

Highlights from AIDS2020

Introduction

The 23rd International AIDS conference took place online from the 6th-10th of July. AIDS 2020: VIRTUAL allowed participants to access and engage with the most recent HIV science, advocacy and knowledge in an interactive online space. It was an engaging combination of virtual sessions, workshops, art exhibitions and networking, that reached audiences around the world. For highlights and updates from AIDS2020, see [here](#).

This was followed by a virtual COVID-19 conference organised by the International AIDS Society (IAS) on the 10th-11th of July. The conference highlighted the latest science, policy and practice of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is in recognition of the urgent need to analyse research, review policy and exchange frontline experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic. All material from this conference is now available online. To access the conference material, please see [here](#).

Share-Net Netherland's Community of Practice working on the integration of SRHR & HIV is very happy to share an overview with highlights and lessons learned from the AIDS2020 Conference.

These highlights are based on the experiences of various colleagues whose work focuses on SRHR & HIV.

Enjoy the read!

AIDS 2020 HIGHLIGHTS FOR SHARE-NET MEMBERS

Inclusion of transgender men

One session that stood out for me was the first ever session at an AIDS/HIV conference by and on transgender men. This group of people is often overlooked because of the idea that they are not or less at risk. This leads to there being hardly any data on transgender men and HIV. The session called for the inclusion of transgender men in research and interventions. It also showed some of the ways in which they are at risk.

Roanna van den Oever, Children & Youth programmes, Aidsfonds

Tools for qualitative research, stigma and the HIV power wheel

Attending the AIDS2020 conference allowed me to learn more on the different tools that can be used in qualitative research, for example on narrative storytelling. In the programme we're working at we adapted some of these tools into the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning manual we developed for our partners. Sessions such as the ones on stigma and learning on the HIV power wheel have impacted the work I am currently doing. It made us aware of the power balances in the programme and will inform the activities that will be implemented in 2021.

Soraya Bouwmeester, HandsOff! programme, Aidsfonds

Dapivirine Ring

Very good news that we can add a female controlled HIV prevention method to the tool box - especially as adolescent girls and young women have too little control over their sexual health and may need this extra bit of protection.

Long acting PrEP

The good news here is that PrEP is almost 100% effective, but only if taken consistently. Eight weekly injections will make it much easier for many men to protect themselves.

A desperate attempt of UNAIDS to remain relevant by linking HIV to COVID-19

UNAIDS is developing their next long term strategy to reach the 2030 SDG targets for HIV: ending AIDS. The world is not on track and needs UNAIDS to keep us focused on this ambitious goal. UNAIDS seemed to talk COVID-19 a lot at the conference, instead of providing a laser sharp focus on AIDS. This seems a risky strategy to maintain relevance and funding.

Paul Janssen, Public Health Physicia

Interview with Dance4Life trainer

What was your highlight of the conference?

Major highlight is that we have a lot to learn and share in the fight against HIV/AIDS and now COVID-19. Stigma is still one of the major challenges faced by persons living with HIV/AIDS and gradually, there is an increasing financial burden or funding challenges the community is facing. It is very important to highlight that significant progress has been made in this fight. Example being, more people going on and staying on treatment and after testing positive and more people living longer with the virus. However the current Pandemic poses new threats to the progress made. A collective response from all stakeholders is continuously need to fight HIV/AIDS as well as COVID-19

What has this conference inspired you to do or think about?

Generally, I have been reflecting about the gender related challenges that most of the sessions I attended presented. I think that in the space of academia, research and science is still very male dominated and I've been thinking about how that can be changed. In a few instances, the topic of rape and defilement came up and the increased vulnerability of females to get infected in these situations gave me more to reflect in as well. I think that the more I attend these conferences, the more learnings I gather from the perspective of sexual and gender minorities. This is primarily in relation to access to health care services, SRH commodities and information. I have been thinking that maybe if we focus less on discrimination against such groups and focus on working together then we can actually make a head way in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Sherifa Awudu
(25 years)
Trainer4Life,
Ghana

Sherifa, What was your favourite session and why?

Overall I really enjoyed the 3 sessions below the most so I am unable to choose. Below are my favorite sessions.

I. “Women Powered Solutions; Changing the Narrative around Women and HIV response”.

This session was my favourite because it explored the involvement and inclusion of women and girls in HIV related researches. Major highlights from this session includes the possibility of having more female researchers in the field of HIV response as well as the inclusion of women and girls during research as beneficiaries. The session further explored the possibilities of gender dynamics in the fight against HIV/AIDS pandemic.

II. Young People Changing the HIV Narrative in Ghana (Global Village and Youth Programme)

The facilitators for this session included Adjoa Yenyi, Abigail Ashun-Sarpy and Naa-Amy Wayne of UNFPA Ghana. From this session, they shared how UNFPA Ghana through the Youth Leaders Fellows embarked on some outreach to educate other young people on HIV and its prevention. One key highlight was the use of gamification as an innovative way of disseminating HIV education to young people. Also explored was the influence and effects of having one-on-one engagements, information dissemination through music and dance among others which proved very effective in engaging young people in communities.

III. My body, my health, my choice: Sexual and Reproductive Health rights and justice

Deneen Robinson led a session on “My Body, My Health, My Choice: Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and Justice. She established the fact that black women with HIV/AIDS face systemic barriers in realizing sexual and reproductive justice in the current political, legal and socioeconomic system. She added that it is crucial to introduce a care model to HIV programming for persons living with HIV. According to the facilitator, reproductive justice helps to reduce stigma on HIV and helps achieve bodily autonomy. There was a call on stakeholders to establish and support initiatives to empower women on their reproductive rights. Deneen Robinson emphasized that using a framework like reproductive justice will go a long way for women to exercise their SRHR. I found this session very interesting because many women especially in Africa have little to no control of their reproductive health. Typical example is the decisions as to whether or not to have children. Furthermore the discussion allowed for me to relate to some of the issues that came up during the session.

Interview with Dance4Life trainer

What was your favourite session and why?

I liked the session on Sex is more pleasurable when it is safe!

The session was focused on encouraging young people to practice safe sex which can lead to pleasure and safety. They have brought SRHR experts and activists who present their experience why it is important to have consent and maintain safety with contraceptive devices. And how pleasure can be achievable by keeping things safe for both partners.

Also, I did manage to attend one session on COVID-19 and HIV called Making sense of science. The presenters were presenting the scientific explanation of COVID-19. There were data on increasing no of infected people in countries. Moreover, experts highlight the role of young people during this pandemic. How people are taking responsibility by testing themselves and aware elders about the virus and the importance of getting tested. They believe big change can be brought by young people from all around the world.

What has this conference inspired you to do or think about?

After attending this conference I am assured that no matter what, things get better. When I joined Dance4Life in 2012 I was introduced with HIV and AIDS on depth level. I didn't expect that situation can be better like this. Vaccines and treatment facilities are getting better day by day and still many are working on it. I felt more inspired and enthusiastic for the future to continue my journey as a Trainer4Life. I strive to encourage and empower young people to fight with AIDS pandemic.

**Rekha Trikhatri
(28 years)
Trainer4Life,
Nepal**

Interview with Dance4Life champion

What was your favourite session and why?

My favorite was a session on HIV disparities: on how HIV affects marginalized and disenfranchised racial and sexual populations more. This session was my favorite because I believe in order to end HIV, we need to talk about the disparities and pay more attention to marginalized and minority groups that are most affected.

What has this conference inspired you to do or think about?

AIDS2020 inspired me to think about focusing more attention to fighting HIV stigma as well upscaling HIV prevention programs to marginalized groups who are the most affected. Aside a few technical issues (ranging from internet issues to navigating through virtual platforms), I think it was a beautiful experience. Who would have thought we could attend a conference from the comfort of our rooms/offices?

**Abdul-Hanan Saani
Inusah
(23 years)
Champion4Life,
Ghana**

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and become part of the knowledge platform on SRHR as either a member or a sponsor. When joining Share-Net, you will not only be contributing to our mission and vision, but you will also be able to enjoy specific member benefits:

- Have free access to all the meetings that we organise. (Non-members participate at cost-price)
- Participate in our working groups or CoPs, which is exclusive for members. These groups are crucial for agenda setting, organizing meetings and executing small research projects. For more information on the Share-Net Netherlands working groups and thematic groups please visit www.share-net.nl/working-groups.
- Be elected in one of our governing bodies, the Steering Committee of the Netherlands or the Board of Share-Net International. All members are invited to our annual business meeting.
- Be eligible for our yearly call for proposals for the Share-Net International Small Grants facility.