

Action Card 11

Scrutinising Progress and being an Independent Watchdog

It is vital that, along with the official participation of its representatives, the community sector be able to play a watchdog role, independently assessing and critiquing the contributions and results of a variety of sectors and initiatives. This is particularly important in support of marginalised groups that are often excluded or have limited influence within formal processes.

■ Key Steps:

- ✓ 1. A facilitator convenes the community sector - such as through consultation meetings with members of an NGO network - to identify what sort of watchdog role it wants to play and what type of group or processes this role might require.
[See Box 31]

Box 31: Partnership between sectors

The community sector needs to ask itself:

- What type of issues and groups does the community sector want to monitor as part of its watchdog role?
- How aggressive does the community sector want to be in its watchdog role?
- What mechanism will best help the community sector to play a watchdog role? For example, should it develop a new watchdog group or build on the functions of an existing group (such as an NGO network)?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of playing a watchdog role? For example, how might it affect funding opportunities for those involved?
- How can the community sector balance a watchdog role with its official participation in coordination structures?
- Does the community sector need to build its capacity to play an effective watchdog role? For example, does it need to increase knowledge and skills about areas such as economics and budgeting?

- ✓ 2. The community sector develops terms of reference for its watchdog role, whether it involves a new or existing group. This document outlines the groups:
 - Aims and objectives. (What is its focus? What does it want to achieve? Is it a mechanism for community complaints or an additional arena for community sector discussion and decision making?)
 - Membership. (Is it just for community stakeholders or open to others, such as academic institutions? Is it for particular groups within the community sector?)

- Principles. (How will it ensure the greater involvement of people living with HIV and other marginalised groups and that their issues are addressed?)
- Working practices. [See Box 32]

Box 32: Working practices for a community sector watchdog group

Developing working practices for a watchdog group involves agreeing on issues such as:

- How the group will be coordinated and administrated.
- How often the group will meet, where and for how long.
- How the group will gather its information.
- How the group will make decisions and deal with any differences of opinion.
- How the group will document and share its decisions.
- How the group will relate to other groups and institutions.

- ✓ 3. The community sector uses the information and decisions from its watchdog role for a variety of purposes. These include:
 - Informing the community sectors official participation in national coordination bodies and processes (by giving representatives evidence of how issues are affecting communities).
 - Informing the community sectors advocacy work (by providing evidence of how an issue is affecting communities throughout the country)²⁴.
- ✓ 4. Other stakeholders, including the government and donors, respect the watchdog role of the community sector and acknowledge it as a vital part of democratic systems connected to the principles of the Three Ones and the national response to HIV/AIDS²⁵.

Case studies: Scrutinising progress and being an independent watchdog

In 2005, largely in response to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, five NGOs – Africa Consultants International, Alliance National Contre le SIDA, ENDA Santé, SIDA Service, and Synergie pour L'Enfance – co-founded the Observatoire. The initiative provides an open space for a range of actors, including the community sector and government. It aims to:

- Act as a national watchdog by critically examining the multi-sectoral response to HIV/AIDS.
- Be a forum for formulating constructive proposals and recommendations likely to improve the response.
- Feed into reflection on the response to date and the implementation of the country's strategic plan.

The Observatoire is open to all organisations and encourages the involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS. It has no formal structure, with communication taking place via e-mail and meetings called as the need arises. Decisions are made by consensus and are documented.

²⁴ See Action Card ⑦

²⁵ See Action Card ⑩