



Global Fund poised to award its first-ever major regional grant to help reduce impact of HIV and AIDS on men who have sex with men

US\$ 47 million campaign would focus on men who have sex with men and transgenders in 7 South Asian nations

For Immediate Release

25 November 2009, Lucknow, India –The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has approved in principle a landmark US \$47 million grant for a community-strengthening programme aimed at reducing the rapid and alarming spread of HIV and AIDS among men who have sex with men and among transgender people in South Asia.

The grant proposal was submitted by Naz Foundation International (NFI), PSI (Population Services International), the United Nations Development Programme Regional Center based in Colombo (UNDP RCC), and the South Asian MSM and AIDS Network (SAMAN), a coalition of country level community based organizations dedicated to MSM and HIV issues. The five-year project will encompass Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This marks the first time the Global Fund will support a major regional project in Asia specifically addressing men who have sex with men (MSM), transgender (TG) and HIV.

“This is indeed a milestone for both the Global Fund, and those of us who work on these issues,” said Shivananda Khan, NFI Founder and Chief Executive. “I speak for all our partners when I say how grateful we are that the Global Fund has recognized the urgency in combating the spread of HIV in these long marginalized and still ‘invisible’ populations. The grant provides South Asia with a promising platform which must continue to be strengthened by all concerned – governments, international development partners and community partners alike.”

“Millions of gay and transgender people in South Asia suffer from discrimination in many aspects of their day to day lives. This makes them more vulnerable to HIV and undermines their capacity to contribute fully to their communities and societies.” noted Jeffrey O’Malley, Global Director of UNDP’s HIV Group. “This grant reflects the commitment of the international community to support the health and human rights of all people, even the most marginalized.”

“The Global Fund grant comes at a time when the MSM HIV epidemic in South Asia is truly at a crossroads,” said Andrew Boner, PSI’s Country Representative in Nepal. “Regional HIV prevalence rates are difficult to estimate, but the most recent data for South Asia suggests that between 6% and 10% of men have had sex with other men, and up to 90% of men who had sex with other men in the last year are at great risk of HIV infection and transmission. If urgent interventions are not implemented soon, the window of opportunity to address this crisis effectively will narrow very quickly.”

Following a review by an independent technical review panel the proposal was recently agreed to by the Global Fund Board. The Board’s decision starts the final contract negotiation phase before the first tranche of funding is released. PSI was named Principal Recipient of the grant, and will administer the funding, monitor the programme, and provide technical assistance based on its experience working with MSM and other vulnerable groups in Asia and its worldwide experience. As the lead UN agency on issues relating to HIV among MSM, UNDP will work on strengthening regional and sub-regional policy and advocacy

efforts, while NFI will implement country-specific, community strategies for reducing the impact of HIV on MSM and TG persons.

SAMAN's partner community based organizations that will help implement the programme at the country level include the Bandhu Social Welfare Society (Bangladesh); the Blue Diamond Society (Nepal); Companions on a Journey (Sri Lanka); India Naz Foundation International (India) and Naz Foundation International (South Asia). As other local organizations are created through the programme, it is expected that they will join SAMAN.

Editor's Notes:

- In May 2009 the Global Fund reaffirmed its commitment to working more closely with men who have sex with men, transgender people and sex workers through the Board level approval of a Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities Strategy. The Strategy is available online at www.theglobalfund.org/documents/publications/other/SOGI/SOGI_Strategy.pdf
- HIV prevalence rates among MSM and TG vary widely from country to country, but the latest data indicate an alarming picture of rapid and unbridled spread in these highly marginalized populations, fuelled by stigma and discrimination, a woeful lack of government attention and public health resources devoted to addressing the crisis. For MSM country snapshots for several South Asian nations, visit the APCOM website at msmasia.org/news_article/items/msm_country_snapshots_released_for_15_asia_pacific_countries.html

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