Yunnan Parallel MSM Group provided a range of cultural and anti-stigma activities around World AIDS Day of 2010. As a MSM community group that primarily delivers HIV/AIDS prevention initiatives and serves MSM communities, the group provided a range of activities to promote gay culture and a sense of community among gay groups, and to advocate for human rights and anti-stigma.

In late November 2009, Yunnan Parallel provided the first-ever gay cultural activity, which included the G-spot magazine communications and the Kunming stop of the 2nd China Queer Film Festival. In order to make such an activity sustainable, we named it “Yizhuo” (Supreme) a carefully chosen word.

In 2010, Yunnan Parallel continued to provide “Yizhuo” cultural activities from an anti-stigma perspective, and the activities were supported by USAID, International HIV/AIDS Alliance, and other community-based organizations. Mr. Cui Zi’en (renowned movie director, fiction writer, and professor) and Mr. Fan Popo (Chief Director and film critic from Beijing Gay Cultural Activity Center) were invited to participate in the activities as honored guests. The two-day activities attracted around 200 friends from inside and outside the community and the level and depth of the discussions were beyond our expectation.

(Continued on page 3)
Thailand’s experience at the 1st Developed Asia Network Consultation

The 1st Developed Asia Regional Consultation on HIV in MSM and TG was held on 2-3 December 2010 in Singapore. The Thailand National MSM Network, although not part of the new network, was invited to share our experiences and it was an honor to represent the network during the consultation.

Along with representatives from Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, China, South Korea and Malaysia our three representatives, from the Government, Education and Community sectors, shared their experiences of working with MSM and TG. Under the subject of “What effective and innovative MSM and TG HIV programs have been developed in country?” we shared our situation on the HIV epidemic and the partnerships and novel interventions to address HIV among MSM and TG. Information about monitoring and evaluation and research methodologies in addition to best practice on Behavior Change Communication (BCC), use of technology and overcoming challenges under Global Fund round 8 projects (GF8) were discussed.

Participants were most interested in our experience of the collaboration between Thailand’s Government sector, and Community-based organizations (CBOs), to implement GF8 projects, in particular how CBOs are involved in the development of policy at the provincial level and providing input for country-level monitoring and evaluation processes.

In addition to countries sharing experiences, the consultation had several breakout sessions to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences of best practice and topics of interest. Some of the practices shared by Thailand included:

- Capacity Building training workshops such as report writing
- Group discussion on safer sex and condom negotiation skills through peer educators
- The introduction of compulsory sex education, for a minimum of 16 hours, at secondary school level (Liaising with Civil Society Groups and the Ministry of Education)
- Community groups working with elected Government representatives and independent human rights commission to advocate for acceptance and respect of MSM and transgender people and to reduce stigma and discrimination

At the conclusion of the consultation participants agreed to form the network under the name of DAN (Developed Asia Network).

Kosol Chuenchomsakulchai, Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand (RSAT)
Components of the 2101 Yunnan Parallel “Yizhuo” cultural week activities included:

- **Smile Photography Exhibition**: A week long exhibit of “smiles” photographed by Yunnan Parallel to encourage the wider community to understand, accept and care for gay people in Kunming.
- **The 3rd China Queer Image Traveling Exhibition** (Kunming site) brought queer films to Kunming for the second time. Four films not publicly released were shown, including *Gay Remembrance*, *Youth and Yellow Flowers and Grass*, *The Old Testament*, and *He and She: Gays Are No Common People*.
- **Interactive forum with honored guests Cui Zi’en and Fan Popo**: The topic “Mutual discrimination among gays: looking at gay expressions from Hollywood films” was discussed. Discussing social issues facing gays, the participants interacted with the honored guests with a focus on equality and human rights. Although much of the talk was specific to Yunnan, the topic was of universal concern.
- **“Have Dinner with PLHA”**: Parallel invited caring and kind-hearted individuals through the internet and phone calls to have dinner with PLHA MSM. On December 1st, 19 individuals were randomly selected among 247 people who applied to have dinner with PLHA. The activity was covered by CCTV, local satellite channels, and the majority of Yunnan’s local newspaper media.
- **World AIDS Day activities**: Yunnan Parallel and local gay groups, along with International HIV/AIDS Alliance, facilitated advocacy activities under the theme of “Rights and Respect: Let’s Take Actions Together!” Activities included “hugging”, “smile” photograph exhibition, blessings for gay people, and distributing materials advocating for the rights of gay people. The activities aimed to raise awareness of sexual diversity within the community and to respect the rights of gay people. Media was used to reach a greater audience and call on the wider community to and reduce discrimination directed at gay people.

**Experience and Lessons Learned:**

- Community engagement activities have enable individuals to contribute to reducing discrimination within the wider community.
- While primarily targeting MSM communities, the activities were also provided to the general public. Media was used to engage the general public and collaboration with the news media was improved.
- Group members and volunteers participated in developing ideas and designing the diverse range of activities, which were based on community needs.

**Reflections:**

- A small number of local MSM groups were not enthusiastically involved in the activities and although HIV/AIDS was the focus of their projects community needs and mobilization were neglected. They were unaware of the connection between anti-discrimination efforts and HIV/AIDS interventions.
- We could only provide the activities around the World AIDS Day because of government restrictions. We hope that such anti-discrimination actions can become sustainable and long-term interventions.
- Funds, resources, and support are still needed to provide better anti-discrimination projects and community culture building activities as levels of community participation remain low.

Last but not least, we would like to express our gratitude towards the community partners, international organizations, and government departments that assisted with the preparation of, and provided technical support for, the above activities.

_Yunnan Parallel MSM Group, China_
This year World AIDS Day focused on Universal Access and Rights, although Vietnam has made great progress in tackling HIV and AIDS, there are still issues to address, for example, many people who are living with HIV and AIDS still face stigma and discrimination in their daily lives. How best to reduce and eliminate such stigma, which is often based upon fear and prejudice, is a difficult task, but for World AIDS Day this year the Centre for Creative Initiatives in Health and Population (CCIHP) together with ensemble films, produced a film that addresses this issue in a different way.

Entitled “People Living with Stories” the film features eight people who are living with HIV. In a series of short cameos, the participants reveal intimate moments about their lives such as love, bereavement, a first kiss, a wedding day, or a friend’s loyalty. The central theme of the film is one of universal humanity - by telling their stories the participants reveal that they are just like others within their community and that they share similar experiences and thus are defined by the stories they tell. The film’s participants were from a cross-section of Vietnamese society, including Tai, who has featured in a previous PSN newsletter.

“One People Living with Stories” was shown at the Hanoi Cinematheque, to a full house, over three nights, including World AIDS Day. One of these screenings was attended by Vietnam’s national network of MSM. The film was very well received and there was particular interest in the style of the documentary that put people first and HIV last. The aim of this was to tackle stigma and discrimination by revealing that people living with HIV have similar experiences to everyone else, regardless of the labels that other people may give them.

One member of the audience asked why films have not been produced that deal specifically with the stigma and discrimination encountered by MSM and the LGBT community in Vietnam. This is a good question and one that certainly can be addressed by producing creative films that address such issues. So watch this space!

In the meantime “People Living with Stories” is now available on-line and is available at [http://vimeo.com/17947326](http://vimeo.com/17947326) please do try and catch it and let us know your thoughts or if you use it in any of the advocacy work that you do. We would love to hear from you.

*The “People Living with Stories” Team*  
CCIHP & Ensemble Films, Vietnam  
E: ccihp@ccihp.org  
E: ensemblefilms@gmail.com
Cambodian Youth Voices Count (YVC) representatives, Mok Sokha and Phorng Chanthorn, attended the Cambodian National MSM Technical Working Group Meeting in September 2010 to advocate for the inclusion of key issues affecting young MSM and TG into the workplan and activities of the working group. The issues were drawn from a set of recommendations developed at the YVC South East Asia and Pacific Consultation, held in September 2010. The recommendations, outlined below, include a broad range of activities to engage and include young people in the HIV response as well as the involvement of Government and other key stakeholders:

**Stigma and Discrimination**
- Data collection on the needs, challenges, social complexities of young LGBT and young people living with HIV
- Development of youth-led and youth-centered activities to disseminate key information on issues affecting young MSM and TG.

**Education: Lack of Resources and Services**
- Youth LGBT consultation with Ministries of Education and other stakeholders to review and revise current sex education curriculum to include key information on sex and sexuality with regards to sexual diversity and safe sex.
- Publication of Youth LGBT online magazine translated into local languages of the Asia-Pacific region.
- Online magazine-style podcasts that provide information to educate and engage LGBT youth

**Networking**
- Create an online network for MSM and TG Youth in Southeast Asia and the Pacific region, using existing social networking websites.
- Establish national and regional MSM and TG youth working groups
- Ensure youth participation in existing national and regional MSM and TG networks

**Self issues**
- Conduct qualitative studies/ rapid assessments on self issues
- Develop a training curriculum on self issues for youth leaders
- Create safe space for youth MSM and TG
- Create an educational campaign about self-issues through various media

**Health care and welfare**
- Undertake training for health care workers on MSM and TG issues
- Improve youth involvement in policy development, particularly for policies affecting youth
- Improve coordination with health service providers to strengthen the referral system

Dr. Ros Seilavath, Deputy Secretary General of National AIDS Authority (NAA) and chairman of the meeting congratulated the representatives on their involvement in YVC and raising the issues affecting young MSM and TG in Cambodia and in turn presenting the issues affecting MSM and TG in the region to the working group. He commented that YVC provides an opportunity for young people to participate at national and regional levels. Dr Seilavath also added that issues such as stigma and discrimination, networking, and lack of support and resources for health and welfare, for young MSM and TG will be included in current HIV prevention activities of the working group. However, it was noted that some of the recommendations would not be incorporated. It was recommended that the Cambodian National MSM Network - Bandanh Chaktomuk (BC) include a Youth MSM/Transgender Representative at the sub-national level and NGOs working on HIV/AIDS prevention among MSM and TG should conduct assessments on the needs of young MSM and TG in Cambodia.

**Phorng Chanthorn & Mok Sokha, Cambodia**
PATH, Ponsthorn Chanleaw. WAD is about something more than preventing HIV and remembering the past. Groups living in risk of HIV needs to look to the future and should use the day to tell policy makers and the general public their view on the contemporary situation. “Stigma and discrimination does not go away by itself, people need to be encouraged to open their mind and think differently” claimed Mr. Ponsthorn.

The social challenges MSM and TG people face in health systems, schools and in their work place are an integral part of the epidemic. Fear of discrimination and stigma leads many to avoid sexual health check-ups as well as seeking treatment if HIV positive. Furthermore, knowledge of HIV prevention in Thailand is far from sufficient. According to UNAIDS, only 44% of young men and 30% of young women aged 15-24 have comprehensive knowledge of HIV transmission. Although data show that the global HIV rate of new infections has declined by 19% between 1999 and 2009, low levels of knowledge and stigma and discrimination continue to create a dangerous combination that facilitates the spread of HIV. As 40% of the 7400 daily infections worldwide are among youth, the school system holds a crucial responsibility to educate students in how to both prevent HIV and to contribute to reducing social stigma.

“We should speak about safe sex as something fun and attractive, it should be something the youth wants.” states Mr. Ponsthorn as he explains the goal of a featured mini project; the Talking Wall. On the ground, carefully placed close to the footpath, three large pieces of cloth and coloring markers were laid out to encourage passersby to express their opinion on three subjects. The first, how to make safe sex more fun; the second asked the audience about their sexual preferences and the third addressed thoughts about condom use. Mr. Ponsthorn wants to steer the talk about safe sex away from the somber HIV talk and towards a more exciting way of thinking about it. Happily jotting down their opinions on the Talking Wall were Boom (18) and Kwa (17). “They can’t tell us not to have sex!” proclaimed Kwa when asked about sexuality education in school. If we are to successfully combat the effects of social stigma,
the way we talk about sex, condoms and sexual orientation needs to be out in the open. Mr. Ponsthorn’s mini project pinpoints the main tool we have in this process; mainstreaming information about sexual health.

As sexual diversity transcends all age groups the fact that youth, even the young ones, have sex needs to be recognized. Ignoring this is a dangerous game to play in the midst of an epidemic. Receiving correct information on safe sex practices means correcting common myths: first, learning about sexual health at an early age does not lead to earlier sexual debut and second, being educated about sexual diversity does not make anyone homosexual. What it does do is provide the means for young people to avoid sexually transmitted infections. In effect, proper education on safe sex is one of the main tools we have for fighting the HIV epidemic.

*Martin Olander, UNESCO Bangkok*

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**PSN Faces**

Share your story and experiences of working or volunteering with your community. How did you get involved, what is most challenging and what is most rewarding about working with MSM and transgender communities?

Please send your story of up to 300 words, and include a photo of yourself, to PSN Communication Officer. Email: kylie.johnston@treatasia.org by Monday 21st March 2011.
World AIDS Day in Cambodia highlights prevention issues for young MSM and transgender community

World AIDS Day is celebrated on December 1 each year around the world. It has become one of the most recognized international health days and a key opportunity to raise awareness, commemorate those who have passed on, and celebrate victories such as increased access to HIV treatment and prevention services.

To highlight the need to keep our communities aware of the ever present threat of HIV in the region the Purple Sky Network, World AIDS Campaign and MHSS collaborated for the first time to carry out significant awareness raising activities in Battambang province, Cambodia. Under the expert supervision of MHSS Executive Director Mr Phal Sophat the day’s events brought together community, local leaders and government officials to showcase and highlight issues affecting young MSM and TG in the local context.

As this event was the first time such a collaboration had taken place it was exciting to see such a great turn out of observers and buy-in from local authorities and policy makers acknowledging their commitment to addressing the issues faced by the MSM and TG community.

T-shirts and IEC materials were distributed and, in traditional Khmer style, a fun packed ‘edutainment’ agenda was the order of the day with games, karaoke and speeches made by local community leaders highlighting the key issues for prevention and the challenge of minimizing stigma and discrimination within the community.

The World AIDS Campaign is committed to supporting and collaborating with regional and national level partners in the Greater Mekong Region through awareness raising activities such as these. We also hope to develop further opportunities to build capacity and address emerging issues that the community self identify, be it through the country specific Technical Working Groups of PSN or other regional fora. PSN were key partners in the Youth Voices Count regional consultations, in September and November 2010, for young MSM and TG and for 2011 we hope that our partnership will reach greater heights as we look at ways to reach out to the community through advocacy and capacity building opportunities.

For further information on World AIDS Campaign and our activities please visit the website: www.worldaidscampaign.org or contact the Constituencies Campaign Coordinator Greg Gray at the following email grayg@worldaidscampaign.org

Greg Gray, World AIDS Campaign
Phal Sophat, MHSS Cambodia
HIV and AIDS Data Hub Asia-Pacific: MSM Country Snapshots

The MSM Country Snapshots, developed by UNAIDS Regional Support Team Asia-Pacific, in partnership with APCOM, provide country specific information on HIV, men who have sex with men and transgender women. The information briefs build upon the first snapshots, developed in 2009, and have been expanded to include information on law enforcement and legal situation, stigma and discrimination and community-based responses to HIV in addition to the most current epidemiological and behavioral data. Country information is updated as new data is made available. Feedback and corrections can be sent to msm-ap@unaids.org. The snapshots will also be available on the APCOM website www.apcom.org in late January.

Civil society groups urged to participate in UNGASS Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation

The Asia-Pacific UNGASS regional consultation will be held in Bangkok, Thailand on 7-8 March 2011 (TBC) in the lead up to the UN General Assembly 2011 Comprehensive AIDS Review in June. The meeting, to be convened in New York, will review countries’ progress in realizing the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. The review is a moment for the reconfirmation of political will around HIV and universal access. The review will build on: outcomes of UNAIDS’ regional meetings; country reports; and the Secretary General’s report, expected in April 2011.

ICASO (International Council of AIDS Service Organizations), International and Regional Secretariats and sub-regional partners are working with national partners in 15 countries to support the community sector to document, provide critical analysis, and undertake policy dialogue for accountability on achieving Universal Access commitments. The methodology for the Universal Access 2010 Review is based around participatory action research (PAR). Findings will be compiled into a Global Report which will be launched at the 2011 review.

It is now imperative that local civil society organizations mobilize their constituencies to become involved in advocacy at country level; joining in your national delegation to the June meeting; engaging in regional consultations, and engaging with members of the civil society taskforce.

To find out more about the UNGASS 2011 AIDS Review, you can join aidsreview2011@googlegroups.com by emailing PaulineHG@icaso.org
www.icaso.org/ungass.html
Purple Sky Network is the network of governmental organizations, NGOs, community-based organizations and international organizations working with MSM and transgender women in the Greater Mekong sub-region, including Cambodia, China (Guangxi and Yunnan provinces), Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

Call for articles Volume 8: April - June 2011

PSN Newsletter is moving to quarterly editions. The next issue will be out on April 2011. We would like to hear about issues affecting your MSM and transgender communities. Articles of up to 500 words, and photos, can be submitted to the PSN Communication Officer by Monday 21st March 2011.

e-mail: kylie.johnston@treatasia.org

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Calendar

January
19 - 21 14th Bangkok International Symposium on HIV Medicine, Bangkok, Thailand
www.hivnat.org/bangkoksymposium

28 Early registration closes ICAAP 10
Busan, Republic of Korea
www.icaap10.org

February
15 - 17 PSN Board Meeting
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

16 - 17 Asia-Pacific Regional Dialogue on HIV and the Law, Bangkok, Thailand

March
31 Abstract submission closes ICAAP 10
Busan, Republic of Korea
www.icaap10.org

Note: All dates are correct at time of publication