



INTERNATIONAL AIDS SOCIETY

Being socially and environmentally aware



Anouk Rey, IAS Conference Director

CSR's values are particularly important in the organisation of the IAS's large international conferences, where CSR measures - with an emphasis on the organisation's CSR motto of the 'Four R's': reduce, reuse, recycle and raise awareness - are an integral part of the conference planning from the beginning of the process.

The International AIDS Society (IAS) is the world's leading independent association of HIV professionals and a participant in the UN Global Compact strategy. As a non-profit organisation, and although we don't come under the same intense scrutiny as organisations in the corporate sector, we still believe that it is crucial for non-profit organisations to adopt the same rigorous Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) standards as those enforced upon big business.

Text Anouk Rey, IAS Deputy Executive Director

CSR WORKING GROUP

In 2008 we established a CSR working group at our secretariat in Geneva. The same year, the concept of a socially responsible conference was formally communicated through an official CSR plan on the occasion of the XVII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2008) which took place in Mexico City where for the first time we offered a carbon offset programme for our delegates and we also systematically offset all flights for staff, scholarship recipients and speakers at the conference.

Since then we further improved our CSR efforts and in 2010 we won an IMEX Green Meetings Award for the XVII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2010) which took place in Vienna. AIDS 2010 had more than 18,000 participants and was rated highest on all set evaluation criteria, which included minimizing environmental impact, economic indicators, commitment to change, commitment to community and commitment to conservation, pre-event and post-event. We followed our CSR criteria in all aspects of the conference, from the choice of a venue

centrally located, to the use of Fair Trade products, to waste minimisation, to carbon offset programme and donation of unused leftover food to a local charity. It is thanks to the dedication of the conference organisers and to the generosity of the delegates that we received this important award.

Building up on the success of the conference in Vienna, the XIX International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2012) held in Washington, D.C. in July 2012, continued its reputation as a socially and environmentally friendly conference and it is a great example of how a huge event that involved some 24,000 people can still be sustainable.

The Walter E. Washington Convention Center, the venue of the conference, was chosen for its central location (to limit the environmental impact of the conference) and its CSR initiatives already in place which included the use of sustainable materials, energy- and water-saving measures, and the reduction of the venue's carbon footprint. We also made sure that, whenever possible, selected suppliers had good social responsibility policies and we reduced the number of printed publications.

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On top of this, delegates were encouraged to recycle at specially placed bins and a green team of volunteers helped in the planning and execution of the green initiatives.

CARBON OFFSET PROGRAMME

In addition to these measures, we carried out a carbon offset programme and a donation programme. Delegates and staff travelled from all over the world to attend the conference and therefore their travel caused the emission of carbon dioxide in the process. To counter this, delegates were invited to offset their carbon footprint by ticking a box in their application form. In addition to the US\$12,220 collected

from delegates, we donated US\$13,715 to carbon offset all scholarship recipients', staff's and speakers' flights.

The money collected from the carbon offset programme was donated to three organisations: Township Patterns (South Africa), DC Greenworks (USA) and Myclimate (Brazil).

- *Township Patterns* is a non-profit organisation based in Cape Town, South Africa, which employs local women to create sustainable jobs in the textile, fashion and accessories-related industry. Funding from the AIDS 2012 carbon offset programme assists with the training of the women, the set-up of the co-operative and the acquisition of the necessary tools, furniture and basic start-up material.
- *DC Greenworks* creates green roofs in the Washington, D.C., area. A green roof reduces energy expenditure by up to 30% and can prolong the life of the roof surface by up to 2 to 3 times. The vegetation on the roof also sequesters carbon dioxide and water.

- *Myclimate* put the money towards an environmentally friendly source of energy in the Brazilian Amazon forest. A new power plant, which generates power from wood chippings, replaced several diesel generators that supplied power to 80,000 people of the city of Itacoatiara. The plant produces 56,000mWh of electricity which replaces the 5 million litres of diesel that would have been consumed. The wood plant results in a total reduction of 45,000 tons of carbon dioxide every year.

We also established a donation programme where the excess conference materials were donated to local charities. Over

13,000 items including bags, stationery supplies, condoms and other conference materials were donated. The material was sourced from delegates, exhibitor booths and leftover conference merchandise. The items were donated on a needs basis to local charities for homeless people, or to HIV/AIDS charities, and programmes for education and enrichment such as the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

One of the recipients of the donation programme was Bright Beginnings, a charity for homeless children. Materials such as stationery supplies were put to good use to help prepare homeless children for kindergarten so that they were more likely to succeed at school and therefore create a better environment for their families.

In addition, all leftover untouched food from the conference was donated to DC Central Kitchen, a local charity which distributes food to the homeless throughout the District of Columbia.

Our conferences prove that the size of an event is not an obstacle for social and environmental responsibility practices. These CSR measures will be continued and improved at the upcoming conferences including the 7th IAS Conference on HIC Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention (IAS 2013) in Kuala Lumpur, from 30 June-3 July 2013, and the 20th International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2014) in Melbourne in July 2014. Each of these locations will present their own challenges, yet with the right collaborative efforts I am confident we can further improve our CSR initiatives.

If a non-profit organisation can achieve this, then surely all conferences can work towards being more socially and environmentally aware.

For info on UIA
www.uia.org
For info on IAS
www.iasociety.org

Anouk Rey, from Switzerland, joined the IAS in 2004 and became Conference Director in 2010. She has recently been appointed Deputy Executive Director of the IAS.