

Section 3: Introduction to the community sector and the 'Three Ones'



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

3.1. How is the community sector linked to the 'Three Ones' principles?

Community sector involvement in the initial development of the 'Three Ones', including the design of the principles, was limited.

Over time, however, the community sector has gradually become more engaged, although experiences of the implementation of the 'Three Ones' have been mixed. In some contexts, the principles have encouraged action to ensure that the sector is increasingly involved and respected as a full partner. However, in many other contexts, the sector remains an 'outsider' or has been co-opted as an extension of government and excluded from decision making. In some countries this has resulted in an increased centralisation of funds and power within government, undermining the 'Three Ones' principles, which are designed to achieve greater coordination and partnership.

For many in the community sector, the 'Three Ones' principles have the potential to offer many opportunities to support decades of work on strengthening involvement, if implemented correctly. These include the chance to have greater influence on national action on HIV and AIDS and to strengthen systems that ensure more effective community sector representation.

For others, however, the principles are surrounded by much confusion. What do they mean exactly? How can they be put into practice? How can they improve the response to HIV and AIDS and the support to communities? Many in the sector have also experienced problems resulting from coordination approaches that are not in line with the key principles. [See Box 3]

Box 3: Opportunities and threats arising from the 'Three Ones' for the community sector

Opportunities if implemented in line with the principles	Threats if not implemented in line with the principles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighting the unique strengths of the community sector and its vital contribution to responses to HIV/AIDS. • Providing an advocacy tool for the full involvement of the community sector in managing national action on HIV/AIDS, and for more resources for the sector, particularly its coordination activities. • Promoting Action Frameworks that are based on real needs, particularly those of marginalised groups. • Encouraging governments to meet the targets of international agreements that are supported by the community sector. • Enabling the community sector to more quickly scale up its efforts (by influencing national plans and accessing global lessons and resources). • Giving the community sector added incentive to develop stronger and more democratic systems of representation. • Providing a forum to address blockages to effective community sector action on HIV/AIDS, such as funding bottlenecks. • Ensuring that capacity building for the community sector meets their needs and is provided more systematically. • Addressing the disconnect in Monitoring and Evaluation (with different national and community systems), increasing the acceptance of quantitative and qualitative community data and improving the consistency of communities' monitoring. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limiting the independence of the community sector and its watchdog role. • Using the community sector's diversity as a means or excuse to limit its involvement. • Contributing to national HIV/AIDS responses being solely owned or dominated by the public sector. • 'Creating a monster', with one Coordinating Authority being too large to function and leaving the community sector voiceless and the government the main channel for funding. • Encouraging a work pace that denies the community sector time to consult its constituents. • Leading to token involvement, with community representatives only used for show. • Highlighting challenges about community sector representation, such as selection processes where donors and governments choose representatives. • Limiting monitoring and evaluation to 'official' quantitative data and neglecting communities' quantitative and qualitative results. Also, leading to community groups having to report on both standardised indicators and those of individual donor's systems. <p style="font-size: small; margin-top: 10px;">(Source: Adapted from Discussion Paper: Civil Society and the 'Three Ones', International Council of AIDS Service Organizations and the International HIV/AIDS Alliance.)</p>

These guidelines aim to enable the community sector to manage the threats posed by implementation of coordination approaches that are not in line with the 'Three Ones' principles. They also aim to enable the community sector to make the most of the benefits that effective and proper implementation can bring, both to its own members and to a country's overall response to HIV and AIDS.

3.2 Why should the community sector be involved?

The community sector is closest to the action in responding to HIV and AIDS. All too often, its people and groups are the 'glue' that hold responses to local epidemics together – providing the day-to-day support that prevents HIV infections, cares for those living with AIDS, and mobilises individual responses.

As such, the community sector's involvement in the implementation of the 'Three Ones' principles is vital. Its contribution can help ensure that one agreed HIV/AIDS Action Framework, one National AIDS Coordinating Authority and one agreed country-level Monitoring and Evaluation System are developed and implemented more effectively and efficiently. [See Box 4]

Box 4: Benefits of community sector involvement for national responses to HIV/AIDS

Community sector involvement can help ensure that national responses are:

- **Based on real needs and strategically focused:** The community sector understands the needs of people most affected. Its hands-on work and technical knowledge are instrumental in identifying the services and support that will make a difference. In particular, the sector has strong links with, and includes, marginalised groups that are key to the dynamics of HIV and AIDS and that other sectors are often unable or unwilling to reach effectively.
- **Far-reaching, flexible and responsive to crises:** The community sector can often reach and engage a broad range of individuals, groups and communities, including those in remote areas and those that are not usually involved in HIV/AIDS work. As such, it can recognise and respond rapidly to changes in local environments and epidemics and can adapt its approaches and priorities accordingly. It is also often able to maintain action within extreme situations, such as war, where official government activities may not be possible.
- **Creative and effective:** The community sector has developed ground-breaking and risk-taking responses to HIV/AIDS, often in difficult environments and with few resources. Many of these have been carefully monitored and improved over the years and are now recognised as global good practice.
- **Non-stigmatising or discriminatory:** The community sector is best placed to mobilise action against stigmatising attitudes and behaviours by tackling the root causes within communities. It is also often willing to identify and challenge discriminatory practices and policies.
- **Rights-based:** The community sector has been at the forefront of promoting rights-based approaches to HIV/AIDS that, in particular, respect and protect people living with HIV/AIDS and other marginalised groups.

Box 4 continued...

- **Participatory:** The community sector has pioneered empowering approaches to HIV/AIDS that encourage the participation of a broad range of individuals, groups and institutions in all stages and levels of responses.
- **Accountable and transparent:** The community sector has increasing experience of using systems to ensure the ethics and accountability of its work and also of playing a watchdog role, holding other sectors to account for their actions.
- **Cost-efficient:** The community sector is accustomed to making the most of limited funding and developing cost-effective approaches that maximise and complement existing local resources.



Image 1: sex worker, India. © 2006 Shailaja Jathi, Image 2: HIV/AIDS educator demonstrates condom usage, Mozambique
Image 3: The ACER project engaging communities in roll-out of services, Zambia. © 2006 IHAA

3.3 What is meant by the active and meaningful involvement of the community sector?

The active and meaningful involvement of the community sector in national coordinating bodies and processes is characterized by a set of specific features. (More details are provided in Part B of these guidelines.) In summary, all sectors are required to:

- View participation as a right, which also entails responsibilities.
- Be able to participate safely and legally.
- Have enough representatives and influence at all levels and in all relevant bodies and processes.
- Have balanced, broad-based representation.
- Have effective and resourced coordination within their own sectors.
- Be able to access adequate information and technical support.
- Work professionally, fostering a culture of equity and transparency.
- Maintain their independence and perform a watchdog role over other sectors.
- Work according to their sector's 'good practice'.
- Work at an efficient, but realistic pace.
- Work towards international commitments on HIV/AIDS and development.
- Take shared ownership, responsibility and commitment.

3.4 What can all stakeholders do to support the active and meaningful involvement of the community sector?

All stakeholders can play a role in supporting the active and meaningful involvement of the community sector. [See Box 5]

Box 5: Examples of support for community sector involvement in the 'Three Ones'

Government	Donors/UN	Community Sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being committed to genuine, multi-sectoral collaboration that is based on sharing power and resources. • Building understanding among officials about the community sector's role, principles, diversity and ways of working. • Analysing and maximising the contributions that all stakeholders, including the community sector, can make to national, multi-sectoral groups. • Appreciating the unique, hands-on work of communities, such as qualitative monitoring and service delivery to marginalised groups. • Allowing the community sector to develop its networks legally and freely and to play the role of independent watchdog. • Supporting capacity building of the community sector by channelling funding and expertise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing funding for community sector involvement that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building representatives' capacity. - Strengthening networks. - Carrying out consultation and communication activities. • Providing support to build consensus within the community sector, instead of engaging in 'fund and divide' practices. • Implementing activities accessible to the entire community sector by offering them in local languages and using participatory tools. • Being open to changing their own practices (e.g., by respecting the agreed M&E system and not asking groups to report on additional indicators). • Influencing the government to address blockages for the community sector, such as bottlenecks in funding mechanisms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being open to genuine, multi-sectoral collaboration, even if it involves compromises. • Being prepared to take a leadership role in national groups, rather than acting only as a participant. • Being honest about capacity gaps and being committed to mobilising resources to address those gaps. • 'Getting its own house in order', such as strengthening democratic systems to select representatives. • Being prepared to work transparently (e.g., by contributing monitoring information to a national database). • Being committed to consensus building, both within the community sector and with other sectors. • Balancing the complex dynamics of being part of national coordination processes and of playing an external watchdog role.



A drama group performs an HIV education play at a marketplace, Zambia

To make involvement a reality, each sector can take specific actions within national coordination processes and in relation to each of the 'Three Ones' principles. These actions are outlined in **Part B** of these guidelines.

The community sector and others can also take specific actions to create an enabling environment and build the capacity for involvement. It should be stressed that the degree to which these actions are possible and useful will vary from country to country. A number of critical actions are outlined in the **Action Cards**, included with these guidelines:

- Action Card ① Initiating action, defining the community sector, and building consensus
- Action Card ② Identifying roles, responsibilities and selection criteria for community sector representatives
- Action Card ③ Selecting community sector representatives
- Action Card ④ Assessing and building capacity to support community sector involvement
- Action Card ⑤ Being effective community sector representatives and providing support for their role
- Action Card ⑥ Raising funds for community sector involvement
- Action Card ⑦ Advocating for community sector involvement
- Action Card ⑧ Enhancing communication within the community sector
- Action Card ⑨ Improving consultation within the community sector
- Action Card ⑩ Working in partnership and building mutual understanding
- Action Card ⑪ Scrutinising progress and being an independent watchdog