

South African men care enough to act against HIV/AIDS and general inequality: the MIPPA experience



Rabi Gobind

overview

Initiated at a National Men's Imbizo in 2002, Men in Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (MIPAA) contributes to the discussions and debates that have begun to emerge at all levels, on the roles that South African men should play in both the struggle for gender equality and the country's fight against HIV/AIDS.

keywords

HIV/AIDS, National Men's Imbizo, men, partnership

Background

Using the theme 'South African Men Care Enough to Act', the spotlight of the HIV/AIDS campaign in this country was turned on men for the first time at the National Men's Imbizo in Cape Town on 4-5 October 2002. This initiative gave birth to Men in Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (MIPAA).

The national Health Ministry, through Government's Aids Action Plan (GAAP) unit, brought some 400 men from around the country to the Men's Imbizo. They represented all sectors of the population and were addressed by Deputy President, Jacob Zuma, National Minister of Health, Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, traditional leaders, labour, civil society and people living with HIV/AIDS.

Objectives of the Men's Imbizo

The main objectives of the Imbizo were to:

- mobilise men to actively participate in the fight against HIV/AIDS;
- sensitise men on reproductive health issues;
- encourage networking between men and other sectors;
- share best practices; and
- establish an Interim National Men's Task Team.

The Imbizo proceedings

The participants broke into 10 commissions to deliberate on key areas within the broader framework of the government's National Strategic HIV/AIDS Plan for South Africa 2000-2005. The commissions dealt with the following: orphans and vulnerable children; voluntary testing and counselling; men as caregivers; men as partners in reproductive health; attitudes towards health services; prevention of mother-to-child transmission; gender-based violence; positive living; youth; and behavioural change.

Participants elected an Interim National Task Team as a first organisational step towards the formation of a broad-based countrywide Men's Forum. The Imbizo adopted the following commitments to action:

- To inculcate the spirit of care, love and respect for the women and children of South Africa;
- To respect and protect every woman as our own mother, wife, daughter, sister and friend;
- To provide care and support to all persons infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS;
- To stand up, speak out and act against all forms of violence and abuse against women and children;
- To organise ourselves to be able to provide

- leadership to the youth;
- To protect ourselves and those close to us from being infected by diseases including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis etc, and from violence and abuse;
- To mobilise every sector of our community and to work in partnership; and
- To build a nation with high morals and which cares enough to act.

The national MIPAA initiative has also led to the mobilisation of other groups and sectors including youth, labour, business, women, faith-based organisations, the police, the military, people with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, numerous organs of civil society and community-based organisations.

Post Imbizo

In February 2003, following the Imbizo, GAAP and the MIPAA Interim Task Team decided to further engage the men's sector through a series of consultative workshops based on the Imbizo outcomes in all nine provinces.

These provincial consultative workshops, held between May and July 2003, followed on from the provincial reportback meetings held after the Imbizo. The provincial consultative workshops realised the following objectives:

- Built on and strengthened the commitments made at the 2002 Imbizo;
- Developed provincial and local strategies for men to increase their involvement in HIV/AIDS interventions;
- Mapped out strategies to deal with the following issues facing men in dealing with HIV/AIDS: unequal sexual and gender relations; culture and traditional values; polygamy and *lobola*; gender stereotypes

and masculinity; lack of role models; poverty and unemployment;

- Identified core problems and gaps;
- Identified the building of structures necessary to support the MIPAA initiative at provincial, district and grassroots levels; and
- Between February and March 2004, men's marches were held in each province ending in the 'Million Men March' held in Durban.

Current status of MIPAA

MIPAA has been represented and has presented papers at various conferences. It works very closely and in partnership with GAAP. There is an elected National Executive Committee whose main priority is to implement the National Terms of Reference adopted at the Imbizo. Both national and provincial draft constitutions have been circulated for debate, amendments and inputs from provinces and GAAP before finalisation at a national conference. Provincial and district structures and MIPAA committees are currently being set up in most provinces. MIPAA enjoys great support and commitment from all levels within the country's men's sector and has very good relationships with both national and provincial AIDS councils. However, it is faced with the constraint of lack of funds at all levels – GAAP and provincial AIDS Action Units are MIPAA's only source of funding.

Conclusion

More recently, as the MIPAA initiative unfolded, greater discussions and debates have begun to emerge at all levels, on the roles that South African men should play in both the struggle for gender equality and the country's fight against HIV/AIDS.

Councillor Rabi Gobind currently serves as the African National Congress PR Councillor in the eThekweni Municipality. He sits on various health committees and is the Secretary of the eThekweni HIV/AIDS Council. He is the National Chairperson of MIPAA. Email: haarhoffe@durban.gov.za

