

Mainstreaming Local Government Responses to HIV/AIDS: The role of Technical Support Agencies

Report of the Learning Event of the
HIV/AIDS and Local Government Learning Network

Department of Provincial and Local Government, Pretoria
19 September 2008

This report provides a strategic summary of presentations and discussions at the learning event of the HIV/AIDS and Local Government Learning Network on 19 September 2008, themed "Mainstreaming Local Government Responses to HIV and AIDS: The role of Technical Support Agencies." The event was organised on behalf of the HIV/AIDS and Local Government Learning Network by the Department of Provincial and Local Government (dplg). The report of this event was prepared by Ms Stacey-Leigh Joseph, Isandla Institute.

Current members of the HIV/AIDS and Local Government Learning Network are:

Built Environment Support Group (BESG)
Centre for Municipal Research and Advice (CMRA)
Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Evaluation (CADRE)
Department of Provincial and Local Government (dplg)
Education Training Unit (ETU)
Isandla Institute
Medical Research Council (MRC)
South African Cities Network (SACN)
South African Local Government Association (SALGA)
Independent consultants and researchers working on HIV/AIDS and Local Government

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The event was funded by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ). GTZ, through its Strengthening Local Governance Programme (SLGP), provides funding and support for the activities of the HIV/AIDS and Local Government Learning Network. The SLGP is a partnership initiative with the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA).



Objective and outcome of the event

In June 2007 the HIV/AIDS¹ and Local Government Learning Network hosted a very successful meeting with members of the donor community. This meeting was seen as an important opportunity to share information and experiences and to encourage collaboration and engagement between donors, government departments and other actors that are working on issues relating to local government and HIV/AIDS. Donors also recognised the importance of collaboration and engagement amongst themselves. A further key outcome of this meeting was the undertaking that engagement between the Network and donors would be ongoing.

In recognition of this and as a follow up to the June 2007 meeting, the theme for the third meeting of the HIV/AIDS and Local Government Learning Network was “Mainstreaming local government responses to HIV/AIDS: The role of technical support agencies.” The key objective was to answer the following questions:

- How does the work of donor agencies assist with the practical application and implementation of the *Framework for an Integrated Governance Response to HIV and AIDS at Local Government Level*, developed by the dplg, as well as the *SALGA Country guideline for Local Government on HIV and AIDS: promoting an Effective Leadership Response*?
- Do donor agencies assist in terms of the budgeting and planning for the technical support for the implementation of these plans and guidelines?
- How is donor support and involvement in municipalities evaluated?
- To what extent can the HIV/AIDS and local government learning Network influence and guide the policies and responses of donor agencies to the HIV/AIDS epidemic?

Introduction to Network

As some of the donors had not been present at the first meeting in June 2007, the meeting started with a brief introduction to the Network, its members and its activities thus far. Ms Stacey-Leigh Joseph provided an overview of the activities of the Network and reiterated the network’s commitment to engagement with donor agencies involved in projects dealing with HIV/AIDS and local government.

The donors present included Irish AID, USAID, the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the Centre for Municipal Research and Advice (CMRA).²

Input Paper: Mainstreaming local government responses: The role of technical support agencies

Ms Nombulelo Msikinya, Senior Manager in the Equity and Development Directorate (Department of Provincial and Local Government – dplg) provided a presentation on the input paper, *Mainstreaming local government responses: The role of technical support agencies*, sent to participants prior to the event (available on www.halogen.org.za). Ms Msikinya highlighted the consequences of the HIV/AIDS epidemic for municipalities and provided some suggestions for how they should respond. She defined the role of local government as enhancing the ability of individuals, households and communities to cope with the epidemic. She further emphasised the importance of networks and partners undertaking rigorous monitoring and evaluation to determine the impact, successes and failures in their support to municipalities. In addition, it is critical that some investment is made in research that documents practices in municipalities in order to be kept records of good practices and lessons. For example, it is important to document the experiences of municipalities that might get donor funding but because of this, require extra resources to manage it. In the absence of support from donors to actually manage funding received by municipalities, this might lead to failure or non-implementation of programmes. Another important lesson is the point that one size does not fit all and that what works in one instance might not work in the next. Therefore, it is important to document why certain programmes work, what the background/demographics of a municipality are and what type of support they therefore require. She noted that municipalities receiving support from the German Technical Agency (GTZ) often achieved success because their starting point is the development of integrated, strategic HIV/AIDS plans.

¹ In many other instances reference has been made to HIV and AIDS as a way of recognising the different nature and impacts of infection with HIV compared to the development of AIDS, and its related illnesses. While this distinction is recognised, and used by the presenters at this event, this report will use the abbreviation ‘HIV/AIDS.’

² GTZ and CMRA are strictly speaking not donors/grant making agencies but instead are involved in providing hands on technical support to local government.

Ms Msikinya highlighted a number of challenges that are currently influencing the implementation of the *Framework for an Integrated Local Government Response to HIV and AIDS*. One of these is the fact that there is a lack of understanding, particularly among municipalities, of the role and mandate of local government. In addition, donor agencies are not always able to support or understand the fact that local government has to be flexible and cannot always be bound by rigid prescriptions. Another important factor noted by Ms Msikinya relates to the dplg's limited resources and she indicated that one way for donors to assist is to engage in partnerships with municipalities and dplg. These partnerships should, however, encourage independence as they will inevitably come to an end. Thus, municipalities should be able to learn and develop skills by implementing projects themselves with ongoing support from donors.

In response to the presentation by Ms Msikinya, Mr Ashley Losch from the German Technical Agency (GTZ) commented that one of the concerns for the GTZ in their engagement with dplg is that even at national level, the dplg itself is not talking in an integrated manner. He voiced his support for the idea of assessing the impact of donor support in municipalities. In terms of the technical support that is provided to municipalities by donors, it is important to determine what kind of institutional capacity and support is required. For example, if donors fund and support technical advisors in municipalities, what are the effects of their departure when the funding period is over? What mechanisms are in place to ensure that skills transferral and development takes place so that programmes are not stalled when the donor support or funding comes to an end? It was noted that what needs to happen is that programmes become municipality driven instead of donor driven. However, some of the issues highlighted were not experienced by everyone. For example, Mr. Peter Vaz, Director of RTI International (implementing agent for the USAID PEPFAR programme), suggested that their experiences regarding the provision of technical support to municipalities have been very successful as the roles of their advisors are about providing support instead of actually doing the work that the municipality is meant to do. Participants agreed on the importance of clear and adequate terms of reference and agreements with municipalities regarding the role and function of technical advisors. From the experiences of CMRA the placement of project coordinators in municipalities has had mixed results. In some cases they have been successful while they have failed in others. One of the important lessons learnt from these experiences is that the memorandum of understanding/agreement that is signed with the municipality should include a budget and plan for a phased out approach which should result in an appropriately skilled person being appointed in the municipality. In some instances this has worked and in others there has often been political or administrative interference in this process.

Participants commented that the Framework by dplg is very ambitious. For example, it intends to provide a large amount of support to municipalities despite the fact that the dplg itself does not have the capacity at national level to do this. Participants questioned how the rollout of the framework was currently taking place, whether it involved facilitators working in the field and what resources are available for implementation. It was further noted that the rollout of the framework assumes a very systematic approach, ie. from national to provincial to municipal while it is well known that these processes are often not that simple. There is currently no clear picture of who is doing what, where and that the impacts are and in the absence of this, it was questioned how decisions around the rollout were made. Ms Msikinya was asked her opinion on where donors should be investing and where the rollout would have the most impact. In response to these comments she highlighted the fact that resources at national level are extremely limited and despite the fact that the plan seems quite ambitious, this is the mandate that was given to the Equity and Development Unit. Also, the rollout was happening differently in different provinces. In the Eastern Cape the provincial department of local government have agreed to be involved and this is helpful as the province has undertaken to disseminate information and train municipalities in the province. In some instances provinces themselves have indicated that they require support.

Participants thought it was necessary to clarify the criteria which donors use to select the municipalities that receive their support and suggested that this include a clear and detailed needs assessment. It was noted that the municipalities that actually require assistance are often overlooked. One example of this is the Nkangala municipality in Mpumalanga as it is clear that this municipality is struggling and requires a large amount of support. Yet, there are currently no interventions, both from donors and the dplg. In response donors indicated that the decision to support a municipality is often influenced by the willingness and enthusiasm on the part of municipalities to implement an effective response to HIV/AIDS and to engage with donors in doing so. It was noted that this enthusiasm is also critical for success as municipalities that are committed to a project and who feel a sense of ownership are more likely to carry on the project even after the departure of technical support or the end of the funding arrangement. Success is also related to the municipality's ability to articulate its needs and the kind of support that it requires and to be committed to the subsequent plan drawn up to respond to this.

Donor presentations (available on www.halogen.org.za)

Germany Technical Agency (GTZ)

Mr Ashley Losch, the National Advisor for Public Participation and Governance at the GTZ, provided an input on behalf of GTZ in which he outlined the key programmes and priorities of the organisation which includes support for mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in local government. He emphasised that GTZ is very supportive of the HIV/AIDS and Local Government Learning Network and is committed to providing ongoing support for the activities of the network. In this regard, GTZ has also recently appointed a new coordinator for its HIV/AIDS programme, Mr Terence Smith, who is currently a member of the network. GTZ's involvement is focussed on providing national policy advice, capacity building and institutional support in the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga. Yet, there have been a number of challenges. For example, it is recognised that mainstreaming is a challenging and time consuming process and that success depends on developing clear plans and indicators. Another challenge relates to the difficulty in ensuring that HIV/AIDS is effectively mainstreamed in Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) of municipalities. Despite the fact that municipalities have begun to incorporate responses to HIV/AIDS in their IDPs, they still struggle to understand how to implement cross-cutting issues like gender, HIV/AIDS and youth effectively and systematically into their IDPs. Finally, an important lesson learnt is the fact that municipalities do require support evidenced by the fact the fact that the most successful municipalities have been the ones with access to partners or external support. Mr Peter Vaz, from RTI International, commented that strengthening coordination amongst donors is extremely important and undertook to work with organisations like GTZ in future. In response to a question about the availability of funding for the documentation of good practices, Mr Losch indicated that this is definitely a project that GTZ would consider funding as there was a need for good practices and projects to be documented. Amongst the GTZ's future products is the provision of strategic and institutional support to SALGA and also to municipalities at local level.

Centre for Municipal Research and Advice (CMRA)

Ms Marije Versteeg, Senior Researcher at the CMRA, introduced the CMRA as a research and consultancy organisation instead of a donor organisation. The CMRA is funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy and their current work focuses on encouraging a decentralised response to HIV/AIDS (2006-2009) and their latest project attempts to benchmark municipal responses to HIV/AIDS (2008-2009). Both projects attempt to promote the *Framework for an Integrated Local Government Response to HIV and AIDS*, the *Handbook for facilitating development and governance responses to HIV and AIDS* and the *SALGA Country Guideline on HIV and AIDS for local government*. Mainstreaming support is provided to four local and six district municipalities and aimed at providing support for mainstreaming HIV/AIDS into service delivery (eg. disability, trucking, youth and sport). These projects have succeeded in increasing awareness of the developmental and local government response and have resulted in most municipalities implementing mainstreaming strategies and action plans. However, despite the successes of the decentralised response, there have also been a number of important lessons that emerged from the engagement with municipalities. For example, HIV/AIDS is still not seen as an urgent development and governance matter by some municipalities and as a result the tasks for responding to the epidemic falls to junior staff, insufficient funds are allocated to the HIV/AIDS coordinator position and improper understanding of the job requirements in some instances leads to the wrong person being appointed. Local AIDS Councils do not function according to their mandate, have a low status and are not linked to the IDP. In terms of the CMRA's second focus the benchmarking project aims to compare the processes and achievement of municipal HIV/AIDS responses in order to identify and implement ways of strengthening municipal HIV/AIDS responses. The main tools for this project are a questionnaire, meetings and workshops with municipalities and the set up of an advisory committee which includes dplg and SALGA. The benchmarking process is informed by the *National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS/STI/ 2007-2011*, the *Framework*, the *SALGA Country Guidelines* and the GTZ local economic development tool.

Irish AID

The overall goal of the Irish AID Programme is to contribute to the reduction of poverty and inequality in line with the policies and targets of the South African Government. This it does by focussing on strengthening the capacities of government and civil society to ensure improved service delivery. According to Ms Tamara Mathebula, HIV and AIDS Advisor at Irish AID, they focus on the sectors dealing with water and sanitation,

education and gender concerns. Support is provided through direct funding to provinces (eg. Limpopo Province) but also through the funding of groups like the Water Sector Leadership Core Group on HIV and AIDS. Other forms of support include strengthening of provincial, district and local AIDS councils and much of the support takes the form of technical assistance as opposed to funding. In recognising the importance of monitoring and evaluation, Irish AID does both internal and external reviews of its policies and engagements with different stakeholders. This feeds into a review of the programmes and whether or not the stated objectives are reached. Another component of the support provided by Irish AID is its attempt to influence and improve the efficacy of donor coordination, collaboration and alignment as it recognises the importance of an effective multi-sectoral response to HIV/AIDS. In addition, it attempts to respond to the fact that a number of interventions in this field are fragmented, duplicated and uncoordinated by engaging with and coordinating numerous stakeholders in the relevant fields.

A key focus of its work in the next funding period (2008-2011) is to concentrate on the role of gender in increasing vulnerability and specifically the feminisation of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Irish AID will also focus on providing ongoing support to government and civil society on mainstreaming HIV/AIDS into programmes.

USAID

In her presentation, Ms Mary McCleod, indicated that USAID is currently undergoing a process of restructuring and this will be informed by the lessons learnt from its experiences in South Africa. Their current involvement in South Africa has highlighted a number of important lessons and experiences. For example, they have recognised the importance of securing buy-in from the right people and the fact that this is not always an easy process especially in terms of provincial and national buy-in for coordination of the US president's emergency programme for AIDS relief (Pepfar) programme. Another key finding is the importance of building a relationship with a champion inside the municipality to drive projects. One way of doing this is to identify this person/s right from the start of the project as it is crucial to get the right people with authority involved in the project. Much of the emphasis of this programme is on HIV/AIDS in the workplace and home-based care. The decision to focus specifically on these projects was in response to the demand for it and also as a result of engagement with municipalities which highlighted these focus areas. However, the experience has also been that municipalities sometimes change their minds halfway through the project and USAID has experienced challenges in responding to these changing needs. Another lesson relates to determining which departments are the relevant ones to involve in a partnership. In terms of getting buy-in from municipalities for voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) programmes in the workplace, they have found that it is useful to work both with the human resources department and the unions. It is also necessary to engage with the department of health to prevent duplication as this department is largely tasked with responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Finally, a small but important fact that donors often overlook is the need to ensure that trainers, advisors, technical support staff are able to communicate effectively as it is important to engage with people in the language that they feel most comfortable in. Thus these trainers and technical support staff often need to be sourced from the municipal area instead of automatically employing someone from the actual donor agency.

Discussion

The subsequent discussion again highlighted the need for donors to work together and also to use available resources like the Network for information sharing, monitoring and evaluation and to inform its future work and funding for HIV/AIDS at local government level. It was noted that the donor coordination forum has recently hired a consultant to liaise with donors in order to produce a matrix of where donor involvement is currently taking place. A suggestion was made that this project should coincide with the matrix currently being developed by Dr Liz Thomas and Ms Pinky Mahlangu, from the MRC, who are current members of the network. Their matrix intends to document and outline what projects are currently taking place in municipalities in response to HIV/AIDS and which actors (government, civil society, donors) are involved. The main outcome of both these projects should be a clear outline of who is providing support and where. Another matrix that should be taken into consideration is the matrix being designed by the National Treasury.

In response to a question about the history of donor involvement in South Africa and why it is concentrated in certain provinces, eg. the Eastern Cape and Kwazulu-Natal donors indicated that these have been the areas that historically have been identified as having the most severe need. However, donors are attempting to move away from this model and this is why coordination amongst donors as well as government and civil society is so important as they need to communicate with each other in order to determine where their

resources should be located. The role of dplg to assist with this coordination was emphasised and the donor agencies present at the meeting indicated their willingness to engage with the department.

Concluding remarks

- Donors present committed themselves to ongoing support for and engagement with the HIV/AIDS and Local Government Learning Network and its activities.
 - There was overall agreement that there needs to be a needs assessment and review of donor support.
 - Dplg indicated that one of its primary needs at present is short term support in terms of resources and it was noted that this, as well as support in municipalities, should be accompanied by clear terms of references and a strategy for ensuring the stability of resources both in the department and in municipalities.
 - Dplg reiterated its call for support in rolling out the framework at local government level including adequate support structures as well as adequate training for resource persons.
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