

IN FOCUS

A Human Rights Lens on HIV/AIDS Grantmaking

*Including an interview with Daniel Lee, Executive Director, Levi Strauss Foundation and
Chair of the Board, Funders Concerned About AIDS*

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The 22nd annual World AIDS Day was commemorated on December 1, 2010. The theme, "Universal Access and Human Rights," served as an important reminder that universal access to HIV/AIDS treatment, prevention and care are fundamental human rights. While much progress has been made, the spread and incidence of HIV/AIDS is still disproportionately high among vulnerable populations most at-risk of discrimination, stigma and lack of human rights protection.



A human rights approach and framework looks beyond the public health aspect of the HIV epidemic and attempts to address the systemic, root causes and effects of the issue.

In the HIV/AIDS context, violations of human rights -- including discrimination against women and violations which create and sustain poverty -- cause increased vulnerability to the HIV infection. Conversely, people living with HIV suffer human rights violations such as further discrimination and violence. As such, the role of human rights in responding to the epidemic and in dealing with its effects has become increasingly clear.

The affects of HIV on vulnerable populations such as women, children, the poor and marginalized groups has contributed to a renewed focus on economic, social and cultural rights. The right to health has been increasingly defined and now explicitly includes the availability and accessibility of HIV prevention, treatment, and care and support for children and adults. Either through legislation or litigation, many countries have recognized that their people have the right to HIV treatment as part of their human rights. In addition, a human rights approach has addressed the rights of those engaged in illegal activities and the importance of the right to participation of those most affected by the epidemic: people living with HIV and those highly vulnerable to infection. Developments such as these have strengthened the principles of the indivisibility and universality of human rights.

With the growing focus on the human rights abuses that continue to challenge the HIV/AIDS response, Funders Concerned About AIDS (FCAA) invited Michael Hirschhorn, Executive Director of the International Human Rights Funders Group, and Daniel Lee, Executive Director of the Levi Strauss Foundation, to talk to grantmakers about the intersection of HIV/AIDS and human rights at the FCAA 2010 AIDS Philanthropy Summit, held on Dec. 6, 2010 in Washington D.C.:

Below are some key questions and answers from Daniel Lee on the importance of a rights-based approach to HIV/AIDS grantmaking:

1. *Why is the HIV/AIDS epidemic a human rights issue?*

HIV/AIDS is arguably the most stigmatized medical condition in human history. Other viruses and plagues were highly stigmatized because they were extremely contagious and deadly. In contrast, the means of prevention for HIV/AIDS are well known. With HIV/AIDS, we are contending with twin epidemics: the medical epidemic and a staggered epidemic of stigma and discrimination.

More than 25 years into this global epidemic, people living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS face a staggering array of human rights abuses. They are denied the right to marry, quarantined in prison and other institutions, denied housing and jobs and refused basic healthcare. They are abused by police and other government officials, and denied entry into many countries by restrictive policies with no basis in public health.

As Nelson Mandela has said, “AIDS is no longer a disease. It is a human rights issue.” No doubt, HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination are often intertwined with the discrimination attached to being a woman, being poor, having a different sexual orientation, engaging in sex work or drug use, or being in prison. They serve as serious obstacles to effective delivery of prevention, testing, treatment and care services. They have the pernicious effect of driving underground those people most in need of critical health services. Health, HIV and human rights are inextricably linked.

Simply put, unless we go for the guttural in defending the human rights of the most marginalized people in the context of HIV/AIDS, we will fail abysmally in achieving our public health goals.

2. *What is the Levi Strauss Foundation’s approach to HIV/AIDS grantmaking with a human rights lens?*

[Levi Strauss & Co.](#) and the [Levi Strauss Foundation](#) are driven by four core values: originality, empathy, integrity and courage. These values have shaped the Foundation’s human rights-focused response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, in both their business practices and grantmaking.

The bulk of the Levi Strauss Foundation’s (LSF) HIV/AIDS funding—approximately \$2.5 million—focuses on human rights advocacy, with support for litigation, policy change and community mobilization. Among LSF’s grantees are pioneers on the front lines of high-stakes struggles where religion, government policies and cultural norms are primary forces contributing to discrimination and abuse in the context of HIV/AIDS. The Foundation also supports direct services—prevention, testing, treatment and care—for apparel workers in key sourcing countries like Lesotho, Haiti, China and Vietnam.

LSF firmly believes that to ensure the effectiveness of HIV/AIDS responses, it is paramount to protect the human rights of highly marginalized groups—including sex workers, gay and bisexual men, prisoners and people who use drugs. The Levi Strauss Foundation’s HIV/AIDS grantmaking strategy focuses on driving social change to address the unique nature of HIV/AIDS.

In 1983, the Levi Strauss Foundation made the first corporate donation in the fight against HIV/AIDS with a donation to the Kaposi Sarcoma Clinic at San Francisco General Hospital. Over the years, more than \$45 million in social investments from the Company and Foundation have helped build several

HIV/AIDS organizations from the ground up—not only in San Francisco but in over 30 countries around the world. LSF believes that it is incumbent upon the Foundation to continually push the limits of the response to this global epidemic. To this end, they became the first corporate foundation to support expanded access to sterile syringes as the only proven method of preventing HIV among intravenous drug users.

More recently, Levi Strauss & Co. has made a commitment, through the Clinton Global Initiative, to provide comprehensive prevention, treatment and care to all employees, retirees, and dependents—a work force of more than 11,000 people that spans 45 countries. The company seeks to help “change the game” around provision of insurance benefits—perhaps one of the final frontiers in the global fight against AIDS.

For more information or to learn more:

1. The International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights/UNAIDS, 2006:
http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/dataimport/publications/irc-pub07/jc1252-internguidelines_en.pdf.
2. Funders Concerned About AIDS, Example of Innovative Funding: A Human Rights Approach, focusing on the Levi Strauss Foundation: http://ihrfg.org/sites/default/files/111710_FCAA_Innovative_Funding_Levi_Strauss.pdf.
3. Visit the website of the Levi Strauss Foundation at www.levistrauss.com/about/foundations/levi-strauss-foundation.
4. Contact Daniel Lee at dlee4@levi.com or Sarah Hamilton, Program and Communications Director, Funders Concerned About AIDS at sarah@fcaids.org.
5. Visit the website of Funders Concerned About AIDS at www.fcaids.org.