers and migration, erodes organizational capacity. Approaches: multisectoral approaches, mainstreaming HIV in disaster management.
5. **Co-infection of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis:** TB accelerates the progression of HIV-related immune suppression and is one of the leading causes of death among PLWHA. Despite the recognized need for combined care of HIV and TB, the drugs and diagnostics currently available are not appropriate for managing co-infection. Drug interactions when treating both diseases make managing co-infection difficult. Approaches: integrated health programs, comprehensive care.
6. **Children and HIV and AIDS:** Vast numbers of children across the world become infected with HIV every year, and without treatment, thousands die. Millions more children are indirectly affected by the epidemic, as a result of the death and suffering that AIDS causes in their families and their communities. Need for child-specific prevention, treatment and support, social protection. Experiences and case studies of partner organisations.
7. **Violence against women and HIV/AIDS:** Critical intersections: Women can be infected with HIV virus through forced sex. Violence and fear of violence can prevent a woman from insisting on condom use or refusing unwanted sex, and can dissuade women from learning their HIV-infection status, etc. In conflict situations, women and girls are at greatly increased risk of physical and sexual violence. Need for women friendly health services, psychosocial support, empowerment of women, sensitising of men, programs in conflict settings that address both violence against women and HIV prevention and AIDS treatment.

Discussion: The discussion was mostly focused on topics 1-3. Some members particularly advocate for **topic 1**: A cultural approach is necessary in order to understand why projects are not successful. We need to understand the different elements of health systems and why and in which cases the traditional medicine has more relevance and impact on the people than the western medicine. We should look at harmful projects and analyze where the cultural aspects are ignored and then discuss how to overcome this failure. Especially in treatment and care projects cultural sensitive approaches must be included to ensure life long adherence. Cultural sensitive approaches in prevention may give information on people's readiness or resistance to change in behaviour.

Topic 2 is favoured because it offers the possibility to discuss the problem of HIV and AIDS in a wider context and to illuminate many different aspects. A comparison of different countries regarding the implementation of their work place policy is an interesting aspect.

Topic 3 would open the option to organise a joint event, as SDC commissioned a study on „Food Security“ and which will be presented in Spring 2009.

Tony Jungo raises the question on the objectives of such big conferences and its impact on our daily work. Helena Zweifel underlines the importance of the sharing of knowledge and joint learning which may lead to transference of lessons learnt into the practical work of each organisation. The evaluation of the implementation of the “Declaration of Commitment” last year showed that several organisations did use the insights in their work. Charles Senessie emphasizes the important function of the conference for discussing important issues in small groups which did actually impact on his practical work.

Decision: The aidsfocus Conference of April 2009 will be devoted to the issue of **„Cultural approaches to HIV and AIDS“** (10 votes for theme 1; 3 votes for theme 2).

Date of the Conference: April/May 2009, the exact date will be fixed by doodle. (It is fixed now: 6 May 2009)

The coordinator invites interested people to join the advisory group for the preparations of the Conference.

7. Election / Confirmation of the Steering Committee

The following members stand up for re-election: Vreni Wenger (Swiss Red Cross), Rao Satapati (CO-OPERAID), Ignacio Packer (Terre des hommes Foundation) and Daniel Bruttin (Swiss AIDS Federation). Claudia Kessler (Swiss Tropical Institute) would be replaced by another representative of the Swiss Tropical Institute in the course of the year.

Emma Amadò (Médecins sans Frontières) and Lucy Serena (ASFAG) are no longer available for re-election.

Tony Jungo (INTERTEAM) standd for election. Tony works for INTERTEAM as program officer for Africa. He has been for several years as a development worker in Namibia of which he had worked for three years in a church based AIDS project.

Decision: All members are unanimously confirmed in their office. In addition, Tony Jungo is unanimously elected as a new member of the Steering Committee. He accepted the election.

A round of applause expresses the participants' gratitude for the commitment of the members of the Steering Committee. On the occasion of the 5-year anniversary of aidsfocus.ch the coordinator gives special thanks to Vreni, Rao and Ignacio as the three members of aidsfocus.ch who joined the Steering Committee from the very beginning.

Part 2: Sharing of experiences and information

The role of Faith-Based organisations in the response to HIV and AIDS, with an input by Emery Mpwate, AIDS coordinator of mission 21 in Cameroun, DR Congo, Nigeria, Sudan and Tansania.

Short summary of the most important aspects of the presentation of Emery Mpwate (Power Point Presentation in the attachment):

- Religious faith and spirituality have been major resources in promoting health and well-being, especially in Africa. Most people in Africa don't believe in a natural death. Their worldview is mainly linked to spirituality.
- The earlier approach of the church was misplaced as they were not ready to inform the people about appropriate measures to prevent HIV and AIDS. To speak about sexuality and condoms is still a taboo in the churches.
- Despite the fact that the Church and FBOs have a very important role in responding to the challenges of HIV and AIDS, they don't cope appropriately with their responsibility. Their responses towards the global HIV epidemic have lacked sufficient urgency and commitment.
- "We don't have the right to give up because we are called to promote life rather than death." Mpwate calls for greater dialogue and action between religious and public health leaders.

Discussion: One participant underlines that it is a big problem that the churches can't recommend "Safer Sex", which is an ideological problem. Another participant proposes to educate traditional healers and adult men in the villages to share the ideas of prevention of HIV and AIDS, in addition to health professionals. The question was raised if prevention campaigns and information would be enough to change behaviour. A "life skill approach" is needed to be successful.

8. Varia

Linus Jauslin from Aids & Kind informs about their new book "Positiv im Leben stehen".

9. Thanks and farewell

Helena Zweifel expresses her thanks to all participants for their coming. She invites everyone to an Apéro following the official part of today's annual meeting in order to celebrate the 5-years anniversary of aidsfocus.ch.

For the minutes:

Basel, December 2008

*Martina Staenke
Medicus Mundi Switzerland*