



ADVOCACY

AGENDA

Advocating for young men who have sex with men and young transgender persons in Asia and the Pacific



“Evidence shows that many young people engage in high risk behaviour due to a lack of education and in response to punitive laws, which increases their exposure to HIV. This is why government leaders, policy makers and law enforcement agencies have the obligation to respond to the needs and rights of all young people. We must ensure that no one is left behind especially young MSM, young transgender people, young sex workers & young injecting drug users. Their voices must be heard and they should be supported to engage in advocacy and decision-making. We need young people’s active leadership in order for us to see an end to the AIDS epidemic in Asia and the Pacific.” - **Steve Kraus, Director, UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Asia and the Pacific**

“APCOM is committed to supporting YVC to develop a cadre of well-connected, abled and informed advocates working at multiple levels within Asia and the Pacific to ensure that HIV response is keeping up with how young people are networking, making their specific needs heard, and developing future generation of leaders.” - **Midnight Poonkasetwattana, Executive Director, Asia Pacific Coalition on Male Sexual Health**

“Many of us in the UN have a lot to learn from YVC and its network members about advocacy on sexual health, HIV and human rights. YVC continues to excel in drawing attention to the needs and rights of young men who have sex with men and young transgender persons in the region, and their leadership role in meeting these needs. UNESCO is pleased to learn from, and work with, YVC to advance this agenda.” - **Justine Sass, Regional HIV and AIDS Adviser for Asia and the Pacific / Chief, HIV Prevention and Health Promotion (HP2) Unit, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education**

“Young key populations are at the centre of the HIV epidemic in the Asia-Pacific and they must be at the centre of the response. We must listen to young people and include them as equal partners to create laws, policies and programmes that understand and respond to their needs.” - ***Dr. Josephine Sauvarin, Technical Advisor on HIV/Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health, UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office***

“Save the Children recognises that young people themselves are best placed to identify their age-specific needs for HIV prevention, treatment and care. Save the Children supports and encourage the important contribution YVC makes in ensuring that the voices of young men who have sex with men and transgender people are heard and counted when designing and delivering HIV programmes in the Asia Pacific region.” - ***Scott McGill, Senior Advisor HIV&AIDS (Asia Region), Department of Child Protection and HIV&AIDS, Save the Children USA***

“Young people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions face a wide range of obstacles to the full enjoyment of their human rights in the Asia-Pacific region. Young gay men and transgender women in particular are at greatly enhanced risk of bullying in schools, pressures to conform to rigid gender norms from families and their communities, harassment and violence in public spaces, and barriers to accessing mental healthcare. UNDP and the UN, starting with our highest leaders, are committed to combating stigma, discrimination, and violence against young gay men, young transgender women, young MSM, and other LGBT communities. We are doing this through many ways, most notably through our continuous support to Youth Voices Count and through the joint UNDP-USAID 'Being LGBT in Asia' initiative since 2012.” - ***Saurav Jung Thapa, Technical Officer – LGBT and Human Rights, UNDP Asia Pacific Regional Centre***

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WHAT IS YVC?



“To do what you love and feel that it matters...what could be more fun?”

A youth initiative led by young men who have sex with men (MSM) and young transgender people, Youth Voices Count (YVC) brings together the most vibrant, diverse, and young community leaders in Asia and the Pacific.

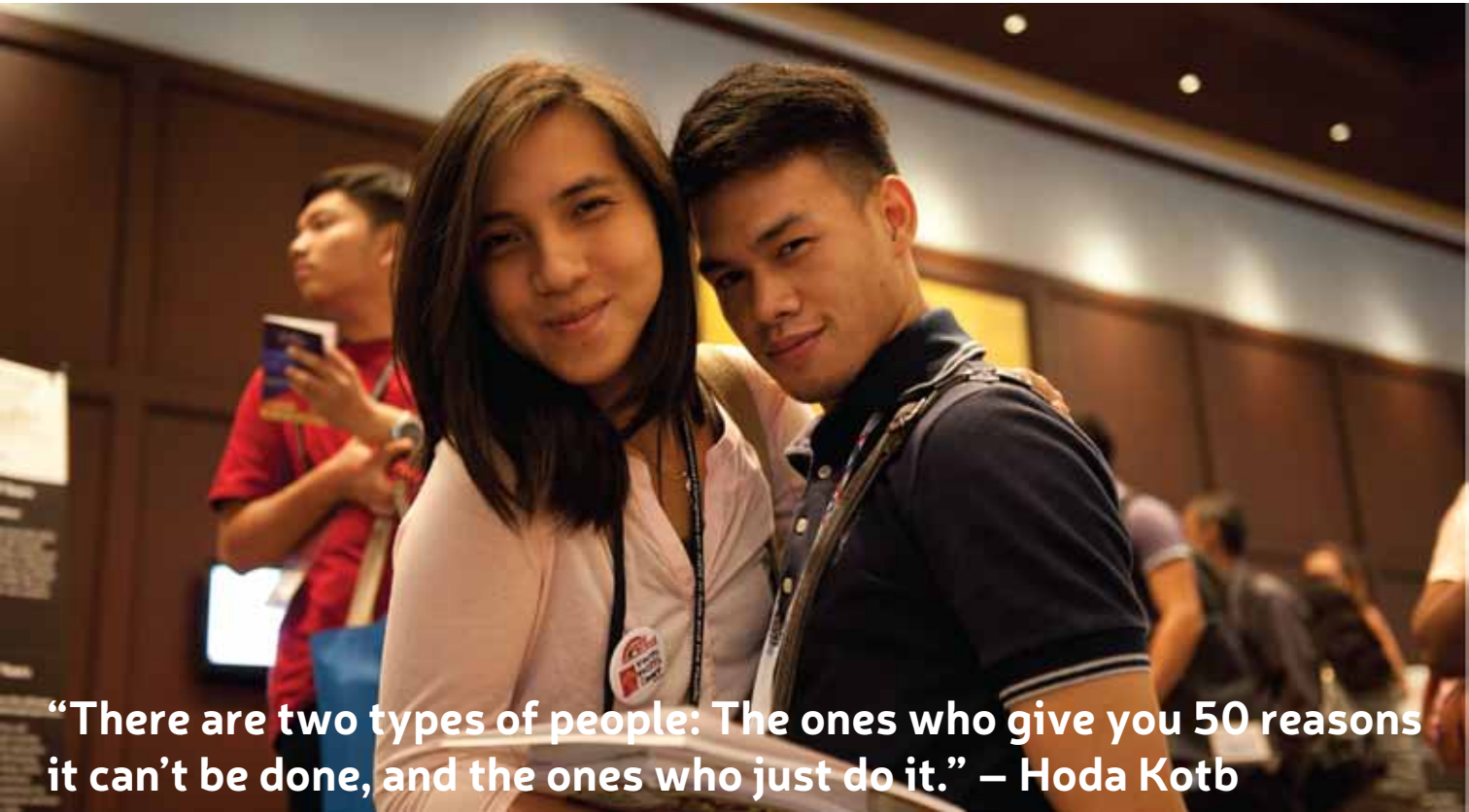
Globally, 4 million young people 15-24 years old are living with HIV¹, half a million of whom are living in Asia and the Pacific². More than 95% of all new HIV infections among young people occur among most-at-risk young people including young MSM and young transgender people³. Age significantly contributes to a person's vulnerability to HIV in this region, particularly young MSM and young transgender people as it adds more layers to already existing stigma and discrimination toward them for their sexual behavior, drug use or/and occasional or non-occasional engagement with sex work.

YVC was formed in 2010 as a result of a successful inaugural consultation in Bangkok, Thailand that brought together more than 40 young MSM and young transgender women from across the region to discuss key issues that they face in their communities.

The outcomes of which is an emerging consensus that there is a lack of youth-friendly health services where they could feel comfortable discussing their health needs with service providers. In addition, intense societal discrimination limits equal education and employment opportunities. Self-stigma issues that arise from such difficulties make it harder for young MSM and young transgender people to seek support and much needed help. Before its inception, there was no youth initiative catering to the specific needs of young MSM and young transgender people, led and driven by them. YVC is the first network to wholly embrace the voice of young transgender people along with young MSM in Asia and the Pacific, cross-cutting entities from MSM, transgender, LGBTQI movement, HIV response among Young Key Populations (YKPs), and from other sexual health-related issues with a touch of human rights.

YVC members have been vocal in advocating on behalf of young MSM and young transgender people at national, regional and global levels. They influence the outcome documents of key strategic meetings (namely, UN High Level Meeting; Asia Pacific Regional Consultation on Universal Access to HIV Prevention, Treatment, Care and Support; the World Youth Summit in Mali; for example) to reflect the needs to access to prevention, treatment, and care services of young MSM and young transgender people in Asia and the Pacific region. The network then continues to provide that space for dialogue both offline and online, work closely with existing civil society partners through a dedicated secretariat to facilitate changes at local, national and regional levels.

YVC aims to address issues related to HIV, health, and human rights through capacity building, policy advocacy and community mobilization within the young MSM and young transgender communities in the region, recognizing the unique needs and vulnerabilities of these communities.



“There are two types of people: The ones who give you 50 reasons it can’t be done, and the ones who just do it.” – Hoda Kotb



**THE WORK
WE DO**

**LOUD IN ACTION
PROUD IN STRENGTH**

YVC has been at the forefront of giving a loud voice and a proud face to the issues that directly affect young MSM and young transgender people by advocating, mainstreaming, and providing a regional platform for the network's strong membership in 19 countries around Asia and the Pacific. The country members' active involvement in their communities and respective countries is the main and unique strength of YVC.

HIV VULNERABILITIES AND THE GROWING CRISIS AMONG YOUNG MSM AND YOUNG TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

As data in Asia and the Pacific continues to indicate that young MSM and young transgender people are at high risk of HIV infection, these young people face additional barriers to services due to the criminalization of male-to-male sex in 19 out of 38 countries in the Asia-Pacific region⁴, the non-recognition of gender identity of transgender people, and the intense stigma and discrimination from family, employers, service providers, law enforcement bodies, and the state, among others⁵. Young MSM and young transgender people also experience challenges in accessing health services due to their age because of laws that require parental consent to obtain HIV testing and counseling for children and adolescents under 18 in some countries in the region. In addition, young MSM and young transgender people aged 18 - 29⁶ report facing unique self-issues, including intense self-stigma, which further increases their HIV vulnerabilities.

In urban meccas such as Bangkok, Thailand; Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam; and Chongqing, China, young MSM have high HIV prevalence rates with the primary mode of transmission being unprotected sex. In some cases prevalence has been increasing over the past several years, according to a community consultation organised by YVC and UNICEF in 2011. Evidences also indicate that young transgender women are increasingly affected and remain an invisible population⁷.

With advocacy as one of the network's main priority and key strength since its inception, YVC is particularly committed to addressing the HIV, health, and human-rights issues faced by young MSM and young transgender people that requires engendering systematic change.

Among other YKPs, young MSM and young transgender people face unique stigma and discrimination due to their sexual orientation, sexual behavior, gender identity, and gender expression, which further marginalize these populations and increase their vulnerability to HIV. To this day, YVC is the only regional network wholly and fully dedicated to the rights and needs of these populations in Asia and the Pacific.

At the moment, YVC reaches out to 19 countries in Asia-Pacific and recruited 40 young MSM and transgender community leaders. Our efforts are made to leverage meaningful participation of young MSM and young transgender people at global and regional fora. Consultations with members are convened annually to identify issues and to address them through inter-country collaboration.

SELF-STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

The voices of young MSM and young transgender people have been strengthened and highlighted through YVC at regional and global conferences such as ICAAP 2011 in Busan, International AIDS Conference 2012 in Washington D.C., ICAAP 2013 in Bangkok, and the International AIDS Conference 2014 in Melbourne. Unique self-stigma issues among young MSM and young transgender people has also been discussed and addressed at many levels. In 2013, YVC organized community events during celebration of International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) in four countries namely Viet Nam, Indonesia, Mongolia and the Philippines. Mini documentaries were produced in these countries to bring the messages of self-stigma

among young MSM and young transgender people to the surface. Expansion and implementation in more countries is on the way.

Upon identifying that there is a lack of youth-friendly HIV-related health services for young MSM and young transgender people in the region, YVC is producing a set of youth-friendly guidelines for health service providers at the country and community levels, with inputs provided by our members during a consultation in November, 2013. YVC hopes that once used by the health services providers, the guidelines will increase youth access to health services in the region.

In the upcoming time, YVC will expand the scope and impact of these activities, continue to identify our members' issues and further advocate for them, while increasing our membership and strengthening our capacity. YVC's direction will be laid-out in more details in this advocacy agenda.



“Being gay and HIV positive means that one has to face double layers of discrimination and has to come out more than once, an unenjoyable experience.”
– Gautam Yadav, YVC member from India

ADVOCACY AGENDA



For the purposes of this agenda, advocacy is defined as, “an ongoing process to change values, attitudes, actions, policies and laws by influencing decision-makers and opinion leaders, organisations, systems and structures at different levels.”^{9*}

The development of this advocacy agenda relied heavily on the perspectives, opinions, and experiences of YVC’s active and spirited membership. Twenty-one members were asked to indicate their top advocacy priorities, proposed approaches and targets at the community, national, and regional levels through an online survey. In addition, key informant interviews were conducted with five members to further capture understandings and reflections on YVC’s advocacy over the past one and a half years.

Key informant interviews were also conducted with two YVC Advisors and two external partners to offer insight into how YVC’s advocacy is interpreted outside of the network, as well as to provide context to the overall HIV landscape in the region and trends that YVC’s advocacy strategy should take into consideration. Several key documents and policy briefs were also reviewed on HIV and other issues faced by young MSM and young transgender people in Asia and the Pacific.

This advocacy agenda was also supported by the YVC Secretariat as reflected in the Rapid Assessment Apparatus (Rapid App) developed by APCOM and AFAO for the *MSM and Transgender Networks Capacity Strengthening Capacity Initiative*.

As a growing and thriving youth initiative, it is apparent that an approach in achieving the change it wants to see at the community, country and regional levels must be in place to facilitate an active involvement within the in-country membership, partners, and key stakeholders. Various points were identified as such:

- YVC's advocacy is **highly driven by the issues identified by YVC members in their communities**. The network's presence is keenly felt at the community, national and regional levels to leverage its collective strengths towards change. Advocacy methods and specific issues are **tailored to national contexts** whenever possible.
- The Secretariat **acts as a hub that collates and generates knowledge, initiates community research, offers policy suggestions and strategic communications**, be always in full and active collaboration and consultation with in-country members.
- YVC members are **enabled to undertake local and national advocacy efforts** through developing their skills, leadership, and collaborations with other organizations.
- A culture of **evaluation, critical reflection and accountability** across the network ensures constant learning about advocacy, strategic network evolution, and its young members making decisions.

This approach is envisioned as a simple cycle, in which the issues identified as critical by YVC members informs and complements both national and regional advocacy strategies and activities. Leadership and documentation of key issues on the ground are going to fuel local, national and regional work.

A young man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a red long-sleeved shirt, is smiling and holding a black camera up to his eye. He is wearing a red lanyard with a badge around his neck. The background is a blurred indoor setting with wooden beams. A large red semi-transparent triangle is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**LIGHTS!
CAMERA!
ACT!**

**ACTION
COMMITMENT
TRANSPARENCY**

Borrowing from cinema's most famous phrase, the title explains the directions and engagement of YVC to the ever-changing landscape of advocating for young people.

LIGHTS

Light signifies hope. Lights, be it in different forms and ever changing is an embodiment of a clear direction. YVC believes that young people will continue the torch and the work in working towards an AIDS-free generation where equality is being upheld and one's voice is given importance, not forgetting the element of fun, professionalism, and integrity in delivering its commitments to the community it serves.

CAMERA

With the world getting smaller everyday and information in the tip of our finger, YVC believes in the power of social media and new technology in reaching young people, raising their awareness, and involving them in advocacy. In our world that is fast-paced and tech-savvy, YVC is committed in exploring innovations to ensure that issues of young people are always highlighted and supported

Action. Commitment. Transparency. ACT!

These three words establish YVC's clear process in achieving its advocacy as a dynamic and growing network of young MSM and young transgender people. We are moving forward to the future and building on the current success of the network to continue to sustain the momentum of the movement.

ACTION

YVC presents its activities, initiatives and participation, including those of its members, at the national, regional and international platforms that will contribute in achieving its aims.

COMMITMENT

One of the strengths of YVC is issues-based oriented effort. The issues we tackle are experienced by our communities. Our members instill and promote a deep sense of commitment and engagement to these various issues that affects young MSM and young transgender people.

TRANSPARENCY

It is vital that YVC promotes wide participation from its members across countries in the region. More so, it is equally essential to encourage accountability of the organization to its members. Thus, we act visibly and predictably. In this document, we present easily measurable standards to guide the Secretariat and the members in the course of YVC's performance.

By this structure that YVC intend to achieve and address its advocacy priorities staying true to its form as a vibrant, diverse, and dynamic youth initiative.

Many providers are not familiar with the transgender body. Inappropriate questions are always asked. People think that transgender women should be passive and powerless and this multiplies our vulnerabilities.

- Hender Gercio, YVC member from the Philippines



ADVOCACY PRIORITIES



“Beyond the rhetoric – getting to the heart of why young MSM and young transgender people in Asia Pacific are increasingly affected by HIV”

1. **The neglected ‘interior’ dimension:** Addressing self-stigma and its linkages to HIV
2. **Accessing services to save lives:** Increasing uptake of HIV prevention, testing and treatment programs
3. **The big picture:** Countering the broader social stigma and discrimination that impacts health outcomes

PRIORITY 1. The neglected ‘interior’ dimension: Addressing self-stigma and its linkages to HIV through pushing for enhanced programmatic responses.

ACTION

Regional level

- To take the conversations around self-stigma and HIV to the “next level” through increasing stakeholder knowledge on the issue.
- To integrate self-stigma reduction innovations into HIV prevention programmes, service delivery guidelines, and policies.

National level

- To develop concrete local campaigns and strategies and further use the research results to advocate for policy and programme change.

- To increase funding of young MSM and young transgender support groups, peer outreach workers, supportive health services, and media campaigns to show positive depictions of MSM and transgender sexuality to national HIV programs⁹
- To find and document successful community-based interventions that address self-stigma as a component of HIV programming

COMMITMENT

At a membership consultation, YVC previously identified self-stigma as a key issue relating to HIV risk and vulnerability amongst young MSM and young transgender people. In 2012-2013, YVC members conducted community-based research to better understand issues of self-stigma and the linkages to HIV. YVC also issued a policy brief that is developed using the findings from the multi-country community research and discussions highlighted in YVC's Self Stigma Consultation Report.

There is a broad consensus that YVC should build on this important work through continuing to advocate on the issues of self-stigma, which are still relatively neglected but need to be greatly highlighted within HIV prevention programming in Asia and the Pacific region.

TRANSPARENCY

We work to expand and circulate the information on the relationship between self-stigma among the young MSM and young transgender population, and the growing HIV epidemic. To achieve this,

- The policy brief titled *The Hidden Dimension: Experiences of self-stigma among young men who*

have sex with men and young transgender women and the linkages to HIV in Asia and the Pacific will be translated into local languages and thereafter be widely disseminated.

- The Loud and Proud Campaign will be implemented to three countries and related events will be properly documented
- Five videos from five different countries documenting self-stigma will be launched.

PRIORITY 2. Accessing services to save lives: Increasing uptake of HIV prevention, testing, and treatment programs.

While there has been increased recognition within the Asia Pacific region that young MSM and young transgender people are at high-risk for HIV, especially given emerging prevalence data in certain cities and contexts, there is still much we do not know about how to best deliver HIV prevention programmes to young people disproportionately affected by HIV, get young MSM and young transgender people into testing for HIV and STIs, and ensure young positive MSM and transgender people are accessing treatment, care and support.

ACTION

Regional level

- To conduct more research on the challenges of young MSM and young transgender people living with HIV to access treatment, and conduct a comparative study on the needs of other young people living with HIV (YPLHIV).
- To advocate for further strengthening of post-diagnosis follow-up.

- To ensure the harm-reduction needs of young MSM and young transgender people who are also using drugs, including stimulants are safeguarded.

National level

- To promote a demand for uptake of HIV testing amongst young MSM and young transgender people as part of someone's normal health routine.
- To continue the discussion and exploration of alternatives to facility-based testing (such as community-based testing or self-testing) to increase coverage for young MSM and young transgender people.
- To continue the call for the creation of community-led transgender centers to serve as hubs providing information, services, counseling and other forms of social support.

COMMITMENT

Empowerment of young MSM and young transgender people must be ensured to equip them with necessary skills to negotiate safe sex with their partners, especially in situations when they are over-powered by an older sexual partner.

Transgender people in particular face extreme obstacles to accessing services, including lack of proper identity documents for national health care, discrimination from healthcare workers, and lack of services to meet their other health needs.

TRANSPARENCY

In some places where there are youth-friendly health services (accessible, free, open during nights/weekends, confidential, and non-discriminatory) for young MSM and transgender, such as Bangkok, young MSM and young transgender people are still not proactively seeking regular testing. Factors preventing young MSM and young transgender people from accessing these readily available services are still unknown. To achieve this, YVC will

- Publish a report and desk-research on youth-friendly services based on the findings of the Third Consultation
- Conduct a mapping on youth-friendly health services for MSM and transgender people in priority countries.

PRIORITY 3. The big picture: Countering the broader social stigma and discrimination that impacts young MSM's and young transgender people's health outcomes.

Asia-Pacific reality is permeated by hetero-normativity, whereby opposite sex relationships are considered "normal" and same sex relationships "abnormal", and cis-normativity, whereby gender expression and identity deviating from social norms deemed unacceptable¹⁰. This broader environment impacts their ability to access services and deteriorates self-esteem; which contribute to self-stigma and fear of seeing healthcare workers or public servants. It also affects their life choices, often dictating education and employment options.

ACTION

Regional level

- To contribute knowledge and perspectives as to how laws, legal environments and social norms affect young people, young MSM and young transgender people in particular.
- To partner with other organizations, networks, and key stakeholders working on these issues, including youth, LGBTQ, and human rights groups, the human rights working group in Asia and the Pacific, so as to be part of the broader movement.

National level

- To address law enforcement abuses in certain countries where young MSM and young transgender people report frequent sexual, physical, and verbal abuse from the police. Violence and discrimination against sexual minorities should be prohibited by the law, while anti-discrimination and other human rights protections for young MSM and young transgender people should be included in human rights, justice, and HIV sectors in regional forums.
- To publish a background research pointing to the extreme barriers young transgender people face accessing jobs, as well as higher-education options.
- To advocate for the inclusion of comprehensive and accessible sexuality education in schools.

COMMITMENT

It's critical that YVC continues to advocate for the removal of laws criminalizing male-to-male sex, for recognition of sexual reassignment and of third gender, for anti-discrimination workplace policies towards MSM and transgender people, for comprehensive sexuality education in schools to shift the attitudes of the broader public; as well as non-discrimination in schools; and age-related barriers to services.

TRANSPARENCY

Although this is a huge area of work and it covers many topics, YVC is committed to ensuring that the rights and needs of young MSM and young transgender people are highlighted and addressed. To achieve this, YVC looks at doing the following:

- Conduct policy advocacy trainings and activities in key countries to call for attention to these issues, and to put in place policies and programs that give young transgender people diverse job and education opportunities, as well as harm reduction services.
- Conduct a background research on these key countries on the extreme barriers that young MSM and young transgender people face in accessing jobs and higher education options.
- Publish the key findings of these researches as a policy brief to open dialogues with the government and raise their awareness on these issues.

ENDNOTES

¹Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), 2014. *The Gap Report*, Geneva, Switzerland: UNAIDS.

²Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), 2012. *UNAIDS World AIDS Day Report*, Geneva, Switzerland: UNAIDS.

³Commission on AIDS in Asia, 2008. *Redefining AIDS in Asia: crafting an effective response*, New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.

⁴Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), 2011. *HIV in Asia and Pacific: UNAIDS report 2013*, Bangkok, Thailand: UNAIDS.

⁵Altman D et al., 2012. Men who have sex with men: stigma and discrimination. *The Lancet*, 380(9839).
⁶18 – 29 is the age range used by YVC.

⁷Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), 2012. *Global report: UNAIDS report on the global AIDS epidemic 2012*, Geneva, Switzerland: UNAIDS.

⁸International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2010. *Measuring Up: A Guide for Learners*, UK.

⁹For a full list of potential programmatic ways to address self-stigma, please see YVC's policy brief, *The Hidden Dimension*.

¹⁰YVC Second Consultation on Self-Stigma Among Young MSM and Transgender People in Asia.



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

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