



**PROGRESS REPORT**

**SRHR, HIV/AIDS AND GOVERNANCE:**  
a SADC - PF project funded by the  
Swedish government

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF SEYCHELLES**  
**SEPTEMBER 2016 - SEPTEMBER, 2017**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Committee on HIV/AIDS and Sexual Reproductive Health (SRHR) of the 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly convened for the first time as a Committee on 01<sup>st</sup> February 2017. The raison d'être of the Committee was to meet the requirements of the Southern African Development Community-Parliamentary Forum vis-a vis the battle against HIV/AIDS and issues of SRHR. In fact the National Assembly of Seychelles had already willingly committed itself to participate actively in various Health programmes relating to HIV/AIDS and SRHR.

Since its conception, the Committee has drawn up its terms of reference, has had regular monthly meetings with urgent meetings being called when required to discuss pertinent issues, has finalized a programme of activities and has been involved in the conception and implementation of several local activities either directly or indirectly and has participated in various regional and international forums.

## **ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE**

The role of the Committee on HIV/Aids & SRHR is to advocate and influence responses to Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights and HIV/AIDS in Seychelles.

## **COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON HIV/AIDS & SRHR OF THE 6<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY**

The Committee comprises of seven (7) MPs and two (2) Secretariat support staff namely

- Hon. Clive Roucou                      Chairperson
- Hon. John Hoareau                      Vice Chairperson
- Hon. Regina Esparon                      Member
- Hon. Francois Adelaide                      Member
- Hon. Noline Sophola                      Member
- Hon. Audrey Vidot                      Member
- Hon. Egbert Aglae                      Member
- Genevieve Morel                      Secretary/ Researcher
- Samia Lebon                      Assistant Secretary

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Terms of Reference provides the Committee with the mandate to carry out its oversight role on the management of HIV/AIDS and SRHR issues in Seychelles and to also provide recommendations on legislations associated with these issues. It also allows for the engagement of Members of Parliament in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The Terms of reference stipulates that the committee shall:

- Examine issues relating to HIV/AIDS and SRHR
- Advise and disseminate information to Members of the National Assembly for possible legislative enactment in a manner that human rights and dignity of all citizens are safe guarded
- Establish effective Communication with local and international stake holders
- Ensure that legislations on HIV/AIDS and SRHR are in conformity to other Southern African Development countries

## **REPUBLIC OF SEYCHELLES AND HIV/AIDS AND GOVERNANCE**

### **Summary of key issues**

The core issue is the disjunction between the quality of the general SRH services and the scope of the country's HIV/AIDS interventions. The Seychelles has sound public health services which provide free health care for all citizens and, in particular, comprehensive SRHR services, on the basis of a small health budget. The disjunction lies in the lack of comprehensive knowledge of the scale of the country's small HIV epidemic and limited interventions to date in the sub-populations where the epidemic appears to be concentrated.

Seychelles' SRH and HIV/AIDS challenges revolve around adolescent health, drug abuse (heroin), and HIV/Hepatitis C co-infection. While Homosexuality has been decriminalised, Drug use and Sex Work are criminal offences under current legislation; hence, effective treatment therapies for IDUs cannot be instituted in the country's public health services and, more generally, societal stigma and discrimination reduce access to, and use of the health services by these key populations. There is a threat of disease transmission from these sub-populations into the adolescent population in view of many IDUs and MSM reporting that they first engaged in their respective practices when they were adolescents, frequent needle sharing, multiple sex partnerships, relatively high STI rates, and limited use of the health services. Furthermore, there are indications of growing health challenges amongst the adolescent population: a relatively high rate of teenage pregnancies amongst 15-19 year olds. These challenges are due in part to the age of sexual consent being 15 years but adolescents cannot access health services without parental consent until they are 18 years old.

### **BACKGROUND TO THE SADC PF PROJECT**

The Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF) has developed a project to work with and strengthen the capacity of SADC national parliaments to advocate for and influence national responses to SRHR and HIV. This project extends over a four year period (2014-2018) and was approved in the SADC PF 35<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly Session in Mauritius.

In view that the parliament as an institution has an important role to play in pushing the agenda of sexual and reproductive health rights and the response to HIV and AIDS, the project is being implemented through the backing of parliamentarians, especially women. This is because of their position in society and their oversight role which can play an influential role in exacting and maintaining political pressure, influencing and scrutinizing policies and stimulating national responses to SRHR and HIV.

Seychelles is amongst the seven countries which have been chosen for the implementation of this project. Other countries include Angola, Lesotho, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, and Tanzania. The criteria adopted in identifying the countries take into consideration earmarked parliaments' readiness, motivation and interest to move ahead with the SRHR and HIV agenda. Seychelles was very receptive to the project as it already had a Committee on Women Parliamentarians and has other baselines established from best practices identified during the national and regional activities undertaken under the SADC PF HIV/AIDS Programme, with Sida financial support from 2007 and 2011.

## **SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

This report encapsulates the progress made by the National Assembly's Committee on HIV/AIDS and SRHR in the implementation of the SRHR, HIV/AIDS and Governance project from September, 2016 to September, 2017.

The report demonstrates the clear progress that the Committee is making in implementing the HIV/AIDS, SRHR and Governance Project. Different aspects of SRHR, HIV/AIDS and Governance were explored from September, 2016 to September, 2017 which has been geared mostly towards advocacy and fact finding activities.

## **ACTIVITIES COMPLETED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT**

### **September 2016 to September 2017**

- I. The Researcher organized a sensitization workshop on the HIV/AIDS and SRHR and Governance Project for the Members of the 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly in October, 2016 in collaboration with SADC PF Secretariat. The new cohort was exposed to facts and figures about the status of HIV/AIDS and SRHR in Seychelles and the role of law makers. They were also informed on the situation in the SADC region and the role of SADC PF in the realization of the project and how Seychelles joined the Project. The Researcher made logistical arrangements for the workshop, selected the facilitators and rapporteur, liaised with SADC PF to finalize the content of the Programme, contacted the Press for media exposure, mobilized the Members of Parliament to participate and liaised with Eden Bleu Hotel for the venue and other logistics.

- II. In October, 2016, the President appointed the former Speaker of the National Assembly, Dr Patrick Herminie as the Secretary of State for Harm Reduction programme. This move has meant that the Committee on HIV/AIDS and SRHR now has a new partner in the form of a Harm Reduction Programme Secretariat as a stakeholder to influence responses on HIV/AIDS issues especially in prisons and rehabilitation for drug injecting users. The researcher advised the Committee on HIV/AIDS and SRHR to consider these strategies in its plan of action for the Committee.
- III. Another sensitization workshop was also organized by the Researcher in collaboration with SADC PF for CSOs dealing with HIV/AIDS and SRHR issues in Seychelles. The workshop took place at Eden and was well represented. The CSOs were motivated to work with Parliamentarians and had the opportunity to understand how Parliament works and how the public can engage with it. The Researcher made logistical arrangements for the workshop, selected the facilitators and rapporteur, liaised with SADC PF to finalize the content of the Programme, contacted the Press for media exposure, mobilized the Members of Parliament to participate and liaised with Eden Bleu Hotel for the venue and other logistics.
- IV. The Members of the Technical Working Group met in November, 2016 to strategies on the way forward on issues of HIV/AIDS and SRHR targeting Members of Parliament. The Group was represented by different CSOs, Ministry of Health, NAC and Media practitioners and the Group attempted to merge activities of the different organizations targeting Parliament. Many CSOs had affiliations with international Organizations such as ARASA, WHO and UNFPA. It came to light that there were duplications of activities and the need to harmonize them into an action plan. The Group developed an action plan with concrete activities targeting MPs for the first quarter of 2017. The Researcher coordinated the organization of the Strategic Session, selected a Rapporteur, made a presentation about Parliament and coordinated the logistical arrangement including informing staff and MPs about the Session.
- V. Members of the Technical Working Group met during the last week of November, 2016 to prepare several Motions and Urgent Questions to submit to Members of the National Assembly with the aim of facilitating oversight over the HIV/AIDS programme at the national level, more specifically, the mobilisation of resources. The motions pushed for a Committee on HV/AIDS and SRHR at the National Assembly and also discussions on national policies and programmes on HIV/AIDS and SRHR. The researcher facilitated the session and submitted the motions and Urgent Questions to the Leaders in the National Assembly.
- VI. A Strategic Session was organized for the seven Women Parliamentarians in November, 2016 with the aim of influencing them to take the lead in formulating motions and debates on the domestication of the HIV/AIDS and SRHR issues in Seychelles. The session also sought to empower them to share experiences and exercise leadership for their personal growth and gender equality. At the session,

Hon. Jessica Kabwila who is the Chairperson of the SADC PF Women's Parliamentary Caucus and a Member of Parliament of Malawi made a motivational speech. The Researcher coordinated the organization of the Strategic Session including informing the Speaker, the Members of Parliament and staff, provided logistical support including venue, content of session, the presence of the Motivational Speaker, invitation to CSOs to the session and liaising with the Committee on Women Parliamentarians for their participation in the session.

- VII. The Researcher facilitated the meeting between the Speaker of the National Assembly of Seychelles and Dr. Jessie Kabwila, the Chairperson of the SADC PF Women Parliamentary Caucus. Dr. Kabwila was the motivational speaker for the Strategic Session with Women Parliamentarians and the Speaker demanded that she addressed the House in November, 2016. The researcher made necessary arrangements including protocol/transportation and coordination with the Clerk to insert the Statement of Dr. Kabwila on the Order Paper. Dr. Kabwila's statement made reference to the HIV/AIDS and SRHR project and the role of women parliamentarians in influencing responses on these issues. She also talked about the role of women parliamentarians in gender equality and how women can take leadership roles and be the change they want to see.
- VIII. Members of the National Assembly at the highest level were involved in the HIV/AIDS Campaign on the 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2016 to coincide with the HIV/AIDS day. A delegation from the National Assembly led by the Deputy Speaker volunteered to the rapid HIV testing at the Beau Vallon Health Centre. In the Presence of the President of Seychelles, the Members also lit candles in memory of persons who have died of HIV/AIDS and those living with the disease. The Researcher at the National Assembly liaised with the National Aids Council (coordinator of the Project) to mobilize the Members of the National Assembly to take part of this activity.
- IX. HASO, a CSO for HIV/AIDS launched its "Support Don't Punish Campaign" on the 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2016 and invited the Members of the National Assembly to attend. However, the launch took place during the Sitting period of the Assembly and the Budget was being debated then. However, the Researcher disseminated the information received from HASO about this event to the Members and also demanded that the Members paid attention to the Concept of the Campaign. The campaign sought to call for action for Drug Policies and laws based on Public health and Human Rights and lobby and advocate for the adoption and implementation of Harm Reduction Services/Interventions for PWUIDs in Seychelles.
- X. A motion on the Terms of Reference of the Committee on HIV/AIDS and SRHR was submitted to the House on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2017. Four Members of the Committee intervened on the Motion and the Researcher assisted with facts and figures to enrich the debate. She liaised with the members of the Technical Working Group to acquire information about HIV and SRHR and distributed to the Members. She further consulted the website of SADC PF to extract information about the Project

targeting MPs that would be useful if assisting the Members when explaining the role of MPs in influencing responses of HIV/AIDS and Sexual Reproductive Health.

- XI. Women Parliamentarians visited the Women's prison to coincide with International Women's day 2017. The aim of the visit was to meet with women prisoners and understand the challenges they face whilst behind bars. One of the points raised was of the gender bias in early release of prisoners. It was reported that women prisoners were not considered for pardon in December, 2016 when the President pardoned 88 prisoners. The women prisoners felt that there was an injustice in view that most women prisoners were convicted for minor crimes compared to men. Furthermore, most of these women have small children and they are also single parents. The Committee is compiling a report to present to the House. The Committee Secretary communicated with the Researcher to inform her of the activity.
- XII. The HIV/AIDS Support Organization (HASO) organized a "Zero Discrimination" against people living with HIV/AIDS Campaign on the 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2017 and advocate that Members of Parliament supported the campaign by taking a photograph with butterfly posters. The Researcher informed the Office of the Speaker and the Clerk about this activity. She also liaised with the Chairperson of HASO for logistical arrangements. All members of Parliament were informed and they took part in the campaign but more pronounced were Members of the Committee on Women Parliamentarians and Committee on HIV/AIDS and SRHR. The campaign began airing on the Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) during the last week February, 2017.
- XIII. The National AIDS Council collaborated with the St John Bosco Church to organize prayer sessions on the theme of #beboldforchange# and invited all Women Parliamentarians and staff to participate. The sessions included special prayers for interventions on school dropouts in boys and girls and parenting. NAC liaised with the Researcher to disseminate this information to all MPs and staff. The researcher ensured that staff and MPs were aware of this activity by circulating the email from NAC.
- XIV. The Researcher met with a Consultant from Global Fund, Ms Drew Aiken, a consultant working with ARASA on work for the Global Fund. She was creating a tool and accompanying report to assess political and advocacy opportunities to address barriers that interfere with access to HIV services. The Researcher discussed the status of legislative framework on HIV/AIDS in Seychelles and opportunities that exists to address barriers. She talked about the activities of the National Assembly in that direction and discussed some of the bills being brought for consideration by Parliament relating to HIV/AIDS.
- XV. HASO, a CSO relating to HIV/AIDS issues sent its "Kontakt" Newsletter to be disseminated by the National Assembly. Upon liaising with the Researcher, the



newsletter was sent to the Deputy Clerk to be distributed to the Members. The Newsletter contained articles about the amendment to the Penal Code, the Zero Discrimination Day and discussion about Bills being brought to the National Assembly for Consideration.

- XVI. The Ministry of Health presented the findings of a study on Pregnant women's Satisfaction and Expectation of maternity health services in Seychelles on the 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2017. The study was funded by the Seychelles Women's Trust Fund and Members of the National Assembly attended the presentation. The Head of the Family Health and Nutrition Programmes sent the invitation to the Researcher to be dispatched to all Members specifically Women Parliamentarians. Although, there were only 7 women Parliamentarians and the activities were many on that day, the Researcher managed to convince at least two Women Parliamentarians to attend.
- XVII. On the occasion of Women's Day, 2017 (8<sup>th</sup> March) the seven Women Parliamentarians attended a half day session at State House by invitation of the President. The aim of the session was to debate on challenges of women in decision making and other issues of concern in the society for women. Some of the pertinent issues discussed with the President were domestic violence, abuse and the possibility of building a half way home for women and girls in these situations. From the discussion, the Cabinet committed itself to the construction of a half way home for abuse women and girls. The researcher liaised with the Secretary of the Committee Women Parliamentarian for information about the meeting and issues to be discussed.
- XVIII. There were many instances when Members of the National Assembly requested information from stakeholders on HIV/AIDS and SRHR. The Leader of the Opposition sought information about budgetary allocation for the National Aids Council through the Research Officer after he attended the HIV/AIDS and SRHR Workshop targeting Members of the National Assembly. The Chairperson of the Committee on HIV/AIDS and SRHR informed the Researcher that he has been having informal discussions with the HIV/AIDS Programme Manager in the Ministry of Health.
- XIX. The Committee met with the National AIDS Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2017. The aim of the meeting was to have an overall view of NAC's programmes with relevance to HIV/AIDS & SRHR, and budgets allocated to such programmes. One important point on the agenda was NAC's Legal Framework/Roadmap that was at that that time still in its draft stage. MPs on the HIV/AIDS & SRHR Committee were able to discuss and give their views with regards to the Legal Framework. The Researcher coordinated the meeting.
- XX. A meeting was also conducted with the Communicable Diseases Unit (CDCU) 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2017, also to receive an overall view of the Unit's programmes and budget. One major point of discussion was the location of the Unit itself as members of the Committee felt that the location is not conducive for service delivery of such a

sensitive nature. The meeting also provided the opportunity for members to obtain in-depth knowledge on the protocol of the Needle Exchange Programme. Members can now provide their support through their parliamentary work. The Researcher coordinated the meeting.

- XXI. Meeting has also been conducted with two key Civil Society Organisations dedicated to HIV/AIDS & SRHR issues, HASO & ASSF on 31<sup>st</sup> August. The meeting provided a platform for MPs to better understand the work of these two associations and pledged their support to assist them in their capacities as MPs. The Researcher coordinated the meeting.
- XXII. Through its close involvement with all relevant partners, one young woman MP, who also sits on the HIV/AIDS & SRHR Committee has recently been appointed as a member on the National AIDS Council Technical working group. NAC liaised with the Researcher who in turn liaised with the Committee for the nomination
- XXIII. The Committee has also recently co-partnered with NAC to organise a half day workshop entitled “Speak Out to the Community”, on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2017. The researcher worked in close collaboration with NAC in the implementation of this workshop.
- XXIV. The Committee has also organised two Regional Public Hearings, one on Praslin on 28<sup>th</sup> September and one on Mahe on 29<sup>th</sup> September. These hearings are aimed at gathering information to be analysed at a later date which will permit the members to work on a relevant motion to present before the house shortly.
- XXV. All Committee members and support staff participated in a workshop focusing on the decriminalization of sex work. The half day workshop, held on Friday 06<sup>th</sup> October 2017 at Eden Blue, was organized by the HIV and AIDS Support Organisation, HASO and also saw the participation of the Women Parliamentarians Committee.
- XXVI. Committee members and support staff have had the opportunity to participate in several regional and international forums organized by the SADC PF.

## **BEYOND 2017**

A fresh programme of activities will be drafted for 2018 which will comprise of, amongst other issues, visits to prisons, dispensing of condoms to all work establishments, government, private and parastatal institutions, including prisons. Outreach and sensitisation programmes will be extended to all schools.

## **CONCLUSION**

There has been a great stride in implementation of activities and there is a new buzz around the subject of HIV/AIDS and SRHR brought by the new Committee on HIV/AIDS and SRHR. Since its inception the Committee has had the support of NAC, HASO, ASSF and other relevant NGOs who are willing to work in close collaboration for the advancement of the project. During 2018, the Committee will partner with other local NGOS and newly formed associations both on Mahe and the inner islands and will work closely with CEPS, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and the Prison Department so as enable them to have a voice in Parliament with regards to issues of HIV/AIDS and SRHR

**-END-**

**MEMBERS' SIGNATURES**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
1. Hon. Clive Roucou	Chairperson	.....	.....
2. Hon. John Hoareau	Vice Chairperson	.....	.....
3. Hon. Regina Esparon	Member	.....	.....
4. Hon. Francois Adelaide	Member	.....	.....
5. Hon. Egbert Aglae	Member	.....	.....
6. Hon. Noline Sophola	Member	.....	.....
7. Hon. Audrey Vidot	Member	.....	.....