

# Action Card 8

## Enhancing Communication within the Community Sector

The community sector needs to communicate effectively both with its own constituents and with other stakeholders.

### ■ Key Steps:

Increasing and improving communication by and for the community sector requires action by a range of individuals and organisations. These include:

- Community sector representatives. For example, a representative on the National AIDS Coordinating Authority needs to keep other members of the community sector up to date about decisions being made about the allocation of resources.
- The organisation of the community sector representatives. For example, they formally commit to allowing a percentage of time for their staff members to undertake communication tasks and they allocate resources for communication roles.
- Community sector leaders and coordinators. For example, an NGO network needs to produce regular newsletters, e-bulletins, etc., to inform members about when they can provide input into the HIV/AIDS Action Framework.
- Community sector constituents. For example, groups of people living with HIV/AIDS need to communicate their concerns about the development of national monitoring indicators to community sector representatives.
- Secretariats of national coordination bodies or processes. For example, the administrative staff of the National AIDS Authority's Secretariat need to clearly communicate with community sector representatives about the dates and agendas of meetings.
- Members of national coordination bodies or processes and wider stakeholder groups (such as Expanded UN Theme Groups). For example, members of the National AIDS Authority need to communicate to the community sector about opportunities and challenges that are coming up for community groups.

The community sector coordination group or a communications working group, and the representatives on the national coordination bodies or processes, can take a number of practical steps to improve communication, which include:

- ✓ 1. Ensuring open, transparent and professional communication: This involves (a) being open to sharing information freely and widely; (b) building collaboration rather than competition; (c) maintaining confidentiality, and (d) treating people with respect.
- ✓ 2. Ensuring active, multi-directional communication: Members of the community sector communicate proactively with their representatives, instead of simply expecting to receive information.

- ✓ 3. Reaching out across the breadth of the community sector: This means communicating not only with NGO leaders and activists, but with a wide range of community sector individuals and groups, including those that are geographically or socially isolated<sup>21</sup>.
- ✓ 4. Agreeing on communication roles and responsibilities: This involves (a) identifying which individuals or organisations are responsible for specific communication tasks (e.g. distributing the meeting agendas of National AIDS Coordinating Authority among the community sector); and (b) holding each other to account if responsibilities are not met (e.g., if newsletters are distributed late).
- ✓ 5. Using appropriate, simple, accurate and respectful language:
  - Using the most widely spoken local language or producing resources in several languages.
  - Not using terms that are incorrect or offensive.
  - Avoiding jargon, and translating terms and ideas into information that is easily accessible to community groups. [See Box 26]
- ✓ 6. Identifying appropriate and effective means of communication:
  - Communicating to different types of audiences through a combination of creative and practical formats, such as newsletters, websites, briefing papers and e-bulletins; not disseminating all information via e-mail if most community sector groups do not have computers.
  - Using databases to facilitate knowledge management and ensuring that information can be disseminated rapidly and efficiently.
- ✓ 7. Using agreed formats for reporting and communication, keeping records for monitoring and evaluation and capacity building. For example, community sector representatives on the National AIDS Coordinating Authority could use a template (basic format) to produce reports on each meeting that they attend. [See Box 27] This report can be used to engage in consultations with the community sector and to help identify capacity-building needs of the representatives of the community sector and other sectors.
- ✓ 8. Keeping communication regular and ongoing. An NGO network could commit to updating its members about the national coordinating body or processes at least four times a year, and a community sector representative could commit to giving feedback after each meeting of the National AIDS Coordinating Authority.

**Box 26: 'Translating' jargon or using appropriate language**

Term	Translation
AIDS victims	People living with and affected by AIDS
Prostitutes	Sex workers
Country Response and Information System (CRIS)	A way of collecting, storing, and sharing information on what is being done in responding to HIV in the country.

<sup>21</sup> See Action Card 9

## Box 27: Template for a meeting report by a community sector representative

A meeting report from a community sector representative (for example on the National AIDS Coordinating Authority) to the constituency might include:

- Date, time and location of the meeting.
- Who attended the meeting.
- Background information (e.g. on any discussion held among the community sector in advance of the meeting and any positions that were agreed).
- Summary for each agenda item, including:
  - How the discussion went.
  - The positions that different representatives took.
  - How the community sector representative voted.
  - Decisions that were taken.
  - Any agreed action points, including for the community sector representative.
- List of any other important issues that arose during the meeting and whether there should be any follow-up, including by the broader community sector.
- List, in order of importance or urgency, of the key items that the community sector needs to discuss.
- The date, time and location of the next meeting.

(Source: Adapted from Challenging, Changing and Mobilising: A Guide to PLHIV Involvement in Country Coordinating Mechanisms, Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS and POLICY Project, 2005)



The Theni District Positive Network meets for discussion, sharing, and support, India

Action Card 8 Coordinating with Communities

