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Effective CCMs and the Meaningful Involvement of Civil Society and Key Affected Populations

Lessons Learned in ICASO's extensive work supporting CCMs

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Introduction

Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs) are the most important country-level decision-making bodies with regard to Global Fund grants. With the launch of the New Funding Model and other structural changes in the Global Fund Secretariat, CCMs are further empowered as supervisors of Global Fund-supported programs and will continue to be expected to be inclusive of diverse constituencies within their respective countries. However, despite widespread acknowledgement that civil society[1] involvement is a prerequisite for optimally functioning CCMs, civil society is still too often constrained in its ability to influence decision-making within them. As the Global Fund (appropriately) re-imagines how to support the participation of civil society and key affected populations in CCMs, it is important to take stock of the many lessons learned to-date. ICASO has worked extensively with civil society and key affected population representatives on CCMs. This overview of lessons learned and subsequent recommendations has been prepared to offer guidance and insight to the current review of CCM policies and support programs.

Overview of ICASO's work with CCMs

ICASO's CCM Strengthening Advocacy Project was aimed at strengthening the capacity of civil society, in general and key affected populations, in particular, to be meaningfully engaged in and support more effective CCMs. From this perspective, ICASO's work included strengthening the capacity of civil society actors to hold CCMs accountable for greater access to HIV, TB and malaria treatment, care and prevention and to be more responsive to the needs of key affected populations. Implemented over two phases, CCM II ran in Cameroon, Indonesia, Egypt and Tanzania, while CCM III was conducted in Egypt and Cameroon. Our work with CCMs, as a component of the CSAT[2] (Civil Society Action Team) initiative, was anchored in supporting civil society actors and CCMs through three approaches: guidance

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[1] For this document, ICASO uses the term 'civil society' (instead of community sector) to conform to the language used by the Global Fund. In this case, the definition of 'civil society' includes representatives of community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations focussing on or led-by sex workers, people who use drugs, transgender, men who have sex with men, people living with or affected by HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, youth and women.

[2] The Civil Society Action Team (CSAT) was a civil society-led global initiative (2008-2012) that coordinated, brokered and advocated for technical support to civil society organizations implementing or seeking grants from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. - See more at: http://www.icaso.org/?file=16900

to country-level civil society organizations on how to organize and advocate as a sector within the HIV response (for instance, through the Coordinating with Communities guide[3]); short-term training and technical support in response to requests for capacity building or crises within CCMs; and structured, ongoing financial and technical support designed to strengthen civil society advocacy and communications related to the Global Fund at country level.

Contextualizing civil society CCM engagement

Although in many countries CCMs provide an entry point for civil society organizations to engage with policy and decision makers, the ability of the sector to have an influence is to some extent determined by the structures that exist outside of the CCM. In addition, the tendency of CCMs to focus on relatively abstract concepts such as grant performance indicators, spending rates, and CCM and Principal Recipients'[4] adherence to Global Fund conditions, often leaves little space for representatives of affected communities to assess and raise practical problems faced in the delivery of programs – despite the fact that these are the issues that civil society representatives are uniquely qualified to comment on. Civil society sector organizations often avoid speaking out about problems as they feel it may jeopardize their relationships with Principal Recipients and other CCM members. To make matters worse, when civil society representatives do not provide input, they are seen as naïve or lacking relevance and this casts a negative perception of their role, thereby reducing the meaningfulness of their involvement.

Key Lessons Learned

- **Supporting stronger CCMs requires unique and tailored approaches.** Each country and therefore each CCM works with a different set of circumstances. Government policies, cultural norms, civil society infrastructure, key affected population marginalization and numerous other variables must be taken into account when developing and implementing CCM support programs.
- **Regional and global exchange among civil society actors is important.** Communication and support between civil society and key affected populations in different countries is essential to identifying common challenges, opportunities, and successes. This type of exchange allows civil society actors to process their experiences with independent, yet friendly, organizations working within similar structures, and facilitates the communication and adaptation of CCM-related troubleshooting strategies. Such dialogue can also play a role in devising and advancing regional and global civil society and key affected population advocacy strategies. Including technical support providers in these exchanges is also important, as they do not all have a presence at the country level, in every country.
- **Dissemination of information is vital**. Pro-active and tailored channels of information dissemination between the Global Fund Secretariat and civil society need to be prioritized and maintained. It is not sufficient to rely on CCMs (even civil society and key affected populations members) to communicate all relevant information to communities. As has been the case

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[3] Available in multiple languages in the following locations: http://www.icaso.org/files/coordinating-with-communities-book-a; http://www.icaso.org/files/coordinating -with-communities-book-b; http://www.icaso.org/files/coordinating-with-communities-action-cards; http://www.icaso.org/files/coordinating-with-communities-workshop-facilitation-notes

[4] Principal Recipients are the organizations or institutions which receive the actual funds and deliver preprogramming or sub-contract programming accordingly. Principal Recipients are selected and supervised by the CCM, and directly sign grant agreements with the Global Fund Secretariat.

previously, independent organizations can serve as a liaison between the Global Fund and civil society. By leveraging the capacities and roles of existing networks and organizations, the Global Fund can share information with them in a formalized manner, which can then be disseminated to communities in Global Fund recipient countries. This allows for the free flow of information independent of CCMs and also supports global and regional communication among civil society and key affected populations.

- **All national partners need capacity building—of different types**. All CCM members need capacity building around Global Fund processes, project administration and management, and good communication and coalition building abilities. In some cases, civil society and key affected population members are in particular need of direct technical support in these areas. Other CCM members frequently need capacity building on the appropriate and meaningful involvement of civil society and key affected population members and their constituencies.

- **Civil society needs support in identifying a common agenda.** Distinct civil society groups and groups representing different key affected populations generally have nuanced agendas and in many cases have historically competitive relationships with regard to funding and policy. To ensure a strong, meaningful, and representative voice for civil society and key affected populations, it is important to support processes which allow for some common priority-identification and agenda-setting. This not only increases civil society and key affected populations' buy-in to the CCM and Global Fund programs, but also promotes an environment of cooperation at the country level.

- **Transparency, clarity, and guidance.** Technical support is needed for transparent selection of civil society CCM members. Additionally, policies providing greater clarity of roles, improved rotation and alternate member protocol are helpful. Support for CCM charter development, along with training and orientation for CCM members has a transformative effect on CCMs, improving functioning overall.

- **Non CCM-member liaisons**. Strong, visible civil society focal points, which are not members of the CCM themselves, but who can play the role of ensuring communication and consultation with the broader sector, are useful to ensuring engagement of civil society and key affected population constituencies. These liaisons may facilitate more regular information dissemination through newsletters, websites and blogs.

- **Direct support for civil society from the Global Fund Secretariat**. This support has been primarily provided through the now disbanded civil society team, and it is unclear how such support will be provided under the new Secretariat configuration. While CCMs have been promoted as the primary point of contact for the civil society within the New Funding Model, a protocol for civil society and key affected populations representatives to reach the Secretariat directly to express concerns and file grievances is critical.

- **Support for pre-Country Dialogue exchange between civil society actors and CCM members.** Effective preparation for Country Dialogues and CCM meetings should include dialogue between civil society and key affected population actors (and CCM members) and other CCM members outside of CCM meetings, so as to build momentum and support for the civil society agenda prior to concept note development and other decision-making meetings.

Key Recommendations for the Global Fund Secretariat

Ensuring meaningful involvement of the civil society

1. **Establish strong accountability mechanisms for the meaningful involvement of civil society and key affected populations in CCMs.** CCM compliance with civil society engagement needs to be reviewed on a regular basis. As certain CCMs establish a positive track record, their compliance reviews may decrease in frequency. However, if a given CCM performs poorly on civil society involvement, corrective action should be taken by the Fund Portfolio Manager. It will be important to determine what corrective action is appropriate, and to describe those actions clearly in the grant agreement.

2. **Check in directly with civil society CCM representatives.** The Secretariat will need to go beyond setting of criteria and guidelines. Fund Portfolio Managers, or other Secretariat staff, should communicate directly with civil society CCM members at least annually to check in about engagement and verify CCM reporting.

3. **Support national-level civil society agenda-setting processes.** Prior to Country Dialogues, CCM meetings, and concept note development, diverse civil society and key affected population representatives should be brought together to identify and agree upon a common agenda to pursue with the CCM, or more broadly in their national AIDS, TB, and malaria responses. The Global Fund should provide modest funding to support meetings and other activities in this process. Where needed, direct facilitation by Global Fund or technical support providers should be made available. This will strengthen civil society and key affected populations' advocacy within the CCM and enhance program viability upon implementation.

4. **Sponsor regional and global civil society exchanges**. Experience and skills-sharing opportunities among civil society CCM-members from different countries will allow for successful engagement and advocacy strategies to be promoted and adapted organically, through direct exchanges. Annual regional meetings along with bi-annual global meetings of civil society and key affected population CCM-members—perhaps organized around country bands—would be one potential approach. In between meetings, regular communications could be managed by an independent facilitator. The Global Fund Secretariat should provide modest funding for these activities; they may be internally coordinated through the Secretariat, or by appointed regional organizers.

5. **Support civil society and key affected population CCM members in effectively representing and communicating with their constituencies**. CCM membership can be daunting and unfamiliar for civil society groups. The Global Fund should proactively support them in not only being effective CCM members, but effectively representing their constituencies. Activities should include: technical support for the conduct of transparent selection processes for CCM representatives; the appointment of a non-member CCM civil society liaison or other form of civil society focal point for CCM activities; and capacity building for civil society and key affected population CCM-member groups in the areas of project management and administration, communications, and coalition building.

Enhancing CCM functioning and efficacy

6. **Provide training and capacity building to civil society CCM members on working with the civil society**. Government and other non-civil society CCM members often need training in appropriate and supportive techniques for working with civil society and key affected populations. Trainings and capacity building activities should be conducted by the Global Fund or other multi-lateral stakeholders, but curricula should be developed in consultation with civil society and key affected population representatives. Added challenges should be anticipated and adjusted for in countries with hostile political and/or legal environments.

7. **Encourage exchanges between civil society CCM members and other CCM members prior to Country Dialogues.** The encouragement and facilitation of dialogue among CCM members will enhance the ability of civil society and key affected population members to communicate their positions and needs and to generate support ahead of decisions. Greater inclusion of civil society priorities should be an outcome of this process.

8. **Strengthen CCM guidance and governance.** The Global Fund should provide greater clarity to CCMs on roles and expectations, particularly where the meaningful involvement of civil society and key affected populations is concerned. Additionally, CCM charters should be required and the Global Fund should provide technical support for their development.

At this critical stage of the epidemic, with the end of AIDS in sight, the pressure is on to get it right. We know better, so we have to do better. This includes ensuring that:

- Every proposal approved by the Global Fund is evidence-based and grounded in the respect for human rights as per the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) and the Gender Equality Strategies.
- The Global Fund remains global and that a sufficient pool of funding is available for key affected populations, particularly in middle income countries.
- Mechanisms are created that allow key affected populations to access resources directly from the Global Fund, particularly in cases where criminalization or stigma prevents them from fully participating in CCMs.
- There is a commitment to investing in the roll-out and scale up of interventions that build and strengthen community systems.
- Risk assessment and risk management issues are integrated in any capacity building/strengthening for CCM members and other stakeholders.

The Global Fund has taken some important steps towards doing better with the launch of the New Funding Model. As we move towards full implementation, that progress must be protected and further advanced. Through multi-sector partnership, commitment to human rights, and an evidence-driven response, a future without AIDS will become possible.