



Minutes of the Annual Meeting of aidsfocus.ch, the Swiss platform on HIV/Aids and international cooperation

November 15, 2006, 9.15 a.m. – 1.00 p.m., aki Katholische Universitätsgemeinde, Alpeneggstrasse 5, Berne

Agenda

Part 1: Formal Part

1. Minutes of the Annual Meeting 2005
2. Annual Report 2005/ 06 (till June 2006)
3. Accounts 2005
4. Activities planned for 2005/06
5. Theme of the aidsfocus.ch conference –spring 2007
6. Election / Confirmation of Steering Committee

Part 2: Current Issues

7. Defining common positions, sensitization and advocacy on issues for HIV and AIDS by aidsfocus.ch
8. aidsfocus.ch Memory Work Toolkit

Part 3: Sharing of Experiences and Information

9. Open space
10. Plenary
11. Thanks and farewell

Participants:

Steering Committee: Vreni Wenger (SRC), Romy Mathys, Emma Amadò (Médecins sans Frontières), Coordinator: Helena Zweifel (MMS, Facilitation).

Partners: Stefan Siebenhaar (Bethlehem Mission Immensee), Julien Reinhard (Berne Declaration), Michèle Morier-Genoud (HEKS/EPER), Maya Natarajan (IAMANEH), Flavio Morensino (missio), Jochen Kirsch (mission 21), Thomas Gass (SolidarMed), Verena Wieland (SRK), Ignacio Packer (Terre des Hommes Foundation), Amos Winteler (World Vision Schweiz), Barbara Schär.

MMS: Andrea Isenegger (Board member MMS), Martina Staenke (Minutes).

Guests: Sandra Bernasconi (SDC), Isabelle Oswald.

Apologies: Franz Walter (Aids-Hilfe Schweiz), Linus G. Jauslin (Aids & Kind), Maria Winiger (Caritas Schweiz), Véronique Schoeffel (cinfo), Rao Satapati (CO-OPERAID), Romana Büchel (Swiss Lenten Fund), Gail Hunter (Fédération Genevoise de Coopération), Barbara Müller (FEPA), Valentin Prélaz (Swiss Interchurch Aid/EPER), Mark Moser (Int. Blue Cross), Irene Bush (REPSSI/terre des hommes Switzerland), Denise Caviezel (Terre des Hommes Foundation), Claudia Kessler (STI), Josef Kasper (SRC), Gerhard Bärtschi (TearFund), Andreas Loebell (terre des hommes Switzerland), Esther Bodenmann (World Vision Switzerland), Thomas Schwarz (Medicus Mundi Switzerland), David Mayer.

Welcome

The coordinator welcomes the participants in the name of aidsfocus and leads through the assembly. 11 of 30 partners are present as well as representatives from SDC, MMS and a few individual members and guests.

Part 1: Formal Part

1. Minutes of the Annual Meeting, November 24, 2005

The minutes are approved.

2. Annual Report 2005/ 06 (till June 2006)

The annual report is approved.

3. Accounts 2005

The coordinator reports that unfortunately it was not possible to attract many new external donors in the year 2005 – thus, Medicus Mundi Switzerland had to cover the deficit. In 2006, the risk coverage of the Swiss Federal Office for Health for the annual aidsfocus Conference as well as an earmarked contribution of terre des hommes Switzerland for the Toolkit increased the revenues. And again, the Swiss Red Cross has confirmed an annual contribution of CHF 6000.- for the next three years (2006-2008). The coordinator expresses our gratitude to the SRC for this vital contribution and encourages the other organisations to follow this example.

Upon the question on the sales of material (DVD and Toolkit „Memory Work“), the coordinator reports that material sales rose to almost CHF 6000.- in 2005; and for 2006, up to CHF 4000.- may be expected. There is a rather sluggish market for the French DVD. The partner organisation from the French-speaking part of Switzerland will be requested to beat the drum for its sale.

The accounts 2005 are approved.

4. Activities planned for 2005/06

- Annual conference in April 2007
- Meeting Points with guests
- Website and aidsfocus.news
- Mainstreaming HIV: The peer review group meeting, scheduled for November 2006, was postponed to January 8, 2007 due to non-availability of participants and will be hosted by the Terre des Hommes Foundation in Zurich.
- Fundraising needs to be intensified

5. Theme of the aidsfocus.ch Conference Spring 2007

The coordinator introduces the two themes proposed by the Steering Committee:

a) AIDS, property rights and life perspectives of women and children

Orphaned children's rights to inheritance are often violated, the (male) relatives are the first ones to gain access to the property. Also, widows and their children are likely to face not only social stigma against HIV-affected people but also deprivations caused by property rights violations. Some issues and challenges are to be discussed at the Conference: Women's access to land, traditional and modern law, livelihoods and women's rights violations, protection of children's rights to their inheritance, community based initiatives and experiences of Swiss development organisations.

b) Pregnant women/positive mothers

If an HIV-positive woman becomes pregnant, there is a 35 per cent chance that she will transmit the virus to her child if no preventative action is taken. Every year, more than 700,000 children become HIV-positive via transmission from their parents. Some 15-20 per cent are infected during pregnancy, 50 per cent during delivery and 33 per cent through breastfeeding. However, this is preventable.

Some issues and challenges to be discussed at the Conference – ranging from medical to social-cultural and human rights aspects: Prevention of vertical HIV transfer (PMTCT), dilemmas of breastfeeding, treatment of HIV positive women, providing care and support for families, treatment of HIV positive children, voluntary counselling and testing (routine testing, informed consent and confidentiality), the socio-cultural meaning and significance of motherhood, stigma and challenges HIV-positive mothers and their children are facing, the right of positive women to motherhood and families and experiences of Swiss development organisations.

The participants underline the relevance of both proposed themes in the subsequent lively discussion. Those advocating for the second topic mostly share the view that the social and cultural perspectives need to be treated on the same level as the medical perspectives. Complex social issues and problems must be considered and, in particular, the role of men as well as of fathers and children be reviewed. A family-centred approach should be given priority aiming at encouraging pregnant women and supporting their decision to undergo an HIV-test. Moreover, the aspects that were raised in Topic 1 – such as gender violence and livelihood approach – should be integrated as much as possible also in Topic 2.

Decision: The aidsfocus Conference of April 2007 will be devoted to the issue of „Pregnant women/ positive mothers - from a family approach“ (draft title) (9 against 3 votes).

The second issue proposed by the Steering Committee – „HIV, property rights and life perspectives of women and children“ – should be taken up in 2008.

The coordinator invites all interested parties to join the accompanying group and to actively share in the preparations for the Conference.

6. Election / Confirmation of the Steering Committee

The following members stand up for re-election: Vreni Wenger (Swiss Red Cross), Emma Amadò (MSF), Denise Caviezel, (Terre des hommes Foundation), Claudia Kessler (Swiss Tropical Institute), Romy Mathys, Rao Satapati (CO-OPERAID). Franz Walter leaves Aids-Hilfe Schweiz (AHS) and is thus no longer available for re-election.

Decision: All present-day members are unanimously confirmed in their office. In addition, a successor is elected to replace Franz Walter or rather, a representative of AHS is elected to member of the Steering Group.

A round of applause expresses the participants' gratitude for the commitment of all members of the Steering Committee. Vreni Wenger deserves a special mentioning for her committed cooperation in the Core Group.

Part 2: Current Issues

7. Defining common positions, sensitization and advocacy on issues for HIV and AIDS by aidsfocus.ch

The quality of the position papers is rated very positively. Yet, it is still a big challenge to disseminate and implement the papers' contents both in the public as well as within the individual partner organisations. The participants discussed a press conference / press release as well as measures to directly influence the Swiss government. Moreover, the request is made to work out a Declaration of Commitment during each spring Conference and to periodically adjust the position papers to the latest developments in the field of HIV and AIDS.

Decision: The partner organisations agree that the position paper on prevention, the position paper on treatment and care, and the Declaration of Commitment on the right of youth to comprehensive prevention reflect their common understanding.

The second part of the agenda point – the mandating of the Steering Committee “to support and sign position papers, appeals and calls for action that are in line with these positions in the name of aidsfocus.ch” – raises a lively discussion. Examples discussed are the Toronto Call to action on universal access to treatment (August 2006), the Joint NGO Letter to UNAIDS on universal access process (November 2006) and the option of a letter to M. Calmy-Rey on the Swiss contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. There is some concern and comprehension that aidsfocus.ch would go too proactively into advocacy. Before taking a decision, the Steering Committee should carefully analyse the other actors involved and be extremely cautious if the positioning would be linked to Swiss party politics and elections/voting. The Steering Committee has to take an unanimous decision. The partner organisations need to be informed immediately, in particular if the position paper addresses the Swiss public.

Decision: In the name of aidsfocus.ch, the Steering Committee is mandated to support and sign position papers, appeals and calls for action that are in line with these aidsfocus.ch positions. All decisions by the Steering Committee have to be unanimous.

8. aidsfocus.ch Memory Work Toolkit

The coordinator introduces the new toolkit on memory work which aidsfocus.ch developed in cooperation with terre des hommes Switzerland. The toolkit is designed like a memory box with pictures of body maps. It contains a memory book example, a hero book, a tracing book (patient's own health journal), a CD-Rom with extensive explanations, information, practical examples, training manuals, and the addresses of competence centres as well as the DVD “Strength from Remembering”. It is intended for social marketing and for the support of decision-makers, project officers and trainers with regard to the integration of memory work into project activities. It may also serve programme officers who are invited to schools as an example on how Swiss NGOs work in the field of HIV and AIDS.

Part 3: Sharing of experiences and information

9. Open space

In order to discuss the critical issues in the context of the platform, the coordinator introduces the “open space” technology. Everyone who would like to discuss a theme can put it in the “market place” and invite people to this forum. Four principles have to be respected: 1. Whoever comes is the right person, 2. Whatever happens is the only thing that

can happen, 3. Whenever it starts is the right time, and 4. when it is over, it is over. There is one law, the law of two feet: you can move out (of the group) whenever you want, just like a bumble bee or a butterfly.

An open space was formed for each of the following topics:

1. How to link the Swiss community of practice to the field?
2. Strategy HIV/AIDS of SDC – How do we advocate?
3. Pregnant women / positive mothers

10. Plenary

Summary of the issues discussed in the "open spaces":

First issue: How to link the community of practice to the field?

Key question: How much of the aidsfocus dynamics and the exchange in this community of practice can be actually applied in the field? Proposal: The Steering Committee should consider how to stimulate the member organisations (as a peer review) to disclose voluntarily their delivery status of HIV/AIDS projects or HIV mainstreaming. It is important to give a focus also to "bad practices" and not only to "good practices". If we adopt an approach that there are "no problems" but only "challenges", we give a more honest account when disclosing the difficulties and the "harmful practices" of the international community in terms of HIV and AIDS.

Second issue: SDC AIDS policy 2008

Key question: How can aidsfocus.ch take part in the processes and contents of the new SDC AIDS policy 2008 onwards? The group expressed the view that the issue "human resource development" should be stressed more and the network of aidsfocus.ch should initiate a discussion in order to exert a greater influence on the SDC-policy.

As Sandra Bernasconi attended the meeting, the group was directly informed about the upcoming procedures of SDC. Sandra underlined that SDC plans to conduct detailed interviews with the partner organisations as well as with the organisations of aidsfocus.ch. Thus, on the one hand side the existing strategy should be evaluated, and on the other, proposals how to improve and adapt the new strategy should be implemented. Moreover, she urges the participants to feel free to contact her at any time to share concrete proposals.

Third issue: Pregnant women/ positive mothers

There is no input right now, but the participants are invited to join the working group to prepare the 2007 conference.

11. Thanks and farewell

The coordinator expresses her thanks to all participants for their coming and productive cooperation. In turn, the participants of the Annual Meeting thanked the coordinator for her extensive work.

For the minutes:

Basel, December 2006

*Martina Staenke
Medicus Mundi Switzerland*

*Helena Zweifel
aidsfocus.ch*