

**RURAL ACTION COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATION**

**Impressions of the International AIDS Conference held from July 18 to  
July 22, 2016 in Durban, South Africa**

**A Report presented to Pharmacists without Borders, Sweden**

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## Introduction

This year from July 18, 2016 to July 22, 2016, I was supported by Pharmacists without Borders, Sweden to attend the 21st International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2016) organized by the International AIDS Society (IAS) in Durban, South Africa. This was the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in Sixteen years that Durban was hosting the international event. That 13th International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2000) then was the catalyst for historic change, ushering in a global movement to bring life-saving antiretroviral treatment (ART) to developing countries.

Events at AIDS 2016 included 16 pre-conferences, including the fifth annual Towards an HIV Cure Symposium, TB2016, and pre-conference sessions focused on the rights and contributions of men who have sex with men, transgender people, and adolescents, along with many other topics. This was the first International AIDS Conference at which all of these important pre-conferences took place at the conference venue, which made each pre-conference topic a central component of the main conference program.

### A quick glance at AIDS 2016

- More than **15,000** participants attended the conference from **153** countries
- **157** sessions and workshops on the latest in HIV science, programs and advocacy
- **6** plenary sessions featured leaders and experts from all walks of life
- More than **800** media delegates reported from the conference
- **135** exhibitors showcased their work in the Global Village and Exhibition
- **128** satellite sessions were held by partner organizations
- **42** awards and grants were announced for researchers, organizations and companies
- **33,934** people visited the AIDS 2016 website during the conference

The AIDS 2016 conference had the most competitively scored abstract submissions in history. Thirty-six percent of regular abstract submissions and 18% of late breaker abstracts were accepted for presentation in Durban. Thirty-eight percent of the regular accepted abstracts had a presenting author from Africa, and more than half (54%) of the regular selected abstracts had a female presenting author – proving that women not only make history, they also make outstanding research.

There was also a lot of activism by global activists through marches and demonstrations to drum up support on the need to redouble our efforts to meet global prevention and treatment targets, accelerate research, fully fund the AIDS response, and honor and respect the human rights of all people living with or affected by HIV.



AIDS 2016 attracted prominent participants who included UN Secretary-General **Ban Ki-moon**, actor and activist **Charlize Theron**, singer and philanthropist **Sir Elton John**, **Prince Harry** of Wales, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Chair **Bill Gates**, South African Deputy President **Cyril Ramaphosa**, PEPFAR Chair Ambassador **Deborah Birx**, UNAIDS Executive Director **Michel Sidibé**, Global Fund chief **Mark Dybul**, former South African First Lady **Graça Machel**, and many others. Each of them dug into the conference, participating in sessions and demonstrating their philanthropic and political support, but also their deep personal involvement in and commitment to ending the epidemic.

At the Global Village, I got to experience exhibits, dialogues, screenings, performances and networking zones that are an essential part of the International AIDS Conference. Dozens of community-based organizations, representing the heart and soul of the global AIDS response, participated

### **Significant Revelations at AIDS 2016:**

- Advances in HIV prevention, including new data on access to and use of PrEP; HVTN 702, the study that could lead to the first approved vaccine for HIV; and new research advancing the search for microbicides, long-acting prevention, and multi-purpose prevention technologies. The National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Disease Director Anthony Fauci announced that the HIV vaccine ALVAC-HIV/gp120 will be tested in 5,400 people in South Africa as part of a wide-ranging new clinical trial beginning in November.

- Successes in treatment scale-up, and new efforts to close the treatment gap and move towards the global 90-90-90 targets for testing, access to treatment and viral suppression. Interim results presented from the SEARCH study, conducted in rural Kenya and Uganda, showed a significant advance toward achieving the UNAIDS 90-90-90 targets. The community-based approach to HIV testing, combined with a 'test and treat' model of antiretroviral treatment (ART) access, increased the proportion of adults in these communities who were virally suppressed from 45% to 81% over two years.
- The detrimental impact of laws and policies that stigmatize or criminalize sexuality, sex work, transgender identity, drug use, and living with HIV. As a result, the Elton John AIDS Foundation and PEPFAR announced a joint US\$10 million fund to the International HIV/AIDS Alliance and the Men Who Have Sex With Men (MSM) Global Forum to increase the capacity of local community-based organizations to provide high-quality HIV services for LGBT people.

### Presenting OUR abstract

On a professional as well as personal note, I was among the hundreds of researchers that presented their groundbreaking researches and case studies. My presentation, **“Strengthening community structures for sustained ART provision in resource limited settings”** was prepared on the basis of RACOBABO’s model to increase access and adherence to ART among PLHIV supported by Pharmacists without Borders. At my booth, interest was shown through questions, taking photos, sharing contacts, and invitation to other booths. Through these visits, I was able to pick up several best practices that RACOBABO can adopt in our HIV response such as the use of Mentor mothers in the reversal of mother to child transmission.



### Opportunities for RACOB AO

With a wide range of up to date data from a multitude of researches, publications, and case studies on best practices, RACOB AO is well positioned to make reference during preparation of funding requests, report writing, and breaking new grounds to introduce new methodologies in our project area.

The timely revelation of the successes made towards UNAIDS target of 90-90-90 since RACOB AO employs the same approach in the USAID/PATH funded project that we are currently implementing in Mityana and Sembabule. RACOB AO hopes to use the opportunity to strengthen our resolve and efforts towards achieving the targets.

Having met and shared business cards with a wide range of actors in the AIDS field as well as having presented our ART model at the abstracts gallery put RACOB AO in the limelight and will strengthen our professional networks. Through one of such acquaintances, RACOB AO has registered for the EU volunteers' program. This will help RACOB AO boost our human resources given the numerous challenges with our continued understaffing.

### Conclusion

The closing session saw addresses with calls to reject complacency in the global AIDS response from and to speed up efforts to achieve the U.N. goal to get seven out of 10 HIV positive people to take a test, start medication and suppress the deadly virus in their blood by incoming IAS Presidents **Chris Beyrer** and **Linda-Gail Bekker**. At the end of the closing session, the conference was handed over to the official organizers of the **22nd International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2018)**, which will be held in Amsterdam, Netherlands, in 2018.