

## UNAIDS PROGRAMME COORDINATING BOARD WORKING GROUP

### THEMATIC SEGMENT:

*Positive learning: harnessing the power of education to end HIV-related stigma and discrimination, empower young people and provide a comprehensive HIV response*

### MEETING SUMMARY: FIRST MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP

DATE: Friday 8 April 2022

### MEETING AGENDA

- Welcome and introduction
- Presentation of the draft annotated outline of the background note on “Positive learning: harnessing the power of education to end HIV-related stigma and discrimination, empower young people and provide a comprehensive HIV response”
- Discussion on the draft annotated outline of the background note
- Presentation of and discussion on the draft agenda for the thematic day
- Next steps

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### SUMMARY

#### 1. Welcome and introduction

Mr. Morten Ussing, Director Governance, UNAIDS Secretariat, welcomed the PCB working group to its first meeting for the preparation of the thematic segment of the 50th PCB (24 June 2022) on *Positive learning: harnessing the power of education to end HIV-related stigma and discrimination, empower young people and provide a comprehensive HIV response*.

The Secretariat highlighted that the working group is established to create ownership of the PCB stakeholders in the framing of the background note and discussions for the PCB thematic segment. The members play an important role in shaping the day and the documentation that informs it. Mr. Ussing recalled that the Secretariat is responsible on behalf of the Executive Director for the background note, with Cosponsor support, acknowledging UNESCO’s important role in this topic, and the working group providing the broader steer.

The June PCB meeting is previewed to be a hybrid meeting with each PCB member represented by two delegates in the room for each PCB seat, and all observers joining virtually. To ensure equal participation of PCB participants from all regions and across time

zones, the PCB takes place in the middle of the day, Geneva time, for three to four hours. The thematic segment is therefore also condensed to a half day dedicated entirely to one topic, and it is crucial to have collective ownership of it through the working group.

Mr. Ussing noted with appreciation that some PCB members were joined by a young person, in the spirit of the topic of the thematic segment and resonating with PCB decision 6.8 from the 34th meeting that “recogniz[ed] the contribution of young people through the full programme cycle and within decision-making processes, [...]” and decision 7.2 from the 31st meeting “encourag[ing] Member States [...] to involve the representative/s of civil society in their national delegations to the Programme Coordinating Board, and to facilitate the involvement in particular of local civil society in the consultations that would be held before and after the meetings of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board;”, in addition to the NGO delegation who are members of the Board.

Mr. Ussing recalled the process for selecting the theme. The PCB Bureau sends out a call for themes to the PCB members and the proposals for themes are reviewed by the PCB Bureau on the basis of a set of criteria. In this case, the Bureau asked for two proposals, one from UNESCO and one from Thailand that overlapped, to be merged into one proposal. The Bureau then put forward its proposals for the themes for the thematic segments of the following year for PCB consideration.

While the topics for the two thematic segments of the PCB were decided in December 2021, the PCB agreed earlier this year, intersessionally, that the thematic segment topic for the June meeting will be exceptionally shifted to the December meeting and the thematic segment topic previewed for the December meeting will be shifted to the June meeting. Accordingly, the topic for the upcoming PCB meeting is: “Positive Learning: harnessing the power of education to end HIV-related stigma and discrimination and empower young people living with HIV”, while the topic for December 2022 will be “HIV and men, in all their diversity, how can we get our responses back on track?”.

The Secretariat said that the main expected outcome of the first meeting was to listen to the comments, inputs and suggestions on the proposed focus and key messages of the draft annotated outline of the background note. At the second meeting, the first full draft of the background note, the agenda for the day as well as suggested speakers will be discussed. The draft background note and agenda will be shared with the group ahead of that meeting. The background note and thematic segment should speak to each other.

## **2. Presentation of the draft annotated outline of background note for the thematic segment**

Caroline Ngonze, Senior Adviser, Education *Plus* at the UNAIDS Secretariat, introduced the outline of the background note for the thematic segment. After having given an overview of the outline by chapter, Ms. Ngonze provided a deeper insight into each chapter starting with the introduction of the background note outline which provided the basis of the thematic segment. The right to education, inscribed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “epitomizes the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights”. This right is asserted in numerous international and regional treaties, texts and normative frameworks, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda, the ICPD+25 and the Beijing+25 Declaration. The Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026 which uses an inequalities lens to end AIDS by 2030, and the 2021 Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS also push for inclusive and quality education programmes both in school and out of school for all, particularly for adolescent girls, young women and young key populations.

Ms. Ngonze highlighted the data on adolescents, young people and HIV. Globally, HIV still disproportionately impacts young people (aged 15-24 years), who represent 16% of the global population, but account for approximately 28% of all new HIV infections. Ms. Ngonze also stressed young people's low awareness of HIV and condom use on the decline. In addition, unequal gender power dynamics, human rights-related barriers to access, uptake and retention in HIV services as well as HIV-related stigma and discrimination were persistent barriers to addressing the AIDS epidemic.

Ms. Ngonze further explained that chapter II titled "the power of education – what works", explored data demonstrating the key role of the education sector in meeting the 2030 goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat. She highlighted the example of Botswana, among others, where a policy to expand free and compulsory secondary education was found to produce a cumulative life-time risk reduction for HIV among students by approximately one-third. Evidence confirmed that girls—and their communities and countries—reap multiple social and economic benefits from their completion of secondary education.

The presentation further stressed the role of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) as key to knowledge and demand for youth's rights to informed choices concerning their own body and sexuality. CSE guidelines emphasize the need for programmes that are informed by evidence, adapted to the local context, and logically designed to measure and address factors such as beliefs, values, attitudes and skills. Evidence has shown that CSE contributes to a reduction in school dropout and helps to delay sexual debut, decrease HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, reduce early and unintended pregnancies and enhance gender-equitable attitudes. She emphasized that in-school and out-of-school provision are equally important – and complementary – routes to achieving CSE quality and uptake. Emerging evidence also points to quality CSE programmes' potential to address violence against women and shifting harmful attitudes that justify it, through integration of strong gender components and addressing unequal power dynamics.

Ms. Ngonze underlined the role of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Evidence shows that when HIV policies and programmes are linked with SRH and empowerment approaches to adolescents' and young people's SRHR, such linkages result in better HIV testing outcomes, more consistent condom use, improved quality of care, reduced HIV-related stigma and discrimination, and improved coverage, access to, and uptake of both SRHR and HIV services. She highlighted that the exercise of SRHR, especially for adolescents and youth, has proven to be fundamental to effective efforts to end AIDS as a public health threat, capacity to avoid acquiring HIV, and to positive and healthy living with HIV.

With regards to HIV-related stigma, discrimination and violence, Ms. Ngonze noted the Global Partnership for Action to Eliminate All Forms of HIV-Related Stigma and Discrimination which includes a targeted focus on ending stigma and discrimination in education settings. As related to HIV, it can be influenced by factors ranging from school policies to teachers' attitudes, to the comprehensiveness of the sexuality education curriculum. She underscored that programmatic and policy efforts in the education sector must focus on creating a supportive, inclusive environment for all students, including students living with HIV, with disabilities, girls, and members of key and vulnerable populations, regardless of whether their health status or identity has been disclosed, or their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Before presenting the third chapter, Ms. Ngonze spoke to the importance of psychosocial support, mental health and harm reduction, stressing notably that half of mental health conditions begin by age fourteen, but can go undetected and untreated. Provision of

psychosocial support and mental health interventions to all adolescents and young people living with HIV is part of an often-overlooked essential integrated package of services.

As part of chapter III titled “Partnerships, initiatives and guidance: Examples and opportunities for south-south and triangular cooperation”, Ms. Ngonze gave an overview of the partnerships, initiatives and guidelines that would be further elaborated on in the background note, namely:

1. Global Partnership for action to eliminate all forms of HIV-related stigma and discrimination, (priority focus on education settings)
2. Positive Learning Partnership
3. UN International technical guidance on sexuality education
4. “Education *Plus*” Initiative

Lastly, Ms. Ngonze stressed some of the key gaps and challenges in chapter IV. She highlighted that HIV remains a pandemic of inequalities, spotlighting the role of gender, the specific vulnerabilities of youth, differential impacts among and within regions and countries, and the marginalization of people associated with heightened HIV vulnerability. Ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, requires multi-sectoral and gender-transformative approaches to HIV that seek to reduce prevalence, provide care and treatment to those living with HIV and AIDS, and mitigate the impact of the epidemic to those affected by employing the appropriate mix of health and non-health-based interventions, while involving a broad array of multi-sectoral stakeholders.

She underlined that insufficient political will and commitment for scaled up actions and financing for HIV prevention and treatment continues to slow down progress in ending AIDS by 2030, and that there is limited data and inadequate use of granular data to inform policy making and programmatic action. She stressed that due to COVID-19, over 1.1 billion students globally were out of school as of June 2020, including over 184 million in sub-Saharan Africa. Such external factors can be exacerbated by climate-related events.

### 3. Discussion on the outline

The PCB working group welcomed the annotated outline. Specific comments included the following:

#### **Member States**

- Suggested making linkages to the 2021-2026 Global AIDS Strategy Result Areas and relevant indicators.
- Emphasized on centering young people and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to invite them as part of the working group.
- Underscored the need to include definitions and trends on young people in the introduction. Also remarked that youth leadership could be a separate chapter, while letting young people take the lead, including moderating the event.
- Stressed the importance of linking CSE to youth-friendly services.
- Underlined that youth should not be viewed as a homogenous group and acknowledge the diversity and sub-cultures.
- Stressed that comprehensive sexuality education is the most important and complex concept in the outline and that it should contain examples of where the delicate collaboration between the education and health ministries had been successfully implemented.

- Remarked that for adolescents most at risk, layered interventions and a comprehensive package was needed. It would be important to focus on girls out of school and the poorest income levels in urban areas. There are several good interventions, such as the PEPFAR's Dreams programme.
- Highlighted the need to train service providers on stigma and discrimination where it is prevalent.
- Remarked on the challenges of youth-friendly service delivery during humanitarian crises.

Following the working group meeting, the Secretariat received and noted a set of written comments pertaining to the referencing and balance of the background note.

### **PCB NGO Delegation**

- Highlighted the need for linkages between awareness-raising/information and the related services for young people, in and out of school.
- Emphasized the importance of skill-building for young people especially those from key populations, to access necessary services and the need for equity and a human-rights based approach in delivery.

### **Cosponsors**

- Emphasized that South-South cooperation and triangulation should be more demand-driven and anchored in country-ownership towards country commitments and priorities.
- Stressed the need to revisit communication approaches and methods on HIV prevention among young people and messaging strategies that raise awareness and motivate behaviour change while avoiding adverse effects that perpetuate stigma and discrimination.
- Highlighted the importance of elevating the leadership of young people living with HIV and from key populations.
- Underscored that comprehensive sexuality education might be controversial at global level but is implemented in countries under different names in line with national contexts and realities. Where there has been momentum for CSE, young people have reported that delivery of CSE can be more inclusive towards young people living with HIV, should not focus only on HIV prevention, but also on treatment and human rights, also for young key populations.
- Suggested highlighting the interconnectedness of the initiatives listed in the outline ensuring a broad package of interventions is available for young people.
- Suggested emphasizing the intersection with enabling legal and policy environments. Law and policies on age of consent, opportunities and challenges by and within the digital space.

In response to the comments and observations made, the Secretariat noted the importance of the issues raised by the members of the working group and would be reflected as relevant in the paper. Ms. Ngonze emphasized the need to better illustrate CSE with concrete examples, best practices and lessons learned. She stressed that youth leadership and skill building for young people especially from key populations needed to be captured in the background note. The Secretariat acknowledged programmes that are working such as Dreams and demonstrated how many of the partnerships and initiatives mentioned in the outline are interlinked and together, deliver a comprehensive package for adolescents and young people who represent a heterogenous group. The Secretariat noted that it was

essential to include examples of youth-friendly services and a definitions and trends part in the introduction. Ms. Ngonze said that examples of case studies would be welcome as the background note would be infused with best practices and examples. The Secretariat thanked participants for bringing up the issue of humanitarian settings and the need to ensure services in education, health and others to migrant populations.

#### **4. Presentation of the zero-draft agenda for the thematic segment**

Andreas Hilmersson, senior advisor on Gender Equality at the UNAIDS Secretariat, reminded the working group that the thematic segment will provide an opportunity for the PCB to discuss the role of the education sector in meeting the 2030 goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat. In particular, the thematic segment will focus on the following issues:

- Policy and programmatic action to end HIV-related stigma, violence, and discrimination in education settings.
- The role and responsibilities of the education sector in meeting the needs of learners living with HIV.
- Education as a strategic entry point for provision of comprehensive packages of health, support, social protection and referrals for young people, in and out-of-school, in all their diversity.
- Gaps in provision of resilient, safe, inclusive, healthy learning environments as part of multi-sectoral gender-transformative education.
- Suggest recommendations and propose a way forward.

Mr. Hilmersson presented the zero-draft agenda for discussion. He said that it was standard practice to have keynote addresses after an introduction by a moderator. They would provide strategic vision regarding the session objectives. These would be followed by a session overview with the main highlights from the thematic segment background note, with a focus on the data and evidence around HIV, young people and stigma and discrimination.

The Secretariat proposed to have two panel discussions. The first would focus on the experiences of young people in and out of school who have faced stigma, violence and discrimination. The second, on how to better leverage the education sector as a strategic entry point for the provision of safe, inclusive, healthy learning environments through comprehensive packages of health, support, social protection and referrals for young people, in and out-of-school, in all their diversity. Examples and opportunities for South-South and triangular cooperation would be highlighted in this panel.

Mr. Hilmersson explained that the two panels would be followed by an opportunity for country representatives to commit to eliminating HIV-related stigma and discrimination, empower young people and provide a comprehensive HIV response. The concluding part would provide an overview of the day and highlight key recommendations from the thematic segment.

#### **5. Discussion on the zero-draft agenda**

##### **Member States**

- Suggested looking at anti-bullying and peer-to-peer models, including outside of school structures.
- Stressed that more time could be provided to Board members for reflections.

##### **PCB NGO Delegation**

- Highlighted the importance of inviting adolescents aged 15- to 19-years. A challenge to bear in mind with adolescents is the need to request parental or guardian consent for their participation in such an event.

## **Cosponsors**

- Suggest taking a deeper dive on CSE implementation looking not only at laws and policies but also at how young people receiving good quality education in and out of school leads to better knowledge of HIV and stigma and discrimination.
- Stressed the role of media, radio, television and film in perpetuating HIV-related stigma and discrimination and how to address it.
- Highlighted the importance of making education systems health promoting spaces more broadly which would include resilience to shocks and pandemic, linked with school retention and feeding into the virtuous circle of HIV prevention and treatment.

## **6. Next steps**

Mr. Ussing thanked the working group members for their comments and encouraged them to send written inputs by Tuesday 12 April 2022 as well as any relevant documents to support the drafting of the background note. He mentioned that any delegation wishing to include a young person for the second meeting of the working group would be accommodated.

The Secretariat reiterated that the call for submission of good practices would be sent out to the PCB members and all permanent missions shortly and expressed hope that working group members would submit good practice illustrations and disseminate the call further to partners. These will contribute to setting the agenda for the thematic segment, compiled in a conference room paper and used for other UNAIDS reports.

The Secretariat encouraged working group members to start thinking of speaker names as well as ideas for panel discussions, so that we can start reflecting on the agenda of the thematic segment, including with a variety of regions and ages as discussed in the working group meeting.

The Secretariat thanked the working group for their time and excellent input, the Cosponsors and Secretariat colleagues for their preparations in anticipation for the second meeting of the working group.

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