

Action Card 10

Working in Partnership and Building Mutual Understanding

It is important that all sectors, and the diverse groups within the community sector, work together in a collaborative and supportive way. This involves building mutual understanding (about different ways of working, priorities, terminology, etc.) and developing practical tools and processes to reach consensus and take difficult decisions (about shared objectives, the allocation of resources, etc.).

■ Key Steps:

The community sector and other stakeholders involved in each of the national coordinating bodies and processes can take a number of practical steps to improve the way in which they work together. These include:

- ✓ 1. Clarifying what each means by partnership. [See Box 29]

Box 29: Partnership between sectors

Partnership is about working with others to achieve what we cannot achieve on our own. For national coordination of AIDS responses, it involves different actions:

- Developing mutual understanding and appreciation of each others strengths, weaknesses, experiences, lessons, etc.
- Working for a common purpose.
- Working for mutual benefit.
- Having specific, complementary roles and responsibilities.
- Sharing complementary resources (e.g., skills, good practice, access to funding).
- Respecting the agreed working principles of the partnership.

(Source: Adapted from Pathways to Partnerships, International HIV/AIDS Alliance)

- ✓ 2. Building mutual understanding. This can involve:
 - Learning about what each group actually does and how each functions. For example, by reading each others annual reports and best practice guides, and analysing each others evaluation reports.
 - Appreciating each others opportunities and challenges. For example, by asking about each others resources, limitations, pressures and diversity.
 - Seeing each other in action. For example, by sex workers inviting government and private sector members of the National AIDS Coordinating Authority to visit their projects, or by a UN Theme Group inviting representatives of people living with HIV to observe one of its meetings.

- ✓ 3. Developing and using participatory tools to build mutual understanding, plan together and reach consensus. [See Box 30] These tools need to:
 - Be explained to all those involved, ensuring that they understand and agree to them.
 - Foster collaboration.
 - Allow for differences of opinion and provide a way of channelling them.
 - Be practical, enabling people to develop and share their thoughts by doing something together, rather than just talking.
 - Have their results documented, so that people remember exactly what decisions were reached and how.
- ✓ 4. Developing and agreeing on working principles: This can be done as an informal agreement or more formally through a mechanism such as a memorandum of understanding or another legally binding agreement. This document could cover areas such as:
 - How different sectors will treat each other (emphasising the importance of being non-judgemental and non-discriminatory).
 - What language will be used (avoiding jargon whenever possible and identifying an appropriate working language that will not exclude people).
 - Confidentiality (ensuring that people living with HIV can participate without fear of their status being disclosed publicly).
 - Transparency (reaching a commitment to discuss issues openly and honestly).
 - Intellectual property (clarifying who owns key documents, such as the one agreed HIV/AIDS Action Framework, and who can use them and how).
 - Key principles that will be promoted, such as gender equality and the Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV and AIDS (GIPA).
 - Working practices, such as responding to each others e-mails within one week or always giving apologies if someone cannot attend a meeting.
 - What the expected outcomes and outputs will be, including, where appropriate, work plans and budgets.
- ✓ 5. Developing and using participatory tools to cope with differences of opinion and crises. These tools need to:
 - Be explained to all those involved, ensuring that they understand and agree to them.
 - Allow people to communicate their differences, but be focused on finding common ground or identifying compromises.
 - Be practical, enabling people to build mutual understanding and respect by doing something together.
 - Be goal-oriented, for example ensuring that they eventually lead to a decision, no matter how serious and complex the differences are.
 - Have their results documented, so that people cannot dispute what decisions were reached and how.
- ✓ 6. Developing and agreeing on mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and review the partnership. This can include developing indicators to assess the effectiveness of the partnership and whether the agreements are being fulfilled.

Box 30: Tool for building mutual understanding

The following tool can be used by a sector to understand more about its existing relationship with another sector and to identify areas that need improvement.

For example, it could be used by the community sector (e.g., during a meeting of an NGO network) to assess the diversity of organisations within the sector and its relationship with the government, donors or private sector.

Instructions:

1. Select a sector that your sector wants to improve its relations with.
2. Discuss what your sector thinks about the other sector. For example, what do you think about: Their role? Their strengths/weaknesses? How their ways of working resemble or differ from yours? The best/worst things about working with them? Write the key points in the left-hand column of the chart below. Repeat the process, but from the point of view of what the other sector thinks about your sector. Write the key points in the right-hand column of the chart.

How we see them	How they see us
• xx	• xx
• xx	• xx
• xx	• xx
• xx	• xx

3. Discuss the points that your sector has in common with the other sector. Write the key points in the left-hand column of the chart below.
4. Discuss how your sector differs from the other sector. Write the key points in the right-hand column of the chart.
5. On the basis of your discussions, identify two or three points considered priorities for improving your relationship with the other sector. Write the priorities in the bottom section of the chart.

Things that we have in common with the sector	Differences between us and the sector
• xx	• xx
• xx	• xx
• xx	• xx
• xx	• xx

Priorities for improving our relations

- xx
- xx

6. Discuss practical ways in which you might address the priorities that you have identified. Identify your first step, that is, what you will do, when, where and how.

(Source: Adapted from Pathways to Partnership, International HIV/AIDS Alliance)

Action Card 10 Coordinating with Communities

