

Action Card ①

Initiating Action, Defining the Community Sector, and Building Consensus

The community sector needs to initiate action to convene and consult, to identify who belongs to the sector, and to work out how they will build consensus within the sector.

■ Key Steps A:

Initiating action and defining the community sector

- ✓ 1. The process is facilitated by recognised and respected leaders, organisations or a coordination group within the community sector. Often one agreed leader or lead organisation does not exist. In such cases, a group of community sector stakeholders could convene a coordination/working group to initiate action. Within this group, various individuals or organisations could then take on different tasks in order to share the workload and to ensure broader ownership, participation, and leadership.
- ✓ 2. Donors offer financial support and, if appropriate, support for capacity building to the community sector to assist the process of initiating action.
- ✓ 3. Through a facilitated process (e.g., a meeting), community sector stakeholders define who makes up the sector. In each country this sector needs to be defined according to the characteristics related to the epidemic and the conditions that make certain communities more affected by HIV and AIDS. [See Box 10]

Box 10: Defining the community sector

There is no clear or agreed operational definition of the community sector. In developing a definition, stakeholders should base it on the specific characteristics of each country or region. An example is provided below.

"Individuals, groups, or associations which are separate from the government and the private sector, and who undertake actions and present views in support of community members living with or highly affected by HIV and AIDS." ICASO, 2006.

The community sector includes:

- People living with HIV/AIDS, their groups and networks
- Community networks and community based organisations, including those that involve or support key populations [See Box 2]
- Local, national and international non-governmental organisations
- AIDS service organisations
- Faith-based organisations
- NGO networks
- NGO support organisations

- ✓ 4. According to the definition of the community sector, the community stakeholders, leaders, and/or the coordination group invite representatives to be involved in future activities to build adequate and meaningful involvement of the community sector. The invitation process involves assessing the range of different communities and/or groups that they should represent, such as:
 - People living with HIV
 - Marginalised and vulnerable groups (e.g., sex workers, injecting drug users)
 - Geography (e.g., groups that are based in the capital, district or rural areas)
 - Size of organisations (e.g., one-person, large-scale)
 - Level of organisations (e.g., community, district, national, international)
 - Focus of organisations (e.g., AIDS, human rights, womens development)
 - Type of organisations (e.g., self-help, service provision, network)
 - Culture of organisations (e.g., politics, religion)

■ Key Steps B:

Building consensus within the community sector

In bringing together diverse groups, the community sector can take a number of practical steps to support and improve its consensus building. [See Box 11]

These include:

- ✓ 1. Agreeing to the procedures governing how the convened group will function, its roles and responsibilities.
- ✓ 2. Ensuring that consensus is based on evidence and not only on personal opinions by engaging in community-consultation activities or participatory research, for example.
- ✓ 3. Reaching consensus through an agreed and transparent process.
- ✓ 4. Reaching consensus through a participatory process that brings people together rather than highlight their areas of difference.
- ✓ 5. Supporting the consensus by also having alternative positions, based on the degree to which the community sector is prepared to compromise on an issue.

Box 11: Consensus building

Consensus building within the community sector involves:

- Supporting the sector to work together to understand similar and different opinions, positions and priorities.
- Balancing opinions with evidence (e.g., case studies, monitoring data).
- Being prepared to compromise.
- Reaching agreement, for example about priority gaps or needs.
- Having a cohesive voice once agreement has been reached.

- ✓ 6. Ensuring that community sector representatives are directly involved in or facilitate the process of building consensus – so that they have a thorough understanding of the background to the final position and understand the degree to which their constituents agreed or disagreed on it¹.

Note: In situations of extreme conflict or very little capacity in the community sector, it may not be possible to follow a process similar to the one outlined here and a temporary option may be necessary. Such options should be seen as short-term steps and should be implemented only with the input and agreement of at least some of the stakeholders in the community sector. Examples of such options are:

- Individuals or groups external to the local community sector – such as an international NGO or consultants from an academic institution – play a facilitator role, bringing community stakeholders together and moving agendas forward.
- Donors or United Nations organisations provide resources and play a convenor role, such as hosting a meeting of community sector stakeholders and providing them with a forum and tools with which to reach consensus.
- Donors, United Nations organisations and government provide resources for an intensive capacity-building programme for the community sector, including training potential leaders and building at least a minimal level of networking infrastructure.



Participants at a community mobilization workshop, South Sudan. © 2006 IHAA

¹ See Action Card ⑤

Action Card 1 Coordinating with Communities

