



## United Nations Activity Report

The [68th United Nations Civil Society Conference “Building Inclusive and Sustainable Cities and Communities”](#) was held 26-28 August 2019 in Salt Lake City, Utah, United States.

The three-day conference, co-hosted by the United Nations [Department of Global Communications](#), Salt Lake City, and the [NGO Executive Committee](#), featured opening and closing plenary sessions, interactive thematic sessions, NGO-sponsored workshops, exhibits, and a youth hub.

Report Submitted by Aric Shimek, Sigma United Nations Liaison

### **HIV: Stigma and Discrimination Challenges**

This was an opportunity for two groups from Kenya and Uganda to discuss the current state of health for those infected with [HIV/AIDS](#) and the community’s response to supporting these patients.

[Sustainable Development Goal #3](#) about good health and [Sustainable Development Goal #4](#) about education apply to this discussion given the challenges faced in both nations for those living with HIV/AIDS, especially those in resource-poor locations.

Prevalence and new cases of HIV/AIDS is actually rising in East Africa. It is still deadly in parts of Africa, whereas in the United States it is now considered a long-term chronic illness that isn’t necessarily deadly. Children can be both orphans of parents lost to HIV/AIDS as well as victims themselves. Verbal and physical abuse is common for those living with the infection, leading these children to often have low self-esteem and very little resiliency.

Students from Nyumbani have been refused entry to school because the group home they live in is now known as the HIV/AIDS home, so the children were stigmatized and ultimately refused entry. Another example of discrimination was the story of a woman who lost her good job in an office because of her status and was forced to take a job cleaning vehicles for the same company. This shift from interacting with people to only interacting with things shows just how much discrimination people continue to face.

Nyumbani supports its residents with [ART](#) and efforts to reintegrate them with the community. These efforts include activities such as helping them explore their family tree to reconnect with distant relatives (to create a sense of place and belonging), opening the center’s doors to the public to come see what it looks like (to reduce the stigma and take away the mystery), and teaching children how to do the simple tasks of life like going to the pharmacy to collect their refills (to learn life skills and autonomy). Internal stigma is also a powerful survival mechanism aimed at protecting oneself from external stigma and often results in behavior such as the refusal or reluctance to disclose a positive HIV status, denial of HIV/AIDS, and unwillingness to accept help.

Their hope for this conference was to keep youth involved at all levels of the discussion and to engage with other civil society groups supporting this work.

Sigma members can lead the way in not only providing support to these patients in our own cities and towns but also in serving as leaders in our communities to dispel any myths about HIV/AIDS. We can also play a role in advocating for the continued support of programs like the [Global Fund](#) and [PEPFAR](#) to eradicate the disease and the stigma that comes with it. The challenge is how can we, as nurses, increase public knowledge about the disease while simultaneously creating safe spaces where people can be honest with their healthcare providers about their potential risky behaviors and their own misunderstandings about their own health? This is vital because there is a cyclical relationship between stigma and HIV: People who experience stigma and discrimination are marginalized, especially in rural communities, and are made more vulnerable to contracting HIV because of it.