



HIV/AIDS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEARNING NETWORK

**Report on the Learning Event on
Inter-Municipal Learning and
Cooperation in relation to HIV/AIDS
May 2010**



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This report summarises the learning event: *Inter-municipal learning and cooperation in relation to HIV/AIDS* organised by the HIV/AIDS and Local Government Learning Network (Halogen) on 26 May 2010 and hosted by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA). More information about the learning events and outputs of the network can be downloaded from www.halogen.org.za.

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

Built Environment Support Group (BESG)
Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Evaluation (CADRE)
Centre for Municipal Research and Advice (CMRA)
Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA)
Education and Training Unit (ETU)
Forced Migration Studies Programme (Wits University)
German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) - Strengthening Local Governance Programme
Isandla Institute
Institute for Democracy in Africa (Idasa)
Medical Research Council (MRC) and Wits University Centre for Health Policy (CHP)
RTI International
South African Local Government Association (SALGA)
Non-affiliated development practitioners (consultants) and researchers working on HIV/AIDS and
Local Government

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Introduction

The theme of the learning event was *Inter-municipal learning and cooperation in relation to HIV/AIDS*. Local Government has been identified as one of the key actors in the response to HIV/AIDS. For many municipalities this has been a challenging task while there are others that are engaging in innovative responses to the epidemic. Yet, these responses are often not known and thus not shared between municipalities. It is for this reason that this learning event focused on experiences of inter-municipal learning and cooperation (where they do exist) and on looking at ways to facilitate and support this kind of learning.

The key questions that were explored during the learning event were:

- How do we instil, facilitate and institutionalise inter-municipal learning on the topic of HIV and AIDS?
- How do we create a platform for sharing and exchange?
- How do we create and support vertical and horizontal learning?
- SALGA is in the process of developing a supporting framework for intergovernmental learning – how can this be used to facilitate and support inter-municipal learning on HIV and AIDS?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of key actors and role players (SALGA, CoGTA, Halogen)?

The learning event was informed by an input paper that sought to highlight and address the key questions identified above. Furthermore, the event aimed to reflect on past experiences and lessons that have come out of attempts to facilitate municipal learning and exchange. The lessons from the event will be documented in a municipal brief that will be disseminated to municipalities and will also inform the process initiated by SALGA to encourage learning and exchange amongst municipalities through its Knowledge Management Strategy.

Opening remarks

The event was opened by Antonette Richardson, the Executive Director for Community Develop-

ment at the South African Local Government Association (SALGA). She emphasised that engagements between SALGA and its various stakeholders and partners, including civil society, are critical for building and sharing knowledge, ideas and lessons. These are also critical for identifying, documenting and disseminating experiences of various municipalities' responses to HIV/AIDS. SALGA sees Halogen as an important network for building the HIV/AIDS and local government sector, for the sharing of information and learning and for improving on how municipalities respond to HIV/AIDS. Ms Richardson acknowledged the importance of SALGA's partnership with the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) as well as the ongoing support from the GTZ-Strengthening Local Governance Programme.

Conceptualising inter-municipal learning and cooperation in relation to HIV/AIDS

The input paper for this event was drafted by local government expert, David Schmidt, who was also the facilitator for the learning event. He began his presentation by highlighting the current interest of SALGA in pulling together learning through the development of networks and partnerships among various stakeholders. This has informed the thinking around the development of the SALGA Knowledge Management Strategy (KMS), which aims to develop a broad framework for knowledge management and information sharing amongst local government and its various stakeholders. This is especially critical if we consider that we are operating in a connected world which is constantly changing and being updated with new learning, experiences and also new technologies. Knowledge management and networking is about more than just the collection of information. It is also about producing information, contributing towards and generating new knowledge. The KMS is a critical resource for the local government agenda and speaks to one of the four characteristics of developmental local government as outlined in the 1998 White Paper on Local Government, which is about "leading and learning".

A key institutional capacity of local govern-



ment should be the ability to learn and improve over time, i.e. it is not only about municipalities' capacity at a particular point but also about their capacity for improvement as it is important to take an incremental approach to municipal learning. There are a number of ways to generate space for learning. One way to do this is to take a three-pronged approach which focuses on peer learning, the creation of a knowledge bank and research and benchmarking. Documentation of practice is important and needs to be made accessible to municipal officials as well as other relevant stakeholders. Tools that are useful for encouraging learning and engagement are: communities of practice (CoPs), learning networks, exchanges between different municipalities to allow their staff some insight into how others are doing things, peer reviews which can be very useful if carried out properly, and finally, making use of coaching and mentoring. Encouraging peer review would also allow a base for evaluation of municipalities' responses as there is very little evaluation at present and as a result very little evidence-based policy development is taking place. A final important point to be made is that we do not need to focus all our efforts on developing one response or one network that speaks to the myriad of needs of different stakeholders. There are various options for networks and what might work is a combination of them. For example, instead of a single integrated network that attempts to address everything, we could consider a set of linked networks that connect at different times or even a network of networks where there is an overarching 'body' or network that facilitates engagement between the different networks. (This could potentially be the KMS).

Participant discussion

There are a number of options for organising inter-municipal learning on HIV/AIDS. Participants made the following suggestions for consideration:

- Which municipalities should be included? How do we group municipalities together – for example do we group them according to different categories, size, and location? Do we try to reach all 283 municipalities?
- Which officials/councillors should be involved? For example, do we involve the officials from the health department, other departments, councillors, municipal managers, mayors, or all of them in the same group? Or do we create different networks amongst different peers? But the issue of cross-learning between different groups e.g. between the municipal managers and HIV coordinators should not be forgotten.
- How does learning happen? There are various ways that learning can take place (e.g. not only at learning events or workshops but also in one-on-one and smaller engagements). It is important to decide which kind of learning is appropriate for which audience.
- If no intra-municipal learning then inter-municipal not very helpful. How do we create municipalities that are learning organisations, which have the capacity to learn and improve?
- Performance contracts should be used as a way of ensuring that HIV/AIDS is addressed, especially by senior managers.
- HIV/AIDS should be recognised as a cross-cutting issue that affects vulnerable communities and especially vulnerable groups like women, youth and children.

Municipal inputs

Inputs were made by three municipalities, namely Ugu District Municipality and Hlabisa Local Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, and Buffalo City Local Municipality in the Eastern Cape. Both representatives from Ugu District Municipality and Hlabisa Local Municipality recounted their experiences in trying to get HIV/AIDS accepted as an important challenge within their municipalities that required not only health responses but holistic initiatives that addressed important developmental concerns. In both municipalities it was important to get HIV/AIDS onto the agenda and to get buy-in from relevant stakeholders, including senior management, the private sector and local level actors (including ward committees). The input from Buffalo City focussed more on the municipality's attempts to twin with another municipality and to engage in peer learning and sharing to strengthen their respec-



tive initiatives. While the first two presentations were valuable in terms of sharing their challenges in mainstreaming HIV/AIDS and what was done to overcome them, the Buffalo City presentation provided useful insights into the realities of peer learning, what some of the challenges are as well as the positive lessons and experiences from teaming up with another municipality as it contributes to growth and knowledge building. A representative from the Centre for Municipal Research and Advice (CMRA) also presented on CMRA's project on benchmarking municipal responses to HIV/AIDS. These presentations provided key insights into and motivation for documenting interventions that are happening at local level as well as encouraging inter-municipal learning and sharing.

In all the presentations, a number of key issues stood out:

- Getting buy-in from leadership is absolutely critical to achieve success
- To achieve the above, officials often need to undergo a number of awareness-raising and training sessions to understand the developmental aspects of HIV/AIDS. Even then, these officials will have to be reminded on a regular basis.
- This requires that a strong and fairly senior person be appointed to lead the local level response. In most instances this is the responsibility of the HIV/AIDS coordinator and it is important that this person also understands that a local level response is about looking beyond just the medical aspect.
- One of the challenges experienced by municipalities is that the national policy framework and guidelines are often not effectively filtered down to municipal level.
- Partnerships are of critical importance and if municipalities do not engage with their counterparts, across the different spheres and with CBOs and NGOs, they are unlikely to develop a holistic and effective HIV/AIDS response in their municipalities. The partnerships allow municipalities to assess their own response by comparing it with what is happening elsewhere and possibly using this to improve on their own response.

- Municipalities could even start their own benchmarking processes. If this is made part of the planning process they could put resources aside in order to document their progress for future learning and sharing.

How do we see learning and sharing and what can be done to take this forward?

If we accept that learning and sharing are such important activities, how then do we organise shared learning and knowledge sharing? At the same time, we need to acknowledge that 'learning' means different things to different people in different contexts and that we should use some of the insights from this event to inform and shape how we organise learning in future. This includes looking at what forms of organised learning would assist in particular those municipal officials dealing with HIV/AIDS (but also a broader municipal audience) to effectively carry out their work. Amongst the options that exist for organising learning and sharing include exchanges, the documentation of projects and the experiences from these, networking with various stakeholders (both within and outside of the municipality), organising seminars and events that are specifically aimed at generating learning and sharing.

Participant discussion

The following section summarises some of the key discussions and points made by participants regarding peer learning and sharing and what their own needs and ideas are in terms of taking this forward:

- Individuals, not positions, get things moving forward. Passionate people find ways of working in difficult situations and despite the challenges, it is possible to develop and implement appropriate local level responses to the epidemic. It is important that people recognise that despite the challenges and obstacles that may exist in terms of encouraging innovation and learning, they still have the capacity to make a change. Collaboration with others is important and an effective response to HIV/AIDS requires multi-sectoral



and multi-stakeholder engagement

- Political support (i.e. champions) are important but often only if they identify themselves instead of being selected by others – indicate willingness out of their ‘free will’ to get involved. It is also important to have champions at local community level.
- HIV must be pushed as a development issue – even if it means constantly reminding officials from ‘other’ departments and also other stakeholders by including it on tender documents/payslips etc. Officials need to be constantly reminded that responding to HIV/AIDS is not just about hosting events. In addition, the internal dimensions should not be forgotten so that officials within municipalities feel that they are receiving necessary support.
- There is so much happening out there and it is important to create a platform for some of this learning to be documented and shared.
- An effective response can start anywhere, at any time. It does not have to be linear i.e. we do not have to wait for municipalities to get their act together before action can happen elsewhere
- We need to find a way to institutionalise passion so that all officials are committed to and passionate about ensuring that an effective response to HIV/AIDS is implemented. One option is to include it in officials’ performance contracts.
- Many politicians lack knowledge about HIV/AIDS and especially about the developmental factors that are closely linked to vulnerability to HIV. Many of them think that HIV/AIDS is still a health concern and we should thus work on ways to capacitate councillors and other municipal officials on HIV/AIDS.

When asked to think about and suggest some options for how municipal learning and exchange can be encouraged, participants made the following suggestions:

- **Municipal twinning** has been used in many different contexts and is a good way to encourage peer learning and engagement. SALGA was involved in a project, with VNG International, that involved the twinning of

Dutch municipalities with municipalities in South Africa and Namibia. These experiences could be used to inform a similar process even between South African municipalities.

- **Good practice forums (need to focus on ‘good’ practice rather than ‘best’ practice as there is no one size fits all):** Different forums are required for different groups. For example, while in some instances it is important to have cross-sector learning and learning amongst officials in the same municipality, regardless of their positions and seniority, it is also important to have forums where all mayors or premiers or HIV coordinators and IDP managers can meet. Some participants even suggested that there should be monthly ‘venting’ sessions that would allow people to share not only their experiences but also their frustrations and possibly even come up with alternative responses to deal with these. One way that this could happen is for ‘adjoining/ neighbouring’ municipalities to arrange regular information sharing sessions – can be local and district and even the metros – in the case of Eastern Cape, for example, Cacadu District Municipality, Nelson Mandela Metro and the Buffalo City Local Municipality. Dealing with HIV/AIDS can be a lonely job and for many officials there is very little support. This is why networks and engagements are so useful as they provide spaces for peer support.
- At the same time we should be wary of creating too many structures that all do something different and instead of reinforcing and supporting the work being done on HIV/AIDS we may end up duplicating and repeating what is done.
- **Multi-stakeholder engagement:** The importance of civil society involvement needs to be recognised and one role that civil society could play is in terms of monitoring and evaluation. Also, this should contain a research component that allows municipalities to work together with different civil society organisations and also assist them with the identification of good practice case studies that can be documented and shared with others. It is also important to connect with local academics as they can play a



valuable role in documenting experiences. It is also important to recognise and nurture two way engagements (particularly between municipalities and researchers)

- **Intra-municipal learning is essential:** While learning ‘outside’ of the municipality is valuable, learning within the municipality should be a priority. Communication and participation needs to be improved within and between municipal departments.
- **Need to have the right pitch:** networks (as well as conferences and workshops) should speak to different audiences. For example, the pitch will be different depending on the audience – thus everyone cannot be catered for in the same forum. For example, while Halogen is useful and exposure to municipalities is essential, this network might not necessarily be the appropriate forum for everyone. Measuring impacts of these events is thus important to determine whether it is pitched at the right level.
- **Good practice and case studies:** These should be kept up-to-date and relevant. Documenting and disseminating case studies and tips both electronically and in print form remains an important way to assist municipalities to improve their performance. A database can be set up to be used as an information source by municipalities.
- **Training the trainer:** It may not be possible to reach everyone and it is thus important that a number of people are selected to be trained so that they can train others. An instance where this is already taking place is in the roll-out of the CoGTA Framework for an Integrated Local Government Response to HIV and AIDS. The roll-out, which has started in three provinces, involves the training of service providers who are then responsible for training key officials in the various municipalities that have been selected for the roll-out.

The way forward

How then should we move forward and organise ourselves to improve learning and sharing? Firstly, it is important that we understand the critical role to be played by politicians in

increasing the understanding of HIV/AIDS as a developmental issue that needs to be addressed at local level. Getting the ruling party as well as other political parties on board is thus a critical first step and SALGA can play a very important role in this regard. Getting politicians to change their mindsets will also inform how others think about HIV/AIDS. Politicians should thus be trained to understand and motivate for an effective developmental response to HIV/AIDS.

A second point is that we should work at establishing both internal and external structures for sharing and learning. If learning does not happen within a municipality, this will ultimately affect the value of the learning that takes place externally. Where officials are able to learn and gather new knowledge and information, they should be able to access the necessary spaces within their workplaces to share with others and also to learn from the experiences and lessons of their counterparts both within their sector departments and between different local level sector departments. It is very important that municipalities recognise that learning should start at the local level. One way is to host internal departmental seminars as well as seminars for the entire municipality.

Municipalities should recognise the value of research and documentation of projects and the lessons from these. There is often a sense of distrust and tension between officials and research bodies about the research that is carried out (often with good reason) but it is important that a relationship is built between these two sectors as it will be mutually beneficial. One way that municipalities can start fostering these relationships is by coordinating systematic approaches to research, with municipalities acting as entry points for partnerships with research organisations. Municipalities are also best placed to indicate what is happening in their areas and what are useful case studies for documentation and to facilitate the necessary access to the right people and documents.

A fourth point is that learning should take place across different spheres. Getting provincial partners on board should be a priority and SALGA can also assist in this regard.

Often municipalities feel isolated and out of touch with their provincial counterparts and it would be very useful to work on strengthening these relationships. This also speaks to the importance of personal relationships as this is often what generates the necessary support to get projects underway. In this instance SALGA can again play a very important role as its endorsement assists with creating the facilitative environment for this to happen.

Finally, unless these processes are included in plans and budgets, they will not happen. As with any other undertaking, resources should be set aside in plans and budgets for municipal officials to engage in internal and external learning activities as this is critical for improving on their work and for learning new and innovative ways to carry out their work.

Conclusion

In closing, Ms Richardson noted that when engaging in these types of learning and information exchanges, it is necessary to ask whether we are in fact learning and how we know that we are learning. This means that we need to be clear about the types of changes that we would like to see in municipalities. Transferring learning and

building capacity should be done in a way that allows us to track changes at the municipal level in a tangible manner. For this to happen, an enabling space should be created for measuring changes and learning processes at the local level. It is important therefore that local government has a coherent plan of action for building knowledge both within each municipality and between municipal entities and other organisations. The discussions from this event will also be taken forward and fed into the Knowledge Management Strategy currently being developed by SALGA. This Strategy will lay the basis for institutionalising learning and knowledge management at the local municipal level.





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