



HIV/AIDS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEARNING NETWORK

Municipal Brief 1 - 2010

**Inter-municipal learning on local
responses to HIV/AIDS**

Learning and sharing knowledge about HIV/AIDS in the local government sector is critical, given the high number of people living with, or affected by, HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Municipalities are at the forefront of providing services and driving and co-ordinating development within their areas, yet HIV/AIDS is still often seen as the responsibility of other spheres of government, such as national and provincial health and social development departments, with the burden of care within communities falling on civil society.

Within municipalities, officials responsible for managing HIV/AIDS programmes may feel isolated, with their input confined to one area, even though the impact of HIV/AIDS is felt in every aspect of municipal life. Networks, such as the HIV/AIDS and Local Government Learning Network (Halogen), create valuable spaces for municipal officials working with HIV/AIDS to share lessons and experiences, but the challenge remains to draw in a wider circle of municipal officials and councillors, particularly those in leadership positions.

At a learning event hosted by SALGA, participants in the Halogen network met to consider how municipalities can better share knowledge and how these insights can be put to use within their own municipalities to reinforce the cross-cutting nature of HIV/AIDS and the role every department needs to play in acknowledging its impact and supporting municipality-wide programmes.

Why knowledge-sharing is important

Executive director for Community Development at SALGA, Ms Antonette Richardson, believes knowledge sharing is important because one of the key elements for change was the ability to use information strategically to improve all aspects of service delivery.

‘It is said that if a man wants to walk fast, he can do it alone, but if he has to walk far then he has to do it with other people,’ she said. ‘This is about forming partnerships and alliances, building relationships and following up and working with each other – and those within our organisations – going forward.’

There was no one magic bullet in terms of dealing with HIV/AIDS; the approach must be to work at different levels, with different sectors, because of the complexity of the issue. The solutions may be different for smaller and larger municipalities, and those in rural or mainly urban environments. But there are also commonalities and areas of good practice and true innovation that can be shared and implemented.

SALGA also recognised that one of the key challenges facing local government as a sector is around knowledge management. ‘There is a need to document what we do and to share that documentation, to record what we are doing and capture information in a standard way,’ she said, referring to the saying that ‘if it’s not written down, it didn’t happen’. This was particularly true for the local government sector, which in recent years has had a high turnover of senior managers and politicians, with a consequent loss of institutional memory and learning.

Leading the discussion, local government expert David Schmidt said there was a big industry around knowledge management and organisational learning,



but that it didn't have to be another burden for municipalities. 'It's all about how we create a new and different energy within the municipality. On the one hand the task of delivering services and caring for people who are ill remains the same task, but the way we understand and use information has changed – we are now a connected world.'

So how can knowledge and information be used to make the ever-expanding task of service delivery easier in an environment where resources – people, skills, time and money – are limited? 'A Chinese proverb says that if you have an egg and I have an egg, we can swap them and we each have an egg, but if you have an idea and I have an idea and we swap them, we each have two ideas,' said Schmidt. 'What we have to realise is that, whether we are in the municipal manager's office, or implementing a programme we are all knowledge workers.'

Learning is a social activity

But where do people get their knowledge? While documenting knowledge is important, usually it's not from the huge and detailed online knowledge banks, but from each other, because knowledge transfer and learning are social activities. He said that knowledge management was a practice not a structure, a tool not a function. 'It needs to be part of everyday stuff and if it is not producing energy, innovation and change, then the so-called knowledge management activities are not worth doing, when there is so much else to do.'

Going back to the White Paper on Local Government one of the four key characteristics of developmental local government was 'leading and learning'. While there was a tendency to think that leading was for those who knew, and learning was for those who didn't, actually the capacity to learn and the ability to lead were the opposite sides of the same coin.

'But if we ask what is the most important capacity a municipality has to have, it should be the capacity to improve, to know how to learn. If a municipality that seems to be performing poorly now has the capacity to learn and get better and better, then in a few years it will be doing well.'

This has particular resonance for municipalities and those tasked with mainstreaming HIV and AIDS programmes within them. The challenge for the local government sector is to explore how opportunities for learning and improving could be developed further within the various forums and structures focused on HIV/AIDS and within municipalities and communities generally.

Sharing lessons about leadership in Ugu District Municipality

Situated on the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal, the Ugu district comprises six local municipalities, from the well-developed coastal towns stretching inland to largely under-developed rural areas. HIV and AIDS is staggeringly high – as much as 40% of the population of 750 000.

For Ugu's HIV and AIDS Manager Mabuyi Mnguni, the challenge is to ensure that the enormity of the situation is always front and top of mind





within the leadership structures of the district municipality, despite a high incidence and related challenges in mitigating the impact of the pandemic. She shared some of the lessons learned over the past few years.

Prior to 1994, the role of local government was unclear, limited to public speeches. 'On World AIDS Day, for instance, provincial departments and NGOs would have events, without any collective intergovernmental coordination at a local level. There was no monitoring and evaluation of plans and programmes. Each sector was responding to its core mandates in a fragmented way, without ensuring sustainable support for community-based programmes. Without a central, designated support structure, NGOs tended to run programmes based on donor requirements rather than local priorities with very limited resource.'

In KwaZulu-Natal the provincial Cabinet resolved that all MECs, sectors and political leaders should mainstream HIV and AIDS in their work. Recognising the need to consolidate coordination of the multi-sectoral response, the district municipality fostered a partnership with the local municipalities, civil society and provincial government departments.

This was followed up by a 2005 summit on HIV and AIDS resulting in the formation of an interim District AIDS Council (DAC). The partnership also set a framework for priority focus areas and the development of terms of reference for the Council to coordinate, facilitate an enabling environment, provide support and lobby for the district multi-sectoral response.

This commitment has since been underscored by a memorandum of agreement signed with Department of Social Welfare for the United National Population Fund, a memorandum of partnership with Red Cross Society and a community-based works programme in five wards in Umzumbe Municipality. The Ugu District AIDS Council (UDAC) was officially launched in 2006.

A subsequent workshop in 2007 emphasised the importance of political commitment and visible leadership in implementing the HIV and AIDS strategy.

Within the Ugu area, UDAC is the highest multi-sectoral body mandated to drive a district response to HIV and AIDS and related matters. This structure is accountable to the Council, and also to the Provincial AIDS Council (PAC) chaired by the Premier. These structures have been formed along the lines of the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) and is aligned with the national Framework for and Integrated Local Government Response to HIV and AIDS.

Five local municipalities have now formed their Local AIDS Councils, established in line with the South African AIDS Council (SANAC).

Within the municipality itself, there is an operational mainstreaming plan. HIV and AIDS is a permanent item in the IDP and it is the responsibility



of each department to ensure that the issue of HIV and AIDS is mainstreamed in the day-to-day business of the department for example, in the indigent policy.

According to Mnguni, the main lessons include the role of a visible political and top management support, and placing the programme in the highest administrative office, reporting directly to the municipal manager with a very clear mandate. It is also critical to include HIV and AIDS in performance management contracts.

Hlabisa takes a local approach

In the far north of KwaZulu-Natal, the Umkhanyakude District includes five local municipalities stretching from the Mozambique to the Swaziland borders to the St Lucia coastal area. Hlabisa is one of these municipalities, grappling with an HIV/AIDS prevalence rate of around 40%.

The mainly rural municipality is first in the province to cascade the AIDS council structures down to the level of wards, with the inclusion of community-based organisations and an aim of understanding and responding to the impact down to household level.

‘There is co-ordination at all levels, from the provincial down to districts and local AIDS councils,’ reports Elliot Gamede, Director: Corporate Services and special programmes. ‘We are also working effectively with the private sector, with the social responsibility programmes of companies, like the MTN Foundation, organisations like Cotlands and the Africa Centre, to help with our interventions.’

Through the framework of the various AIDS councils, political leadership is involved, right up to the level of the premier, who chairs the quarterly meetings of the Provincial AIDS Council. Each of the 11 districts in KwaZulu-Natal also has an MEC as an HIV/AIDS champion.

The ward AIDS councils are chaired by the ward councillors ‘so that they can get to know and touch the lives of every household where there is someone sick or affected’. He says some councillors have done very little to address the issue within their wards, perhaps because they feel discouraged, so there have been workshops at ward level to raise awareness of the extent of the problem and to encourage councillors to take ownership. Household profiling also helps to provide better information about the needs of vulnerable families and enable effective interventions, such as the establishment of food gardens, skills development and facilitating access to social grants.

By establishing structures at ward level, it is hoped that the support and services provided by community-based carers, organisations that are the ‘foot soldiers of development’, the municipality, national and provincial sector departments, and the private sector can be coordinated for maximum effect.

As part of a national programme, the emphasis will also be on encouraging as many people as possible to be tested and know their status.

Buffalo City learning from others

Absenteeism affects institutions large and small, and municipalities are no exception. In Buffalo City, HIV/AIDS as well as alcohol and other substance abuse amongst municipal staff negatively impacts on service delivery. So when the opportunity arose to twin with both neighbouring metro Nelson Mandela Bay and two cities in the Netherlands, Leiden and Zaanstad to learn from their experiences of employee wellness programmes, the team at Buffalo City were keen to participate.

‘The impacts of absenteeism include long and disruptive absences from work, high staff turnover, increased pressure on remaining staff, high costs to the municipality and ultimately compromised service delivery,’ says Shaun Petzer, manager of special programmes at Buffalo City. ‘The ideal is to have a healthy institution and a healthy workforce.’

The shared learning experience seems to have been a long one, with workshops hosted for participants in the twinning arrangements both locally and abroad. One of the challenges has been to set management standards and norms for absenteeism, and the need for improved human resource IT systems. There has also been an extensive turnover in both the political and administrative leadership of the municipality, which has affected the speed with which the pilot project has been taken forward.

Steps for an effective municipal response to HIV/AIDS

- Appoint a senior manager with sole responsibility for HIV/AIDS, ideally reporting directly to the municipal manager.
- Locate the programme within the office of the mayor or municipal manager, so that the manager can provide input at senior management level to lobby for the issue to be addressed by all departments.
- Include HIV/AIDS in the performance contracts of the municipal manager and other senior managers.
- Provide ongoing, visible support for HIV/AIDS programmes at political and senior administrative level.
- Get the right person for the job, with the strength, confidence and commitment to drive the programme with sector departments.
- Ensure AIDS councils at district and local levels are functional and effective.
- Hold mayors accountable for reporting on HIV/AIDS programmes at district and provincial AIDS councils.



- Identify dedicated HIV/AIDS champions in each department and hold them accountable.
- Ensure that HIV/AIDS is mainstreamed within the IDP as a permanent theme, that it is monitored and that there is funding allocated for programmes in the budget.

Tips for sharing knowledge

Research shows that people learn best from their peers. There are many organised ways that municipal staff can stay in touch with each other. Some of these include:

- Joining a learning network such as Halogen.
- Getting together with other people working in the HIV/AIDS field regularly, even if it's a venting session where you can share your frustrations and seek moral support.
- Playing a role as a coach or mentor to others less experienced in dealing with the impact of HIV/AIDS or seeking out someone to play this role in your own work.
- Joining an online community of practice, even informally, through social networking sites, like Facebook.
- Organising a peer exchange with another municipality to experience their problems and approaches first hand, or approaching a more capacitated municipality to second an experienced person to your municipality for a period.
- Exploring a twinning arrangement, so that political representatives also get the opportunity to network with and learn from another municipality's approaches to HIV/AIDS.
- Keeping an eye open for training or workshop opportunities that others in your network have found to be useful, relevant and practical.





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About the HIV/AIDS and Local Government Learning Network (Halogen)

Halogen brings together researchers, organizations and municipal practitioners to share knowledge, skills and learning on HIV/AIDS and local government in South Africa.

The network aims to:

- Share information and learning about HIV/AIDS and local government.
- Generate partnerships between civil society organisations, and between civil society and government at various levels, to strengthen local governance processes and responses to HIV/AIDS.
- Document and disseminate good practice, as identified during learning events, to various stakeholders, including communities and municipalities.

Membership of Halogen is open to individuals and organisations working on HIV/AIDS and the role of local government in responding to the epidemic. For more information, or to join Halogen, see www.halogen.org or contact 021 683 7903.

Halogen held its first learning event for 2010 in Pretoria on 26 May 2010. The gathering looked at how municipalities can share knowledge to achieve a better response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in their areas.

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