

Action Card 9

Improving Consultation within the Community Sector

The community sector needs to be able to facilitate efficient, effective and democratic consultation among its members and reach consensus on its positions, priority needs, and strategies.

■ Key Steps:

The community sector can take a number of practical steps to ensure and improve its consultation work. [See Box 28] These include:

- ✓ 1. Strengthening community sector leadership and networking, especially of those that typically have the weakest representation. For example, ensuring that a community sector network is strong and skilled enough to facilitate consultation processes and to have their leadership role respected by their constituents.
- ✓ 2. Holding consultations when and where they are most convenient to the community sector, and providing opportunities for participation from all parts of the country (e.g., beyond the capitals). This can include sub-regional consultations, followed by selected representatives attending national consultations.

Box 28: Consultation

Consultation among the community sector involves:

- Seeking out the opinions, experiences and lessons of individuals and organisations.
- Giving people a clear subject matter and facilitating (but not directing) discussions.
- Listening to what people have to say.
- Giving people the chance to share their views honestly and openly.
- Allowing and acknowledging disagreements.
- Focusing on:
 - A specific section of the community sector, such as NGOs that support orphans and vulnerable children; or
 - A broad cross-section of community sector stakeholders.
- Identifying key themes, plus areas of agreement and disagreement.
- Documenting and sharing the outcomes of the consultation.

- ✓ 3. Holding both one-off and more regular opportunities for consultation, for example:
 - One-off consultations to review draft standardised indicators for the country-level monitoring and evaluation system.
 - Ongoing, regular consultations with NGO networks organising consultation meetings two weeks before each session of the National AIDS Coordinating Authority - to discuss the issues to be placed on the agenda and existing agenda items, and to prepare the community sector representatives.
- ✓ 4. Being transparent by widely announcing opportunities to participate in consultations. Formally agreeing on and communicating which consultation methods will be used, so that constituents are clear about exactly how they can or cannot be involved²². A variety of different consultation methods can be used, such as:
 - Meetings
 - Focus group discussions
 - E-forums
 - Questionnaires
- ✓ 5. Arranging for facilitators to hold the consultations so that they remain focused and allow a wide variety of participants to express their views. The facilitators should preferably be from within the community sector itself, be well briefed and have solid skills in participatory processes.
- ✓ 6. Supporting marginalised and vulnerable groups, especially those with little organisational capacity, to meet, share their perspectives and articulate their views. This could involve providing people living with HIV or injecting drug users with support to have an additional separate, safe space in which to identify their priorities for the HIV/AIDS Action Framework.
- ✓ 7. Supporting consultations by making the most of existing community sector resources, such as participatory community assessments, evaluation reports, case studies, good practice guides and monitoring data.
- ✓ 8. Ensuring that the community sector representatives on the national coordinating bodies or processes are directly involved in or facilitate consultations with the community sector so that they have a detailed knowledge of their constituents views²³.
- ✓ 9. Ensuring that the process starts with defining the issues of major importance for the community sector and focus the consensus-building processes on these issues first. Be practical and focus also on what will be easier to reach consensus on first. Report the outcomes of the consultations to the participants and community sector more broadly.

²² See Action Card 8

²³ See Action Card 5