

CHINA

Report prepared by the Joint UN Team on AIDS

JOINT TEAM

UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UN WOMEN, ILO, UNESCO, WHO, UNAIDS
SECRETARIAT

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020-2021

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, China continued to make significant progress in the HIV response. To ensure continuity of HIV services during the pandemic, the Joint Team supported an assessment of the impacts of the pandemic and related policies on people living with HIV. Moreover, it mobilized resources, established a COVID-19 hotline, and trained healthcare providers on prevention and management of HIV and COVID-19 to improve access to HIV services among vulnerable and key populations. Under the Africa-China collaboration, the Joint Team facilitated experience sharing on China's COVID-19 response among hundreds of doctors from East African and Asian countries. Intense advocacy and technical support led to the adoption of a revised law that mandates schools to provide comprehensive sexuality education and protect minors from sexual harassment and violence in schools. Better pre-exposure prophylaxis treatment regimens were adopted, and HIV prevention services were expanded to key populations, particularly transgender women and male sex workers. A round table discussion was held among post-graduate students on the elimination of discrimination based on gender, disability, sexual orientation, and HIV status; and a self-learning guide was developed and implemented in several companies to reduce stigma and discrimination among key populations in the workplace.

HIV TESTING AND TREATMENT

The Joint Team supported the National Centre for AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Disease Control and Prevention (NCAIDS) to scale up awareness and access to HIV test and treatment services among young people and key populations. More than 100 articles, short videos and key messages promoting early HIV testing and uptake of antiretroviral treatment were also developed by the Joint Team and disseminated through social media outlets to support the national HIV campaigns. These multi-media materials promoted early HIV testing and uptake of antiretroviral; advanced HIV prevention and campaigned against discrimination towards people living with or affected by HIV. These initiatives contributed to the estimated 280 million HIV tests conducted in China in 2021.

In the early stage of the COVID-19 outbreak in China in 2020, many community-based organizations participated in the COVID response. For instance, the Wuhan LGBT Center, a community-based organization in Wuhan was supported by the Joint Team to establish a COVID-19 hotline, which responded to 6500 calls from people living with HIV and persons from

key and general populations in Wuhan who requested information and/or support on HIV and COVID-19 prevention and treatment between February and May 2020. In 2020-2021, with members of the Joint Team sitting in the Advisory Committee, the China AIDS Fund for nongovernmental organizations (CAFNGO) provided US\$ 16 million to support 980 HIV prevention, treatment, and care programmes led by community-based organizations benefiting about 300 000 people annually in China.

The Joint Team, in collaboration with the Sichuan University and the China National Health Development Research Centre, completed a study on the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and related regulation policies on 2280 people living with HIV in China. The final study report highlighted the challenges of access to employment and loss of income for people living with HIV during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Joint Team facilitated the Fourth and Fifth Annual South-South Collaboration Workshops on AIDS (virtual) during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Three webinars were organized for more than 350 doctors from Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda, and members of the Global HIV Prevention Coalition to facilitate interactive and in-depth discussions with Chinese colleagues on the lessons and experiences of HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services delivery during the pandemic.

ELIMINATION OF MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION OF HIV

In 2021, the Joint Team made notable contributions to the development of the 2022-2025 National action plan for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission (EMTCT) of HIV, syphilis, and hepatitis B based on the lessons learned from the 2012-2020 EMTCT demonstration project in Guangdong, Zhejiang, and Yunnan. [Note: the newly developed plan of action was launched early 2022]

Technical assistance was also afforded to the National Center for Women and Children Health (NCWCH) to document experiences, lessons learned, and challenges from the implementation of the EMTCT demonstration project in pilot provinces, which was presented to the National Health Commission to scale up prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B services and support the ongoing internal subnational EMTCT validation process which started in 2020. Additionally, 28 EMTCT best practices were selected and documented; and national expert advisory committees on EMTCT were established to improve services across the country and accelerate China's progress towards EMTCT.

HIV PREVENTION AMONG HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, YOUNG PEOPLE AND KEY POPULATIONS

Under the *HealthWise* initiative, the Joint Team, in partnership with the National Health Commission and Peking Union Medical College, conducted a series of training workshops for more than 650 healthcare workers in Hubei Province to improve their understanding and skills on prevention and management of occupational exposures to infectious diseases, including HIV, COVID-19, and hepatitis. Subsequently, the National Health Commission with technical support from the Joint Team initiated the development of the national Occupational Safety and Health Regulations in Healthcare Settings.

Technical and financial assistance was provided to strengthen the national capacity for the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education and ensuring a safe learning environment, in alignment with international guidelines. Heightened advocacy and technical support contributed to the revision of the Law on Protection of Minors which came into effect in June 2021. The revised law mandates schools to protect minors from sexual assault and harassment; and the provision of comprehensive sexuality education in schools to help students protect themselves and develop safe decision-making skills. The Joint Team also organized comprehensive sexuality education training workshops and online sessions reaching over 20 000 teachers from eight provinces and more than 2000 middle school students from Qinghai,

Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces to improve their understanding and delivery of comprehensive sexuality education.

In August 2021, following years of advocacy and technical support from the Joint Team, the National Medical Products Administration approved tenofovir disoproxil fumarate/emtricitabine as a first-line regimen for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) use in China. In 2021, the Joint Team also supported communities in the conduction of a survey on PrEP acceptability, which highlighted the lack on willingness to scale up PrEP within the public health approach and the insufficient awareness and demand from the community, constituting major barriers to the implementation of this innovative prevention strategy. Representatives from the Government and communities also participated in four regional PrEP workshops organized by the Joint Team, and shared their views and expectations.

To improve access and promote demand for HIV prevention information and services, the Joint Team supported the mapping of available HIV prevention services tailored for key populations on Blued—the largest social network app for gay people with 40 million users across the globe. In addition, the Joint Team continued to support a three-year pilot project funded by the M.A.C. AIDS Fund to reach 1200 transgender women and male sex workers in Shanghai and nearby areas. Through a harmonized working mechanism among local CDCs, hospitals and communities, this project promoted community-led people-centred comprehensive HIV prevention intervention services during 2019-2021.

GENDER INEQUALITY, STIGMA, AND DISCRIMINATION

As part of the multidisciplinary study on the relationship between HIV and vulnerability, the Joint Team supported a survey among 4000 people living with HIV, including 575 women in 11 provinces. The findings revealed that families affected by HIV were at higher risk of slipping into poverty due to catastrophic healthcare expenditure and loss of employment opportunities. It also showed that women living with HIV in China had multi-dimensional vulnerabilities, including significantly heavier financial burdens compared to men living with HIV, and were susceptible to gender-based violence. The consolidated report with recommendations will be used by the Joint Team and partners to advocate for poverty alleviation initiatives, social protection, universal health coverage and a public health reform.

As a result of technical assistance, a self-learning guide on the inclusion of people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community and the world of work was developed and piloted in 10 companies to promote the elimination of discrimination and violence towards the LGBTI community in workplaces. The final report on the pilot programmes will support the finalization of the learning guide.

The Joint Team developed videos messages featuring the UNAIDS Goodwill Ambassador, celebrities and Heads of United Nations agencies rejecting all forms of stigma and discrimination, inequalities, and violence towards people from vulnerable and key population groups. The video messages were widely dissemination through popular social medias in Chinese language such as Wechat, Weibo, Bilibili, Byte Dancing, Kuaishou, and received positive feedback.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

The Joint Team made significant contributions to China's active engagement in the global HIV response. Technical assistance was provided to document China's experiences on HIV and COVID-19 responses and share with other countries on various international platforms, such as the meetings of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board, the Global HIV Prevention Coalition, and the World Health Assembly. China's role in South-South cooperation was actively supported, including through the 2020 UN South-South Day event and the panel discussion on China's experiences in COVID-19 prevention and control through development cooperation.

For instance, in collaboration with the Gates Foundation, the Joint Team organized in 2021 a high-level dialogue on China-Africa Health Cooperation, bringing together leaders from the African Union Commission, Africa Centre for Disease Control, African Union New Partnership for Africa's Development (AU-NEPAD), African diplomatic missions, government institutions, and development partners in China. Critical recommendations generated from the dialogue, such as strengthening collaboration for prevention and control of infectious diseases, including HIV, promoting access to medicines, enhancing drug regulation capacities, and accelerating the establishment of the African Medicines Agency (AMA) were included in the outcome documents of the Eight Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation to further strengthen collaboration and increase investment for ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

As a result of technical support provided by the Joint Team, HIV-related issues, including those related to healthcare, comprehensive sexuality education, gender-based violence, and human rights were explicitly included under two outcome areas—people and prosperity, and partnership—in the newly launched United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for China 2021-2025. To reinforce China's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Joint Team further contributed to all other cross-cutting areas of the UNSDCF, including the “leave no one behind” principle, gender, young people, disability, monitoring and evaluation, communication, and administration.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the challenges for key populations in accessing services and the need for more adapted prevention and social protection services. Persistent stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV and key populations in the whole society narrows the space for resource mobilization, community advocacy and human rights protection. The Government initiated HIV advocacy campaign in schools, hospitals, companies, communities, and households which will help strengthen HIV prevention and address stigma and discrimination.

Concerns are being raised in relation to the quality of services delivered by civil society organizations, and efforts will be further leveraged to improve the capacity of community-based organizations and increase funding to support quality service delivery.

Innovative prevention and treatment measures need to be scaled up. Insufficient coverage of HIV services among key populations and slow up-take of prevention strategy e.g. PrEP, and late diagnosis and out-of-date treatment regimens are still the key challenges.

Despite the adoption of the revised Law on Protection Minors which mandates comprehensive sexuality education in schools, there remains a hesitance to adopt concrete measures to implement comprehensive sexuality education in schools and for young people out of schools.

While the newly launched national programmes for the development of women and children comprised more specific requirements for gender equality education, LGBTI remains a sensitive issue and a challenge in the scale up of gender diversity education and the overall support to the education sector.

Report available on the
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