

This paper summarises a review undertaken by the International HIV/AIDS Allianceⁱ (the Alliance) in August and September 2002, assessing the participation of HIV non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in 6 country-level processes of the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria. These processes include the Country Coordinated Mechanism (CCM), the Country Coordinated Proposal (CCP) and all other Global Fund related activities and consultations.

The review was undertaken on the basis of anonymity, so all quotes and experiences are not attributed to specific individuals or countries. Recommendations are made based on these NGO experiences and from broader Alliance experience in providing technical and financial support to NGOs and community-based organisations in over 40 developing countries.

Recommendations:

1. Access to information is limiting effective NGO participation

- 1.1 Set up simple strategies for wider dissemination of information to all stakeholders from the Secretariat and national (CCM) levels.
- 1.2 Improve transparency of proposal process, particularly the full disclosure of successful proposals.

2. 'Participation' of NGOs needs to mean more than 'consultation'

- 2.1 Establish clear legal and process frameworks from the beginning to ensure an equal balance of power in the decision-making process.
- 2.2 Clear and transparent assessment criteria for NGO involvement need to be developed by the Secretariat and linked to conditions of review and funding.

3. Need for improvements in NGO networks and accountability

- 3.1 Technical and financial support is needed to facilitate and build up NGO networks to strengthen broader civil society involvement in the Global Fund.
- 3.2 The selection process for NGO representation on CCMs and other country and proposal mechanisms needs to be NGO-led.

4. NGOs as Principal Recipients to facilitate disbursement

- 4.1 Full public support by the Secretariat to be given to national NGO intermediary organisations to disburse funds to civil society.
- 4.2 NGO-based disbursement of funds needs to be backed by on-going technical support to these organisations

Summary

In the majority of the countries reviewed, participation in the Global Fund processes has resulted in a relative improvement in the relationship between NGOs and government, providing new opportunities to work together more effectively. In particular, shifts in governments' priorities have been observed. For example, in one country this shift is reflected in a movement away from just looking at building infrastructure and procuring drugs, to recognising the importance of supporting broader needs of people living with HIV/AIDS, which was facilitated by their inclusion in the development of the proposal.

Experiences varied greatly between countries. In some, NGOs were involved at all stages of the CCP development, as members of the CCM, in drafting elements of the proposals and taking part in technical working groups and broad NGO consultations. Many CCMs have drawn on the expertise of implementing organisations to identify priorities and review proposals.

*"There is a genuine atmosphere of partnership between NGOs and government, as (government) know that they can not implement and achieve results on their own."**

*All quotes in this review are from national NGO representatives.

This direct NGO involvement in the drafting of parts of the CCP in many countries has provided them with a real opportunity to influence the proposal. However, while the Secretariat guidelines on the CCM process states that all members of the CCM are to be 'treated as full partners', in most countries reviewed this was far from the case. In particular, NGO involvement post-approval of the funds has been extremely limited.

"NGO involvement was mainly at the programmatic / implementing level through the development of individual action plans. There was no involvement in the decision-making process in terms of the overall amount bid for, mechanisms for disbursement and other processes."

Faced with a new funding instrument and the speed at which it was created, many countries had just weeks to put together a proposal and the guidelines and information for proposal development were limited. This has led to both concerns over the quality and the innovative nature of the final CCPs. It has also raised a number of issues that need to be addressed in relation to NGO involvement. These range from lack of access to information, limited involvement in decision-making, weak NGO networks and the need to ensure effective funding disbursement to civil society.

1. Access to information is limiting effective NGO participation

Recommendations:

- 1.1 Set up simple strategies for wider dissemination of information to all stakeholders from the Secretariat and national (CCM) levels.**
- 1.2 Improve transparency of proposal process, particularly the full disclosure of successful proposals.**

The review and decision-making process at the CCM, Technical Review Panel and Secretariat levels need to include access to information for all stakeholders. Many NGOs involved in the CCM and proposal development processes are not receiving essential information from the Global Fund Secretariat such as guidelines, critical decisions adopted, and the proposal review feedback. Most information is being sent to CCM Chairs and it is not being passed on to other stakeholders beyond the 'high-level' members, putting the others at a clear disadvantage. This is a simple issue of ensuring wider dissemination of information (e.g. electronically) via the Global Fund Secretariat (even if for confidentiality reasons this is restricted to members of the CCM).

“There is a complete lack of information flow to NGOs from the Global Fund and the government, even to those of us who are members of the CCM. We are just waiting for the decisions to be made by the government”

This is related to the broader issue of a lack of effective communication mechanisms to NGOs and other stakeholders. Many NGOs are not even aware that they can participate in both the proposal development and implementation. In many countries NGOs have been demanding greater transparency of the consultation process, CCM selection, their mandates and accountabilities, and the selection process of local project proposals, but without much success.

This is compounded by the current decision to provide only the Executive Summary of successful proposals. The principle of additionality may be undermined by the inability of national organisations not involved in the CCM to undertake a full evaluation of the proposal. This could result in duplication of efforts and act as a barrier to broader civil society participation in the implementation of the proposals. This is particularly important where civil society is being asked to play the monitoring role. There is no clear rationale for why full disclosure of these successful proposals is not being made compulsory.

2. 'Participation' of NGOs needs to mean more than 'consultation'

Recommendations:

- 2.1 **Establish clear legal and process frameworks from the beginning to ensure an equal balance of power in the decision-making process.**
- 2.2 **Clear and transparent assessment criteria for NGO involvement need to be developed by the Secretariat and linked to conditions of review and funding.**

What has been clear from the first two rounds of proposal development is that involvement has meant little more than consultation in most cases. While at a superficial level the NGO involvement box can be ticked for the CCP review, there has been limited NGO involvement in the decision-making process. On the whole, national government representatives have taken most of the important decisions. Commitments to working with NGOs seems to have been motivated primarily by the desire to ensure that the proposal receives the funding rather than a genuine willingness for their participation.

"The proposal development process involved two level discussions. One group comprised senior government officials and the other NGOs. It would have been more appropriate to have a joint session to float the proposal before submission to CCM. As it is, NGOs who participated in the development of the proposal did not see the final document."

Involving civil society actors is not an easy task for many governments and any process of this kind will inevitably exclude one group or another in the decision-making process. The challenge is to push for an honest and real willingness by governments to respond to the voices of the most affected and marginalised and those of NGOs. What needs to be supported is the underlying principle of the CCM as a 'national consensus group' – where NGOs are not just used for consultation and as funding recipients but are decision-makers as well. Experience in the first rounds suggests governments need additional incentives for this to happen and for the Global Fund processes to deliver on the core objectives of supporting 'innovative' and 'true partnerships'.

While fully supporting the principle of a country-led process, the Secretariat must take responsibility for ensuring meaningful involvement of NGOs. This could involve a requirement that CCMs create binding governance structures and legal frameworks that ensure all members have equal status in the decision-making process.

Related to the need for these guarantees is the lack of clarity over the process of assessing NGO involvement, how it is measured, who will make the assessment and what weight is put on this element in the proposal review and funding criteria. An 'independent' institution needs to be identified and given the responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the participation process, with clear and transparent assessment criteria. This assessment needs to be backed by a level of conditionality associated with the Technical Review Panel proposal decisions and subsequent funding disbursements. It is uncertain whether private sector auditing firms, proposed by the Global Fund to perform the Local Fund Agency role, will have the necessary skills and experience to perform this effectively.

3. Need for improvements in NGO networks and accountability

Recommendations:

- 3.1 Technical and financial support is needed to facilitate and build up NGO networks to strengthen broader civil society involvement in the Global Fund.**
- 3.2 The selection process for NGO representation on CCMs and other country and proposal mechanisms needs to be NGO-led.**

In the countries reviewed, most NGOs were 'selected' or invited onto the CCM by the government, largely as a result of their existing relationship and the identified expertise of the NGO representative. In countries where there was broader NGO involvement in the proposal development and consultations, participation was largely a self-selecting process. As a result of these approaches to 'selection' there is an over-representation of NGOs based in the capital cities and under-representation of non-traditional NGOs, many of whom are working with the more marginalised and vulnerable groups.

As a result there have been concerns raised in some countries that NGO members of CCMs are not providing a broad enough representation of NGO perspectives. Experiences in the first rounds of the Global Fund have shown that competing NGO interests and a lack of a cohesive 'voice' from civil society limited effective input into the proposals. National NGOs directly involved in the Global Fund processes need to ensure that their legitimacy is maintained by strengthening their links with the wider civil society, in particular the most vulnerable and marginalised.

"It is important for NGOs to increase their understanding of what other (NGOs) are doing and create an environment of consultation and cooperation."

The status of NGO networks is clearly variable from country to country. However, in many the capacity to coordinate and strengthen networks is limited by both the competition amongst NGOs and the lack of resources and skills. Therefore both technical and financial support needs to be given to NGOs to build networking capacity and where necessary use independent facilitators, such as UNAIDS, to provide a neutral ground to begin consultation and collaboration.

Moreover, to ensure proper representation and accountability, individual NGO membership of the CCM should be selected by civil society organisations themselves. For this to happen at a country level, linked to recommendation 2.2, the Global Fund needs to either make this a condition of funding or clearly state that it will be part of the proposal assessment criteria.

4. NGOs as Principal Recipients to facilitate disbursement

Recommendations:

- 4.1 Full public support by the Secretariat to be given to national intermediary organisations to disburse funds to civil society.**
- 4.2 NGO-based fund disbursement needs to be backed by on-going technical support to these organisations.**

In a number of countries National AIDS Committees have acknowledged that they lack the capacity to handle the funds, particularly in disbursements to NGOs and civil society. Experiences of governments providing grants to NGOs for HIV/AIDS work have revealed clear technical and managerial capacity issues. These include the ability to assess proposals and NGO capabilities, to manage large numbers of small disbursements, and to monitor and evaluate their implementation.

For the Global Fund to realise its aim of delivering rapid disbursement of funds to all players it needs to continue to publicly support the option of the Principal Recipients being non-governmental agencies. In particular to support the channelling of funds committed to civil society through intermediary NGOs with a proven capacity. In selecting NGOs to either play a Principal Recipient or a sub-disbursement role, consideration needs to be made of existing and long-term organisational capacity. The Alliance's experience over the last 9 years has shown that there are very few NGOs that can immediately and confidently play this type of role.

Implementing NGOs often lack the financial and organisational rigour required for a funding disbursement agency, but have the essential knowledge, technical skills and attitude that purely technical/financial support organisations can lack. The criteria for selecting NGOs will have to acknowledge both aspects and ensure the provision of ongoing organisational support. Baseline assessments of NGO capacity and the development of strategies to measure and build capacity over time are required for NGOs to play a sustainable and effective funding support role (see toolkit at www.aidsalliance/ngosupport).

ⁱ The International HIV/AIDS Alliance (the Alliance) is an international non-governmental organisation that supports communities in developing countries to make a significant contribution to HIV prevention, AIDS care and support to children affected by the epidemic. Since its establishment in 1993, the Alliance has provided financial and technical support to NGOs and CBOs from more than 40 countries. In addition, the Alliance promotes good practice in community responses to AIDS more broadly through evaluation, operations research, the development of training materials and tools, as well as policy and advocacy activities.

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