

Action for Universal Access 2010:

Myths

Realities



Civil Society Involvement and Accountability

Issue Statement

Civil society organizations have always been at the forefront of the response to AIDS, but continue to lack the support to be meaningfully involved in the design, implementation, and monitoring of national HIV programmes, creating barriers to national accountability for delivering on commitments.

Key Messages

- The UNGASS 2001 Declaration of Commitment (DoC), “*acknowledge[s] the particular role and significant contribution of people living with HIV/AIDS [PLHIV], young people and civil society actors in addressing the problem of HIV/AIDS in all its aspects, and recognize[s] that their full involvement and participation in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of design, planning, implementation and evaluation of programmes is crucial to the development of effective responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.*”
- Civil society involvement in the design, planning and evaluation of national AIDS responses is still weak and often actively resisted in most parts of the world. This is particularly true for key populations such as people living with HIV, women, youth, people who use drugs, men who have sex with men (MSM), and sex workers.
- Without meaningful involvement of civil society organizations, particularly those representing people living with HIV and key populations in all aspects of the response to AIDS, we will **not** reach universal access targets by 2010.
- Civil society cannot engage meaningfully in processes to set policy priorities, and design, implement and monitor programmes, without being appropriately resourced and supported by governments, donor agencies and the UN system.
- National reviews and reporting on the implementation of the commitments made in the DoC and 2006 Political Declaration are important accountability mechanisms. Failure to report comprehensively or to include civil society data represents a failure to meet these commitments.

Background: Myths vs. Realities – The Road to Universal Access

Although there are clear commitments in the 2001 and 2006 declarations to involve civil society in all aspects of the response to HIV/AIDS, the **reality** in most countries is that civil society involvement is inconsistent and unsystematic, often used only to legitimize a process over which they have little control or little opportunity to provide input.

- Often civil society organizations do not have the capacity – including resources and political support – to meaningfully engage in priority-setting and planning processes that affect the populations they represent. This affects their ability to engage in high level national processes, such as reviewing progress towards delivering on international commitments and national AIDS policies and strategies.
- The challenges are both practical (such as how to have community-level indicators accepted as valid information) and at policy level (such as how to advocate for community data to be incorporated into national reporting).

- Stigma and discrimination, criminalization of certain behaviours (such as sex between men and drug use) or of certain occupations (such as sex work), gender inequity, and the lack of resources to support consultations and advocacy, all present barriers for civil society to be meaningfully involved, and are therefore also barriers to achieving universal access by 2010.

The Role of Civil Society

The involvement of civil society, particularly people living with HIV and other key populations, is essential to reaching those who are most marginalized and “forgotten,” especially in countries where these populations fear harassment, arrest, or discrimination from health care providers. Civil society involvement is also key to ensuring that community-level data and indicators are included in national reporting mechanisms.

Recommendations

- UNAIDS must, especially at the national level, advocate for a more systematic and comprehensive inclusion of civil society groups, especially vulnerable populations, in national review and reporting processes. This is particularly critical with governments that are known to marginalize such groups.
- Governments must meaningfully involve civil society actors, including vulnerable populations, in the ongoing planning, management and monitoring of the national response to AIDS.
- Governments must strengthen national indicators on human rights, in collaboration with civil society, to enable accurate monitoring and promotion of a rights-based response to AIDS; governments must also address other gaps in data needed to complete the full range of Declaration of Commitment indicators for 2010, with particular attention to those related to vulnerable groups.
- Both the UN system and donors, including national authorities, must provide civil society organizations with the appropriate resources and technical support to meaningfully engage in the AIDS response at the national and international level.
- Civil society organizations must remain actively engaged in UNGASS processes and act as a “watchdog” on progress in achieving Declaration of Commitment indicators; to do this it must strengthen its mechanisms for consulting with and representing wider constituents, in particular people living with HIV and other vulnerable populations.

This paper was prepared under the auspices of the Civil Society Task Force for the 2008 UN High Level Meeting on AIDS.

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