

(Even) Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

A Case Study on Working Together as the Consortium of MSM and Transgender Networks

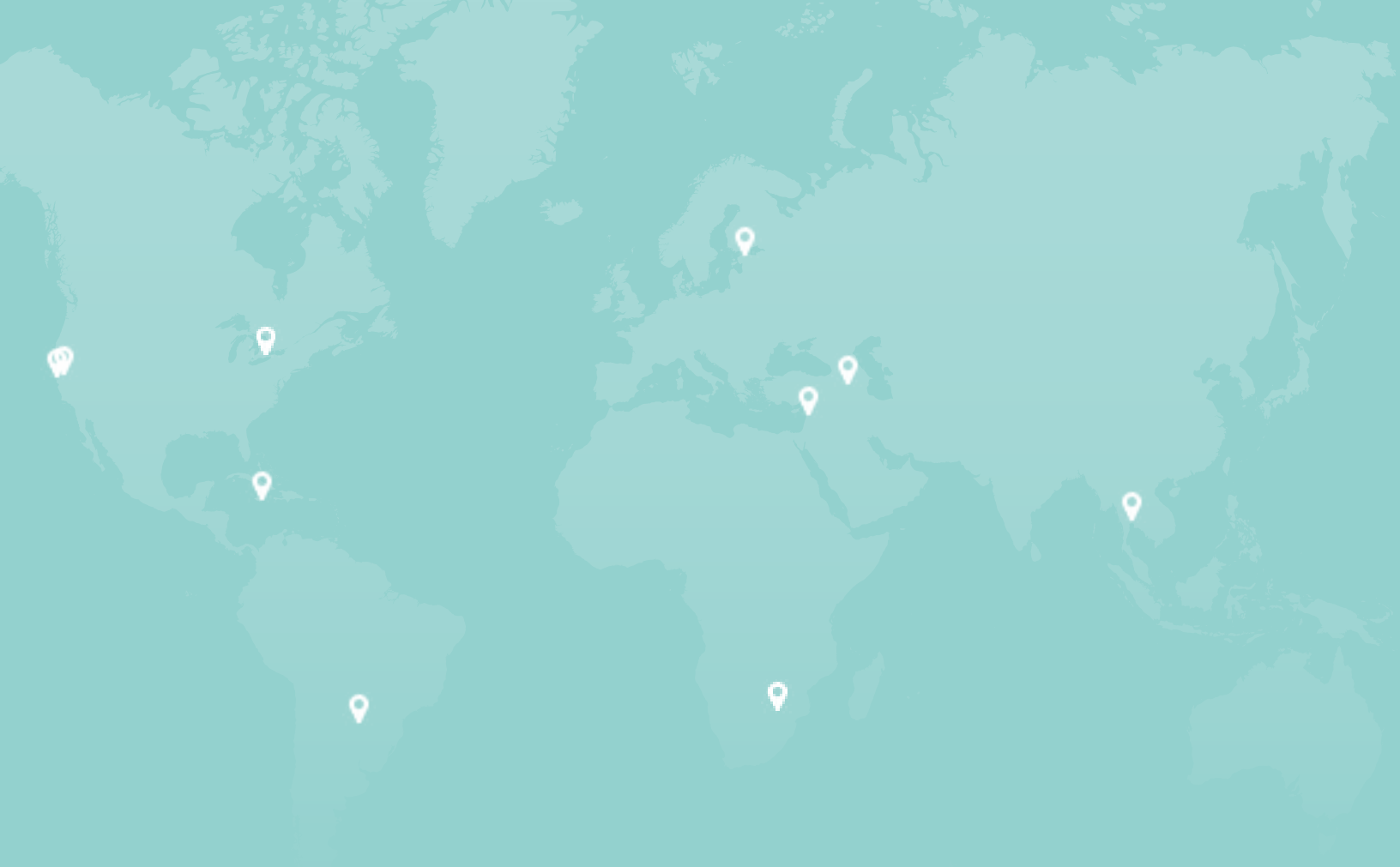


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A Case Study on Working Together as the Consortium of MSM and Transgender Networks

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Summary

The Consortium of MSM and Transgender Networks is a groundbreaking alliance of global and regional networks by and for men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender communities. It currently has 10 members of diverse size, scope and focus that, combined, cover all regions of the world¹. The Consortium started in 2013 in response to major challenges confronting MSM and transgender communities. While networks had a critical role, in isolation, many were fragile. The Consortium was set up to pool their energy, expertise and resources, serving as a united force.

The Consortium addresses the HIV, sexual health and human rights needs of MSM and transgender people. Its objectives focus on: **1. Policy:** Ensuring that national HIV policies and plans - including for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief - support the rights and needs of MSM and transgender communities; **2. Engagement:** Ensuring that MSM and transgender representatives are informed, capacitated and meaningfully engaged in national HIV policy-making and planning; **3. Program:** Ensuring the development and implementation of evidence and human rights-based, good practice HIV programs for MSM and transgender communities; and **4. Coordination:** Ensuring that technical support, community mobilization and advocacy for MSM and transgender communities are well coordinated within and across regions. The Consortium has guiding principles and agreed roles and responsibilities. The Global Forum on MSM and HIV is currently its lead organization, with overall responsibility for coordination, administration and communications. Much of the Consortium's work has been supported through the Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund - with core and project funding enabling the members to both strengthen their organizations and carry out interventions.

The Consortium has demonstrated that the 'value added' of working together includes:

- » Providing an opportunity to strengthen the organizational capacity of regional and global networks - laying the foundations for strengthened advocacy.

¹ African Black Diaspora Global Network (ABDGN); African Men for Sexual Health and Rights (AMShEr); Asia Pacific Coalition on Male Sexual Health (APCOM); Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition (CVC); Eurasian Coalition on Male Health (ECOM); Global Forum on MSM and HIV (MSMGF); IRGT - A Global Network of Transgender Women and HIV; M-Coalition; SOMOSGAY; and South Caucasus Network on HIV (SCN).

- » Improving the quality of programmes and advocacy for MSM and transgender communities – by streamlining communications, pooling expertise, agreeing good practice and having a united voice.
- » Providing a set of shared, agreed objectives – that serve as a framework for each network's individual results and, in turn, strengthen the 'advocacy pathway' between the national, regional and global levels.
- » Providing a nurturing environment to 'fast track' the development of emerging MSM and transgender networks.
- » Providing a stable, global platform that serves as a united front to tackle sensitive issues and hostile environments – by offering credibility, legitimacy and protection to individual networks.
- » Facilitating joint access to funding opportunities - reducing competition and indicating a more time and cost-efficient model of grant management.
- » Providing a simpler, quicker mechanism for external stakeholders to consult with MSM and transgender leaders.

The Consortium's lessons include that it is important to: build the capacity of individual organizations; negotiate shared objectives; leverage each network's strengths; fully resource the role of lead organization; and combine building mutual trust with formal systems, such as for due diligence. Its future directions could include: identifying joint priorities for research or advocacy; expanding the donor pool (to increase independence and sustainability); and building structured relationships with other key population consortia and wider health and social movements. To support these, it is recommended that policy-makers and donors:

1. Actively learn about the unique roles and results of regional and global networks within action on HIV, sexual health and human rights for MSM and transgender communities.
2. Invest in those roles and results by providing funding opportunities for consortia of key population networks – as effective and cost-efficient mechanisms to support networks. Ensure that those opportunities provide access to both core and implementation funding.
3. Within those opportunities, ensure adequate resources for lead organizations.



What is the Consortium?

The Consortium of MSM and Transgender Networks is a groundbreaking alliance of **global and regional networks** that are by and for men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender communities. It currently has 10 members – networks of diverse size, scope and focus that, combined, cover all regions of the world.

The Consortium is dedicated to addressing the HIV, sexual health and human rights needs of MSM and transgender people. It aims to build well-informed, capacitated and engaged MSM and transgender advocates at all levels (national, regional and global). In turn, these achieve increased quality, investment and coverage of tailored and rights-based programs for their communities.

Each member of the Consortium brings unique experience from their specific context. They support a wide range of MSM and transgender people, including those who are living with HIV, young, migrants, sex workers or who use drugs. To ensure ‘**no one left behind**’, the group has grown over time, with new members filling technical and geographic gaps. For example, IRGT - A Global Network of Transgender Women and HIV joined to bring expertise in transgender issues, while M-Coalition joined as the first ever MSM network in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Consortium has a set of **guiding principles**, such as that decisions are made through consensus. These, and the members’ **roles and responsibilities**, are set out in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by every network. The Global Forum on MSM and HIV (MSMGF) currently serves as the Consortium’s **lead organization**, with overall responsibility for its coordination, administration and communications.



Why was the Consortium started?

The Consortium started in 2013 in response to **major, common challenges** confronting MSM and transgender networks. Their communities experienced persistent stigma, vulnerability to HIV and human rights abuses.

Their organizations faced a funding crisis – with a general reduction in HIV financing combined with specific under-funding of networks. Within the wider environment, new evidence and guidelines – such as on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and Antiretroviral therapy (ART) – brought opportunities, but also raised ethical and technical questions. Changing economic patterns – particularly in lower-middle and middle-income countries (home to the majority of people living with HIV) – threatened countries' eligibility for key donors, such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (the Global Fund) and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) now see HIV integrated into wider responses to health and rights – risking neglect of the specific needs of MSM and transgender people.

Within this changing and challenging context, the role of global and regional MSM and transgender **networks** was more critical than ever – serving as hubs for mobilization, capacity building and advocacy across communities and countries. However, in isolation, many were fragile – especially those that were new, small and/or working in hostile environments. It was clear that they could achieve much more **together**.

As a result, the Consortium was set up for MSM and transgender networks to pool their energy, expertise and resources. It serves as an unprecedented means to stand together, working as a **united force**.



What work does the Consortium do?



The Consortium's work has focused on four objectives related to policy, engagement, programs and coordination.

Examples of the activities carried out by some or all of the members are given below, grouped under each objective. Much of this work has been supported through grants from the Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund (RCNF) - set up in recognition of the critical role, but also funding gap, for global and regional key population networks. The grants have provided both core and project resources – enabling Consortium members, individually and collectively, to strengthen their organizations, as well as carry out interventions.

POLICY WORK

Ensuring that national HIV policies and plans - including for the Global Fund and PEPFAR - support the rights and needs of MSM and transgender communities

FOR EXAMPLE, CONSORTIUM MEMBERS:

- » Compile MSM and transgender data for technical briefs to inform national HIV policy-making.
- » Strengthen the coordination of national MSM and transgender advocates, such as through e-lists and websites.
- » Increase the knowledge and skills of MSM and transgender advocates through tailor-made communication tools and training kits in local languages.
- » Conduct surveys and cases studies on MSM and transgender engagement in national HIV processes, such as Global Fund Country Dialogues.
- » Conduct consultations with MSM and transgender communities to inform national HIV policy-making.
- » Coordinate advocacy to decision-makers to introduce or change policies and laws affecting MSM and transgender communities.
- » Strengthen the accountability of national HIV processes – by acting as a watchdog and reporting concerns to relevant stakeholders.

ENGAGEMENT WORK

Ensuring that MSM and transgender representatives are informed, capacitated and meaningfully engaged in national HIV policy-making and planning

FOR EXAMPLE, CONSORTIUM MEMBERS:

- » Promote the right to engagement of MSM and transgender representatives in Global Fund Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs), PEPFAR mechanisms and other national HIV policy-making forums.
- » Support that right by building the knowledge and skills of national MSM and transgender representatives, such as through training and materials.
- » Mobilize support from other movements, such as those for human rights and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities.
- » Facilitate communication between local MSM and transgender representatives and other country, regional and global stakeholders.
- » Represent the needs and rights of MSM and transgender communities in external meetings, such as those related to the SDGs.
- » Represent the needs and rights of MSM and transgender communities in global forums and advisory groups, such as the Boards of the Global Fund and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

PROGRAM WORK

Ensuring the development and implementation of evidence and human rights-based, good practice HIV programs for MSM and transgender communities

FOR EXAMPLE, CONSORTIUM MEMBERS:

- » Share and synthesize the latest research and reports on MSM and transgender programs.
- » Develop technical reports on good practice programs for MSM and transgender communities.
- » Promote the use of global normative guidance on HIV programs for MSM and transgender groups, such as by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- » Partner with global agencies to develop tools to scale-up good practice programs, such as the MSM Implementation Tool (MSMIT) and Transgender Implementation Tool (TRANSIT).
- » Identify and broker technical experts to advise on MSM and transgender programs, such as for inclusion in Concept Notes for the Global Fund.
- » Share examples of good practice programming with other stakeholders, such as at technical forums and Regional and International AIDS Conferences.

COORDINATION WORK

Ensuring that technical support, community mobilization and advocacy for MSM and transgender communities are well-coordinated within and across regions

FOR EXAMPLE, CONSORTIUM MEMBERS:

- » Facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges of lessons, tools and opportunities amongst MSM and transgender advocates at different levels.
- » Conduct onward granting, providing small grants for activities by local MSM and transgender groups.
- » Conduct capacity assessments of MSM and transgender groups and develop plans to address the gaps.
- » Coordinate technical support to MSM and transgender organizations, such as on strategic planning and governance.
- » Support MSM and transgender organizations to convene and strategize with their members.
- » Provide mentoring and support to emerging MSM and transgender networks and leaders.
- » Coordinate MSM and transgender inputs into regional and global events, such as pre-conferences and networking zones at International AIDS Conferences.



What is the value-added of working as a Consortium?

Before the Consortium started, the majority of the members were already carrying out important work in their contexts. Some were also already collaborating informally. However, by systematically working together, the networks are now (even) greater than the sum of their parts. This is because – as a Consortium – they are both leveraging greater action by individual organizations and achieving important collective results. Examples of the **value-added** of working together include:

- **VALUE-ADDED:** Providing an opportunity to strengthen the organizational capacity of regional and global networks - laying the foundations for strengthened advocacy.



The Consortium provides a safe and supportive space within which all of its members have accessed funds and support to strengthen their own organization and strategic directions. As sub-grantees, all members have had to develop or strengthen their systems in areas such as administration, finance (including auditing) and monitoring and evaluation. This has been complemented by tailor-made support for individual organizations, such as focused on: strategic planning (AM-SHeR); member consultations (SCN); network structure (M-Coalition); governance structure (SOMOSGAY); and identification of strategic priorities (IRGT). Such support has often been delivered by stronger/more established networks to those that are weaker/younger. By carrying out this work within a global MSM and transgender movement, individual networks can 'locate' themselves and identify their niche. This, in turn, strengthens the quality and impact of their advocacy work – as they are stronger organizations with better access to information, resources and good practice.

Some members of the Consortium have cascaded the opportunity to strengthen organizational capacity to their national-level members. For example, AMSHeR and CVC have run small grants schemes to enable some of their partners (seven and five organizations, respectively) to start-up or strengthen their work.

- **VALUE-ADDED:** Improving the quality of programs and advocacy for MSM and transgender communities – by streamlining communications, pooling expertise, agreeing on good practice and having a united voice.

A central benefit of the Consortium is that it serves as an interactive ‘bank’ of experiences, tools and information that is not available elsewhere and that can improve the quality of work by each member. It facilitates mutual learning, with members rarely needing to ‘start from scratch’ as they can adapt, replicate or simply be inspired by each other’s approaches. This means that the networks are ‘ahead of the game’ – often better able to foresee and/or tackle emerging challenges than other stakeholders. This is especially advantageous in the context of rapid and dramatic changes in the external environment for the response to HIV.

“The biggest challenges and opportunities facing our region – like reduced funding for HIV and the introduction of PreP – are shared by others. The Consortium gives us formal ties and access to each other’s tools and approaches – so there’s no need to reinvent the wheel.”

Vitaly Djuma, Eurasian Coalition
on Male Health (ECOM)

As the lead organization, MSMGF disseminates a vast number of documents, blogs and webinars developed by Consortium members and external agencies. It also ‘joins the dots’, such as connecting newly appointed civil society representatives from the Consortium to other stakeholders in respective delegations and forums.

Being in the Consortium enables members to broaden their knowledge about issues, populations or approaches that might be beyond their own remit or experience. For example, members can learn from: ABDGN’s expertise on migration; IRGT’s expertise on transgender issues; APCOM’s expertise in social media; or MSMGF’s expertise in global advocacy.

Members of the Consortium have also maximized opportunities to share and showcase their work and lessons at key regional and international events.

For example, at recent International AIDS Conferences, MSMGF hosted MSM Pre-Conferences, while IRGT coordinated the first ever Transgender Networking Zone, with all members of the Consortium able to contribute.



Developing and agreeing on good practice and policy positions

EXAMPLE

As an example of **good practice**, MSMGF and other Consortium members input their experiences and lessons into the development of the MSM Implementation Tool (MSMIT) published in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in 2015. This tool is for use by public health officials, managers of HIV programs, health workers and civil society organizations (especially those run by MSM). It provides good practice guidance across the full continuum of HIV programs and incorporates international guidelines on MSM and transgender communities previously published by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other international agencies. It serves as a vital framework for advocacy and implementation by members of the Consortium and other stakeholders. In the future, members of the Consortium will translate the tool into local languages.

IRGT were also involved in the development of the TRANSIT, similar guidance to benefit programs and policies for transgender people.

As an example of a **policy position**, members of the Consortium working in relevant regions – such as Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and Central Asia and the Middle East and North Africa – are pooling their experiences of the impact of key donors (notably the Global Fund and PEPFAR) withdrawing from lower-middle and middle-income countries. Many of these contexts have concentrated epidemics that disproportionately affect MSM and transgender communities. They also have governments that criminalize such communities and, as such, are unlikely to fund appropriate programs for them.

“The MSMIT gives us, in one package, the agreed, state of the art programming for MSM not what people ‘think’ it should be, but what academia actually tells us combined with what communities have actually experienced. It provides absolute, quantifiable evidence of the core components of effective programmes. We’ve never had that before. It is an embodiment of how community empowerment is central to everything we do.”

Jenny Butler, United Nations
Population Fund (UNFPA)

- **VALUE-ADDED:** Providing a set of shared, agreed objectives – that serve as a framework for each network's individual results and, in turn, strengthens the 'advocacy pathway' between the national, regional and global levels.

The Consortium has shown the value of having an umbrella of shared, broad objectives around which all members can focus their work (even if at different paces and to different degrees). It has also shown how the chain of information, advocacy and action at all levels – national, regional and global – can contribute to those objectives. Each action builds on another – producing a 'snowball effect' that adds up to a strong voice and global movement. This joined-up approach is illustrated by work in relation to the Global Fund [see example on page 13].

“Being part of the Consortium means that we are plugged into important conversations and opportunities at all levels. This facilitates our role as a regional network – strengthening the connection between our national partners and the global level.”

Midnight Poonkasetwattana, Asia Pacific
Coalition on Male Sexual Health (APCOM)

“While each network is a respected entity, the Consortium's voice carries much more weight in discussions – such as about the Global Fund's strategy – because it represents many different organizations, in many different contexts, speaking as one.”

Ed Ngoksin, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS,
Tuberculosis and Malaria

All of the Consortium members are well connected in their regions and/or globally. A selection of examples are that: CVC is a member of the Pan Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS, as well as the HIV and Human Rights Reference Group of UNAIDS; SOMOSGAY is a member of the NGO Delegation to the Programme Coordinating Board of UNAIDS; and MSMGF is a member of the Community, Rights and Gender (CRG) Advisory Group of the Global Fund and is convening an Advocacy Platform to advise the Executive Director of UNAIDS on issues relating to MSM and gay men.



Working on the Global Fund - connecting the national, regional and global

EXAMPLE

At the national level, the Consortium's members have promoted the involvement of MSM and transgender communities in decision-making bodies for the Global Fund. For example, SCN helped secure MSM representation on the Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs) in Georgia and Azerbaijan for the first time. Similarly, SOMOSGAY supported the CCM in Paraguay to become more accountable, while CVC led the development of the Jamaica Civil Society Forum which helped reform the CCM, including securing a civil society Chair. Meanwhile, many members have supported MSM and transgender communities in Country Dialogue and Concept Note processes. For example, ECOM researched experiences in its region, while AMSHeR conducted a survey of its members. Both also produced case studies – on Russia and Ukraine and on Cote D'Ivoire and Nigeria (respectively). Members also produced materials to inform and mobilize community advocates [see box].

APCOM developed a series of Country Dialogue Fact Sheets in local languages for MSM and transgender advocates in countries such as Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines. This template was used by other Consortium members (such as ABDGN and M-Coalition) in their respective regions, as well as by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

Through their connection in the Consortium, ECOM invited IRGT to consultations on an Expression of Interest for a Global Fund grant to increase access to HIV services for MSM and transgender communities in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. This strengthened the application's attention to transgender issues and led to an IRGT representative being appointed to the project's Regional Expert Group.

At the regional level, three Consortium members – APCOM, CVC and ECOM [see box] – have played lead roles in the development of Regional Concept Notes for the Global Fund, facilitating consultation and programme design processes. These provide a critical opportunity to secure resources for programmes for MSM and transgender communities, as well as to promote rights-based good practice. Meanwhile, members such as AMSHeR, APCOM, CVC, ECOM and SOMOSGAY also advocated on MSM and transgender priorities within the regional Partnership Forums to inform the Global Fund's new Strategy for 2017-22.

At the global level, the Consortium channels its national and regional experiences into international advocacy. For example, in November 2015, it presented a joint letter – informed by members' inputs – to the Board of the Global Fund [see box]. This cited a lack of ambition in the proposed new Strategy and highlighted priorities to support MSM and transgender communities, such as responsible transition in middle-income countries. This work built on the Consortium's on-going involvement with the Board. For example, the Chair of the MSMGF was a Board Member for the Developed Country NGO Delegation. Meanwhile, a staff member of SOMOSGAY is the Youth Representative for the Latin America and the Caribbean Delegation – with the MSMGF announcing his appointment and connecting him to other stakeholders in the Delegation.

Consortium members have played a key role in the Global Fund's technical and advisory bodies. For example, in the Key Population Experts' Group, MSMGF advocated for MSM and transgender issues within the development of the Key Populations Action Plan for 2014 - 2017. The MSMGF is now a member of the Community, Rights and Gender Advisory Group. Meanwhile, members have also been providers of technical support for MSM and transgender groups involved in the Global Fund. AMSHeR is an approved technical support provider for key populations, while MSMGF coordinates the Community Action and Leadership Collaborative (CLAC), a global initiative that provides Key Affected Populations technical expertise.

- **VALUE-ADDED:** Providing a nurturing environment to ‘fast track’ the development of emerging MSM and transgender networks.

A critical benefit of the Consortium has been the development of new or emerging MSM and transgender networks. It has provided a space in which such groups can get support and advice from their more established peers – ‘shortening the learning curve’ and accessing a level of resources and influence that might, otherwise, have taken years to achieve. Examples of the networks that have benefited include: SCN (providing a unique alliance in the Caucasus region); M-Coalition [see below]; and SOMOSGAY (developing a new space for the coordination of MSM organizations in Latin America). All of these work in environments that are challenging both politically (with oppressive governments) and financially (with the withdrawal of the Global Fund). They express particular appreciation for the Consortium’s moral support (within work that can, otherwise, be very isolating) and financial resources (that, for example, have enabled them to have paid staff for the first time). Such support has provided a bridge to further growth. For example, they now benefit from better access to regional and global policy-making forums and – with increased credibility and improved systems (such as for audits) – are receiving interest from other donors.

The Consortium is also supporting the IRGT to develop from a reference group (hosted by the MSMGF) to an independent organization. This member network has been able to: gain funding that may enable them to hire a coordinator; bring its constituents together from across the world; identify its strategic priorities (transgender women); and develop a communications plan.



Fostering the development of M-Coalition

EXAMPLE

M-Coalition is the first-ever Arab coalition on MSM and HIV in the Middle East and North Africa, a region with high stigma and discrimination against MSM and transgender people. As part of the Consortium, it has benefited from the experiences and lessons of more established networks. This has included support from the MSMGF – with a French version of the Speaking Out toolkit produced and then used to develop the Coalition’s strategic vision and network and governance structures. The Coalition has also developed a handbook on risk assessment and security planning for MSM activists engaged in human rights in the region.

The group – which now has its first ever full-time member of staff - increasingly serves as a model for mobilizing MSM and transgender people in regions where the policy context is highly negative. Johnny Tohme, M-Coalition’s Executive Director, says: “As activists in a new network in MENA, we are working in a hostile environment. We often question if we’re going to achieve change. Yet, we see from others in the Consortium that there’s hope. We can learn about policy work (such as from SOMOSGAY) and reaching community members (such as from APCOM). It prevents us from hitting a brick wall – because we get not only ideas, but encouragement.”

“Anyone who knows our communities and networks knows that it is not plain sailing. The Consortium is the only space where I can not only share my results, but talk about my problems. I know that I will be understood, receive support and not be judged. This, in turn, helps me and our network do a better job to support our communities.”

Kene Esom, African Men for Sexual Health and Rights (AMSHeR)

“In our region, on a daily basis, it’s very, very difficult to do our work. It’s very helpful for me to network and to learn what’s working and what’s not working in other regions.”

Shoghine Shoghomonian, South Caucasus Network on HIV (SCN)

- **Value-added:** Providing a stable, global platform that serves as a united front to watchdog and tackle sensitive issues and hostile environments – by offering credibility, legitimacy and protection to individual networks.

The Consortium provides a unique mechanism for solidarity – enabling networks to come together and speak openly, building unity against the challenges facing their communities.

This ‘strength in numbers’ is especially vital to groups facing crises and/or operating in hostile environments (where their work is often very lonely and, sometimes, highly dangerous). As a group of 10 networks from across the world, the Consortium provides not only a degree of protection to its members, but a sense of credibility. This is because the networks are not only representing national or regional communities of MSM and transgender people, but are part of a *global* movement. The Consortium brings together organizations that are often tackling similar issues within complex and unsupportive environments. It provides a platform for the groups to ‘let off steam’ (expressing their fears and frustrations) and to strategize together on ‘what works’ and ‘what doesn’t work’. In combination, the members can serve as a global watchdog – monitoring and documenting how critical issues evolve across countries and taking diverse action – such as on human rights (see example) – that adds up to a united force.

- **Value-added:** Facilitating joint access to funding opportunities - reducing competition and indicating a more time and cost-efficient model of grant management.



A critical benefit of the Consortium is that it has provided an opportunity for its members to develop and submit successful, joint applications for resources. For some networks, this funding represents a major part of their organizational budget. For others, it is a minor part, with their budgets supported by multiple other donors. However, all of the members report that resources received through the Consortium are highly *significant* – as they support their *core* work and enable them to collaborate with peers, as part of a movement. Many also cite how the process for submitting joint applications – which includes discussions about the appropriate division of resources – has helped to reduce competition, and decrease duplication, within their sector.

The Consortium is increasingly able to save time and energy through consolidated processes for grant coordination and management. For example, rather than each network developing a different format for their proposal and monitoring reports the lead organization (supported by the members) can produce templates that all organizations use and that can be compiled into collective products. While yet to be quantified, there are strong indications that this model of grant-making is also cost-efficient. This is because it reduces multiple transaction costs – although it is important to consider the full cost involved for the lead organization.

- » **Value-added:** Providing a simpler, quicker mechanism for external stakeholders to consult with MSM and transgender leaders.

The Consortium has important potential to be the 'go to' organization for external stakeholders - such as donors, United Nations agencies or parliamentarians - who want to consult with the MSM and transgender movement. Rather than approaching numerous individual organizations, they could approach the lead organization which, in turn, can communicate across the Consortium.

Advocating for the human rights of MSM and transgender people

EXAMPLE

Throughout the Consortium, members have worked with their partners to advocate on legal issues that affect the rights of MSM and transgender people. Examples include that:

- » ECOM has supported partners in Estonia to successfully advocate for the passing of a Bill recognizing same-sex partnerships.
- » AMSHeR has contributed to the adoption of The Resolution on Protection against Violence and other Human Rights Violations against Persons on the Basis of Their Real or Imputed Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. It has also supported national advocacy, such as to rollback laws banning gay marriage and outlawing organizations supporting gay rights in Nigeria.
- » ABDGN has conducted research on the specific human rights context for Black MSM across the African diaspora.
- » SOMOSGAY has worked with the Organization of American States to promote progressive laws (such as on marriage equality and gender identity) introduced in individual countries.
- » CVC has collaborated to set up a Human Rights Observatory to monitor abuses against MSM and sexual minorities.

“It’s beautiful to see how this collaboration has evolved. I can see the personal and professional synergies between the groups – and how [they’re] coming together as a true Consortium.”

Ton Coenen, AidsFonds

In summary, the **value-added** of working together as the Consortium of MSM and Transgender Networks is:

- » Providing an opportunity to strengthen the organizational capacity of regional and global networks - laying the foundations for strengthened advocacy.
- » Improving the quality of programmes and advocacy for MSM and transgender communities – by streamlining communications, pooling expertise, agreeing on good practice and having a united voice.
- » Providing a set of shared, agreed objectives – that serve as a framework for each network's results and, in turn, strengthens the 'advocacy pathway' between the national, regional and global levels.
- » Providing a nurturing environment to 'fast track' the development of emerging MSM and transgender networks.
- » Providing a stable, global platform that serves as a united front to watchdog and tackle sensitive issues and hostile environments – by offering credibility, legitimacy and protection to individual networks.
- » Facilitating joint access to funding opportunities - reducing competition and indicating a more time and cost-efficient model of grant management.
- » Providing a simpler, quicker mechanism for external stakeholders to consult with MSM and transgender leaders.



What lessons has the Consortium learned?

The journey to develop the Consortium has not always been straightforward – with challenges and obstacles along the way. It has produced a wealth of lessons learned about ‘what works’ and ‘what doesn’t work’ in setting up, operating and maximizing such an alliance. The lessons include that it is important to:

1. Provide opportunities for members to build their organizational capacity – as a critical contributor to strengthening their individual and collective advocacy.

Central to the success of the Consortium is the opportunity that it has facilitated for members to strengthen their own networks. This includes by: developing finance, administration and monitoring and evaluation systems; conducting strategic planning; improving governance structures; and employing coordination staff. For some networks, these steps were taken for the first time. For others, the Consortium enabled them to enhance their existing capacity – benefiting from the inputs of peer organizations. Overall, attention to this area has enabled the networks to become more stable – being better able to survive reductions in HIV funding, leverage additional resources and cope with opposition from external stakeholders. It has also put them in a better position to conduct effective advocacy work as individual organizations and to input into/gain from the collective efforts of the Consortium.



Members of the Consortium at a face-to-face meeting in 2015

2. Negotiate shared objectives to which members' individual advocacy wins contribute and add up to a collective movement.

It has been important that, while respecting individual priorities, the Consortium had a broad agenda that is shared by all. This enables each group's achievements (whatever their scale and significance) to complement each other and to 'add up to a whole'.

3. While working towards common objectives, identify and leverage each member's organizational strengths.

It has also been important to embrace the rich diversity of the Consortium's members – seeing it as an opportunity, rather than a threat. Networks' areas of technical and organizational strengths – such as in work with particular sub-populations or particular types of interventions – provided a vital opportunity for mutual learning. In the future, it will be important to look at how this can be further strengthened – with networks learning more about 'each other's' areas.

“There is still a lot of untapped potential for us to truly learn from and support each other. I look forward to a time when we are speaking up as loudly on each others' issues as our own and when we are fully leveraging our combined and powerful voice.”

Kwaku Adomako,
African Black Diaspora Global Network (ABDGN)

A further lesson was that, at times, it was appropriate to assign different responsibilities, depending, for example, on networks' capacity. For example, within a grant from the RCNF focused on the Global Fund, the larger and more established networks (such as APCOM and AMSHeR) focused on partnering with country-level organizations to mobilize MSM and transgender engagement. Meanwhile, the smaller and emerging networks (such as IRGT and SCN) focused on developing information and advocacy materials for their constituencies.

4. Nurture Consortium members' commonalities, but also recognize and respect their differences.

The Consortium has found that it is critical to focus on the common issues that unite MSM and transgender networks across the world. These form the 'glue' that bonds the members together, creating a united movement. However, the Consortium has also highlighted that MSM and transgender networks are far from homogenous. In practice, each organization has its own identity, while their priorities and working styles vary significantly – such as depending on their size, contexts and resources. Such differences should be acknowledged and, where necessary, addressed. For example, the specific needs of transgender networks should not be 'subsumed' within those of MSM networks, while the specific challenges of working in highly oppressive political environments (such as in Eastern Europe and Central Asia) should be appreciated.

5. Build mutual trust within the Consortium, while also having formal systems, such as for reporting and due diligence.

At the heart of the Consortium lies its members' commitment to collaboration – not just to access funding, but to improve what they do and to build a united movement. Emotional buy-in to working together is essential – with a willingness to listen to and learn from each other, including, where necessary, respecting differences of opinion. However, it is also vital to have formal, agreed and transparent systems by which the Consortium operates. In such a large and diverse alliance, tensions could easily arise around decision-making, while individual members could face organizational crises. As such, systems are needed to cover all eventualities. For example, at one stage, mismanagement of funds by a single Consortium member risked damaging the reputation, and halting the funding, for the entire group. This served as a difficult, but important, lesson – resulting in stronger processes of accountability, such as with a clause on fraud now included in the MoU.

6. Identify appropriate indicators and evidence to demonstrate the Consortium's impact.

While the members have, both individually and collectively, implemented critical activities, the Consortium has struggled to develop a clear monitoring and evaluation framework that both meets the requirements of its donors and is practical for the networks. This has meant that some of the excellent work carried out has not been documented in a systematic or user-friendly format that communicates its results to external stakeholders. In the future, it will be increasingly important for the Consortium to demonstrate not only its activities and results (outputs and outcomes), but, where possible, impact – such as on policies and resource allocations that directly affect the lives of MSM and transgender communities.

7. Constantly explain and advocate for the role of networks and the value of a Consortium.

The Consortium's own members are fully aware of the unique role of networks and the concrete advantages of working together. However, they have also seen that these benefits remain unclear to some external stakeholders, including some donors. There remains a need to articulate and share evidence of the value-added of investing in both: individual regional and global networks (as an essential part of the architecture of the civil society response to HIV and health); and a Consortium of networks. In the future, this area could be strengthened by the Consortium developing a theory of change and documenting further case studies of how its work achieves impact.

“The MSMGF holds the Consortium together – the nuts and bolts of how it functions. But they have also built a relationship that is very collegial. Everyone is welcome in the space and everyone's opinion is valued.”

Carolyn Gomes,
Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition

8. Define, appreciate and fully resource the role of lead organization of the Consortium.

An efficient and supportive lead organization is critical to the effectiveness of a Consortium. The role requires strong finance, administration and communication systems. However, it also requires patience and diplomacy – for example, producing monitoring templates that ‘translate’ donor requirements into clear formats and then following-up members to ensure accurate and timely reports. According to interviews, all members of the Consortium appreciate the leadership of the MSMGF – whose approach is described as “*empowering and motivating*”. While much of the work takes place ‘behind the scenes’, the role represents a

major commitment for the Forum in terms of time, skills and resources. It has been helped through the development of a set of coordination tools – such as the MoU, a Google Group, bi-monthly teleconference calls and in-person meetings. The latter have been especially useful – providing the members with an opportunity to access peer support, exchange experiences and strategize together.

Meanwhile, MSMGF has also provided technical support. Some, such as the dissemination of documents, has been for all members. Other support has been tailor-made to individual members – such as addressing grant management (ABDGN), organizational restructuring and strategic planning (AMSHer) and financial management (ECOM). In the future, it will be important to address some on-going confusion between the role of MSMGF as a global forum and as the lead organization of the Consortium. As the alliance develops, it will be important to more clearly articulate how those roles are both distinct and relate to each other.

What are the future directions for the Consortium?

As researched by the MSMGF, the future for the global MSM and transgender movement faces different scenarios. Within these, the directions for the Consortium will require careful thinking and planning. As guided by its members, the future could see the alliance:



- » More clearly define a specific niche, in terms of what the Consortium 'does best' and 'does that others can not'. Yet also ensure that the members can maintain their individual identities.
- » Identify joint priorities, such as for Consortium-wide research projects or advocacy campaigns. Examples might be: neglected communities (such as MSM in prison); key interventions (such as PrEP); or legal barriers (such as criminalization and anti-homosexuality legislation).
- » Further expand the Consortium's membership and/or clarify its relationship to networks that are not members.
- » Develop a stronger monitoring and evaluation framework that includes measures for the Consortium's impact.
- » Facilitate more structured and systematic learning on each other's areas of technical expertise, such as MSM who are young or migrants.
- » Increase the lead organization's role in identifying and exchanging good practice within the Consortium.
- » Rotate the role of lead organization among different members of the Consortium.
- » Increase the donor pool - to expand the Consortium's work and increase its independence and sustainability.
- » Build a more structured relationship with other key population consortia, such as those for global and regional networks of sex workers and people who use drugs. Also – within the context of the SDGs – explore broader-based coalitions with wider health and social movements.

The future of the Consortium will also require the on-going support of other stakeholders – notably policy-makers and donors – involved in national, regional and global responses to HIV, sexual health and rights for MSM and transgender communities.

Recommendations to policy-makers and donors

Actively learn about the unique roles and results of regional and global networks within action on HIV, sexual health and human rights for MSM and transgender communities.

Invest in those roles and results by providing funding opportunities for consortia of key population networks – as effective and cost-efficient mechanisms to support networks. Ensure that those opportunities provide access to both:

Core funding for networks to: build their organizational capacity (such as in financial management and governance); pay staff salaries; and implement key networking activities (such as consultations and communication)

Implementation funding to resource program and advocacy activities.

Within those opportunities, **ensure adequate resources for lead organizations**, enabling them to play their full role not only in administration and financial management of consortia, but functions such as the exchange of knowledge and good practice.

“We’re where we thought we would be at this stage in the Consortium – having critical discussions about our identity and how we can best work together. We’ve achieved so much already, but this is just the start.... Working even more closely together means we can have a bigger impact and bigger economy of scale.”

George Ayala,
Global Forum on MSM and HIV (MSMGF)

Endnotes

1 Prevention And Treatment Of HIV And Other Sexually Transmitted Infections Among Men Who Have Sex With Men And Transgender People: Recommendations for a Public Health Approach, WHO, UNAIDS, MSMGF, GIZ and UNDP, 2011. Consolidated Guidelines On HIV Prevention, Diagnosis, Treatment And Care For Key Populations, WHO, 2014.

2 Consortium of MSM and Transgender Networks Comments and Recommendations Concerning the Global Fund Strategic Plan 2017-22, Consortium of MSM and Transgender Networks, November 2015. Focusing on: transitions due to Global Fund exiting from upper middle income and middle income countries; representation; scale-up of the response; evidence gathering; measuring success; institutional capacity and community based research; technical capacity; access to affordable treatment and diagnostics; and meaningful engagement.

3 Favoriser L'accès Des HSH À Une Prévention Combinée De L'infection Par Le VIH Manuel Pratique À L'usage Des Militants De La Lutte Contre Le Sida Des Pays Francophones De La Région MENA, AALI Soutak, MSMGF and ALCS, May 2013.

4 A Fundamental Shift: The Future of the Global MSM and HIV Movement, MSMGF, 2015.

5 Consortium of MSM and Transgender Networks: Good Practice and Lessons Learned Meeting, 1-2 October 2015, Amsterdam, MSMGF, 2015.

“As epidemics and the landscapes change, business as usual isn’t working any more – we need new ideas. The support from the Consortium is priceless. It provides you with hope in the face of gigantic opposition. It builds our network’s resilience. I know that – whatever the future has in store – I’m with people fighting the same fight.”

Simón Cazal, SOMOSGAY



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The Global Forum on MSM & HIV (MSMGF) has worked since 2006 to encourage targeted, tailored, better-resourced, and rights-based sexual health services for gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) worldwide through its advocacy and technical support work. As a global network, MSMGF has successfully influenced HIV responses at the local level through shifts in global-level policies and has effectively utilized public health as an entry point for advancing the human rights of LGBT people. MSMGF currently supports programs in 15 countries.

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(Even) Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts:

A Case Study on Working Together as the Consortium of MSM and Transgender Networks

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