



STRATEGIES FROM THE SOUTH AT AIDS 2008

XVII International AIDS Conference
August 3-8, 2008
Mexico City

At the XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico City from August 3-8, 2008, the international advocacy project “**Strategies from the South**” coordinated the “Hot Topics Networking Zone N°427” in the Global Village, called “**Hot Issues Corner: To Discuss, Gossip and Network**”. Since the Global Village is open to the general public -both those registered in the Conference as well as unregistered community members- it encourages broader exchanges with in-depth discussion. This allowed us to hold interactive dialogues about the issues addressed by the project with a great richness of perspectives, and to network and strategize with fellow activists and disseminate our project through printed or electronic copies of our publication, CDs, copies of our advocacy paper from UNGASS, and copies of the Strategies from the South poster “**Improving International/Regional Advocacy through Collaboration among Networks**” that was on display at the Conference, among other materials.

On August 3, the day the Global Village had its grand opening, the Hot Topics Networking Zone hosted a Welcome Reception open to the public with special Argentine food and drink. In the following four days of the Conference, **Strategies from the South** organized nine discussion sessions, many of them in conjunction with other networking zones and networks/groups about controversial issues related to HIV/AIDS, in which speakers made brief and provocative presentations to spark dialogue about a controversial aspect of the topic at hand.

On Monday August 4, the opening session was called “**The Give and Take on Mexico ‘08**”, which took an inside look at the organization of the Conference and generated discussion about ways to prepare for Vienna 2010. This session featured speakers Ana Luisa Liguori of the Ford Foundation in Mexico and Co-Chair of the Conference’s Leadership, Community and Scientific Program, and Marcus Day, Co-Chair of the Global Village Committee for IAC 2008 and Director of the Caribbean Drug Abuse Research Institute in Saint Lucia as well as Strategies from the South project member. The session was moderated by Mabel Bianco, General Coordinator of Strategies from the South and President of the Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer (FEIM) in Argentina and Coordinator of the International AIDS Women’s Caucus (IAWC).

The following session that day was “**Sex Work Not Trafficking**”, organized jointly by Strategies from the South and the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW). Meena Seshu of SANGRAM and APNSW in India and Asia Regional Coordinator of the project, and Melissa Hope Ditmore of the Network of Sex Work Projects (NWSP) were the featured speakers. This was an interesting discussion that incorporated sex workers’ positions from Latin America and the Caribbean and other regions, and the voices of experts on legal issues and Human Rights about the conflicts caused by the association of sex work with prostitution, and we looked at how to strengthen a platform that empowers sex workers.

The second day of sessions in the Hot Topics Networking Zone, August 5, was opened with “**The Invisibility of Lesbians (WSW) in the Epidemic**”. The speakers leading the discussion were Susana Fried of the gender unit of UNDP, Cynthia Rothschild of the Center for Women’s Global Leadership in the United States, Gloria Careaga of Fundación Arcoiris in Mexico and Dotty Aken’ova, Africa Regional Coordinator for Strategies from the South and representative of



INCRESE/AMANITARE. In this session, an important group of women, as well as some men, expressed their concerns about the invisibility of this group in the epidemic and the lack of responses. The participants recognized that this is a heterogeneous group in which bisexual women and others coexist, for example women who work as sex workers but have female partners in their personal lives, among others.

Following the session about WSW was **“Talking about Male Circumcision”**, jointly organized with the African Networking Zone and Strategies from the South, which confronted the practicality and effectiveness of male circumcision as an HIV prevention method in Africa, as well as its implications for women and sexual relationships with circumcised men. This discussion was led by Daniel Halperin from the Harvard University School of Public Health, Bernice Heloo, President of the Society of Women Against AIDS in Africa, and Cheick Tidiane Tall, Executive Director of AFRICASO. Moderating the session was Mabel Bianco. Halperin emphasized the need to differentiate between male circumcision as an intervention related to men's sexual health and as an intervention for HIV prevention, which is not adequate and it lends to confusion. SWAA and AFRICASO expressed their joint statement about the application of a universal intervention in Africa. The perspectives from other participants, especially those from Africa, enriched the discussion.

On August 6, the third day of “Hot Topics” discussion sessions, the first of two sessions was about **“The New PEPFAR and its Implications”**, jointly organized by CHANGE, the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) and Strategies from the South. The speakers were Serra Sippel, President of CHANGE in the United States, Kelly Castagnaro from IWHC and Suksma Ratri of CARAM Asia in Malaysia and member of Strategies from the South. The session was moderated by two representatives of NGOs from the United States who debated the new law passed through Senate, expressing the difficulties in this process and that the most important changes up for vote were not passed. Ratri spoke of her experience working with the Indonesian Network of PLWHA, and how funding recipients were affected by the use of 60-70% of funds going to intermediary organizations and not for direct services, in addition to the requirement of lowering costs and increasing the quantity of care services regardless of the quality.

This session was followed by a discussion led by and for youth, called **“Sexual Freedom or Abstinence? The Voice of Young People”**. It was organized by Strategies from the South in collaboration with Jóvenes Latinoamerican@s Unid@s en respuesta al VIH/SIDA and IPPF/WHR Youth. The featured speakers were Rafael Mazin of PAHO, USA, Alejandro Pompei from “Adolescentes viviendo con VIH” in Argentina, Luigi Burgoa of Colectivo GLBT in Bolivia and Brian Ackerman from Advocates for Youth in the United States. Andrea García Buitrago of PROFAMILIA in Colombia, and former member of Strategies from the South, served as the moderator. This session explored the need for comprehensive sexuality education for different groups of youth and ways to work toward its implementation, especially incorporating the participation of young people. The needs of Latin America and the Caribbean were specifically mentioned and speakers incorporated discussion of the Health and Education Ministries' agreement adopted prior to the Conference. We exchanged gossip about this and gave the stage to the voices of those young people present.

On the following and final day of “Hot Topics” Networking Zone activities, three sessions were held. The first was a meeting to discuss preparations and strategies for Cairo+15 or ICPD+15 in 2009, organized by the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network (LACWHN). The second session was **“End Violence Against Women and HIV. Now!”** which was jointly organized by Strategies from the South and the Latin American branch of the international campaign “Women Won't Wait: End HIV & Violence Against Women. NOW!”. The speakers were Alessandra Nilo



member of Strategies from the South and Women Won't Wait as well as Executive Director of GESTOS in Brazil, Clarissa Valdez of Colectiva Mujer y Salud in the Dominican Republic, Andrea Mariño of FEIM in Argentina, and Alma Estrada of ActionAID Guatemala, Women Won't Wait and Strategies from the South. The session was moderated by Nirvana González Rosa of LACWHN, Puerto Rico, who is also a member of both Strategies from the South and the Women Won't Wait Campaign. This session focused on Latin America, and participants looked at what evidence there is of the link between the virus and violence and what can be done about this dual epidemic, as well as this problem's invisibility in the Conference.

The closing session of "Hot Topics" was the "**Discussion of the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Declaration**", organized by the Mexican NGO SIPAM –Salud Integral para la Mujer– and Strategies from the South, and moderated by Axela Romero, General Director of SIPAM. The objective of this discussion was to introduce and explore regional strategies for incorporating women's, and especially HIV+ women's, voices into the HIV agenda. In this session, a project proposed by SIPAM was introduced: the preparation of a joint Women's Declaration from Latin America and the Caribbean based on a declaration made by Mexican women's organizations to the Mexican government calling for the support of women infected and affected by HIV.

Overall this space in the Global Village had great importance, especially in that it mobilized more than 200 people in the discussion sessions alone and over 500 people to take copies of publications and become informed about the project. In this sense, we were able not only to increase the project's visibility, but also open up the possibility for different groups, both those pertaining to networks involved in the project but from other regions as well as for other networks altogether, to interact on some of the "hot topics" we have been discussing since 2006 and to improve and advance on others. These events were made possible thanks to the great commitment of those involved and because of all the proposals they contributed during the planning process and in the face-to-face encounters at the Conference.

