



Chapter 24

Social Assessment

1. Why is social assessment important?

HIV/AIDS is a social disease that can only be fought with deep-rooted changes in values, attitudes and behavior.

Understanding the fundamental social and behavioral causes and consequences of HIV/AIDS and providing a mechanism for stakeholder consultation are the primary objectives of social assessment under the MAP. Each country's social system and values are distinct. Mapping these systems and their underlying values is essential to understand the characteristics of the epidemic and formulate sustainable strategies to combat it. Using social assessment to stimulate stakeholder discussion about the impact of HIV/AIDS and how to combat the epidemic is another outcome of the social assessment process.

Social assessment is a major tool for intervention development, guiding the design of HIV/AIDS prevention, care, treatment, support and mitigation interventions.

2. What is needed to uncover the social dimensions of HIV/AIDS?

Social assessment (SA) is a:

- Tool to uncover the social causes and impacts associated with investment projects, including those related to HIV/AIDS;
- Process through which project implementation agencies understand how a country's or a community's social, cultural, political and institutional context influences social outcomes;
- Means to enhance equity in the distribution of benefits to affected communities and to strengthen social inclusion; and
- Mechanism through which (a) social cohesion can be rebuilt in HIV/AIDS-affected communities, (b) accountability and transparency can be promoted in the delivery of MAP-funded services, and (c) the poor and affected groups can be empowered to join the fight against the epidemic.

In MAP programs, social assessment is particularly valuable in

- Providing a framework for dialogue with affected communities on development priorities and in building coalitions for change;
- Identifying opportunities, constraints, impacts and risks associated with the MAP program's implementation, and mechanisms to mobilize stakeholders to fight the epidemic;
- Complementing economic and institutional analysis to deepen the understanding of the adverse impacts on the poor and defining poverty reduction measures.

A good social assessment will describe the social “mosaic, analyze formal and informal institutions, identify key interest groups and define strategies for empowering individuals and groups to join the war against HIV/AIDS. It will also incorporate continuous stock-taking to ensure the social outcomes and impacts are achieved. (See Chapter 23 M&E).

2 There are four “pillars” of social assessment

The First Pillar—Analysis of Social Diversity and Gender. Social environments are by their very nature complex and diverse, and understanding them requires a multi-disciplinary approach and a mix of qualitative and quantitative tools. Baseline data are essential, given the experimental nature of the MAP program. SA aims to capture the different needs, expectations and potential contributions of all stakeholders: men and women, ethnic, religious and cultural groups and others. The real value-added of SA derives from its concrete and situation specific focus. The more specific the understanding of the social factors of the epidemic in each county, region and community, the higher the chances of success in identifying appropriate prevention, mitigation and care programs.

Gender issues are at the heart of the epidemic and consequently at the center of social analysis. Women and girls are most vulnerable. Only in Africa is the incidence of HIV/AIDS higher among women than among men. Culturally defined concepts of masculinity, dominance, sexual rights and responsibilities, marital and pre-marital relationships and care need to be understood at the outset and continuously in the design and refinement of strategies. Empowering women through the legal framework on women’s rights and adjusting roles and power relationships within the family and society are part of the strategy to equalize women’s access to information and services, and mobilizing men and boys to take greater responsibility for their actions. See sub-manual on “Integration of Gender Issues in selected HIV/AIDS Projects in the Africa Region”

Orphans are among the most important groups for attention under the MAP. The design and implementation of projects depends on the understanding of the social arrangements that have had to develop to accommodate them. (See Chapter 23—Mitigation).

Generally, understanding social diversity in detail will help in the design of appropriate information, education and communications strategies, and in building strategies for empowering women and young people to take responsibility for their own protection.

The Second Pillar—Stakeholder Analysis and Participation. Stakeholders are groups of people connected by formal or informal ties who are affected by MAP programs. Understanding their perspectives and the likely impact of the project on them is essential for good project design. Good analysis requires time, patience, resources and a great deal of local knowledge and expertise, and is often best handled community by community.

Participation is critical to successful development and implementation of projects (See Chapter 2 - Lessons of Experience), but it is often the most difficult challenge of the SA process. Stakeholders, especially the vulnerable and excluded groups, need to be involved in project design and execution. A participation action plan is needed (but often omitted from SA), based on the level of awareness among different groups and their attitudes toward alternative methods of prevention, care and treatment and mitigation.

Community driven development programs and social funds are an effective mechanism for stimulating participation, but may not be feasible for HIV/AIDS interventions where awareness of the problem may be limited. (See Chapter 11- Communities).

The Third Pillar - Social Institutions, Rules and Behaviors. In addition to understanding the complex social diversity and stakeholder attitudes and relationships, SA undertakes an evaluation of the formal and informal institutions and networks that will be involved in project implementation, including their capacity, structure, rules, and incentives.

The institutional analysis focuses on the feasibility of proposed targeting measures, the sustainability of the proposed participation arrangements and the interaction between beneficiaries and implementing institutions. It identifies “social capital” that can be used to build development activities and to mobilize local stakeholders.

The poor and vulnerable groups for whom the HIV/AIDS program is intended often face difficulty in accessing project resources. There are many reasons, formal and informal—attitudes, customs, laws, practices, and information. It is important for the social analysis to assess the basis for exclusion and evaluate the potential success of new interventions and institutional arrangements, including a review of legislation, business practices and community norms, and to suggest ways to create a more favorable environment and to mobilize community support for the poor and other affected populations.

The Fourth Pillar - Social Impact Monitoring (SIM). The monitoring of social impacts of HIV/AIDS projects is essential for assessing the effectiveness of project initiatives and drawing lessons of experience. The indicators to be tracked should include patterns of inclusion/exclusion, human rights, empowerment and social risk mitigation. The objective is to ensure that all persons have access to HIV/AIDS information, prevention, care and social support. Empowerment means that all stakeholders become “AIDS-competent” and act to protect themselves and care for the afflicted.

Box 24.1: Some key indicators for social impact monitoring would include:

- Awareness and accurate knowledge by social group of HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention methods and evolution of the public perception about people living with AIDS
- Participation rate by social group in voluntary testing and counseling activities (VCT) and reports of desirable behavior change
- Non-discriminatory access of all groups to VCT, treatment for STDs and home care as well as non-discriminatory behavior by service providers
- Percent of community members participating in care for HIV/AIDS victims and their families
- Increased NGO/CBO skills in designing and managing effective interventions, including financial management aspects
- Restoration of economic welfare for persons and families living with AIDS
- Continued enrollment of orphans in school
- Reduction in AIDS-related violence (by or towards AIDS victims)

3. Lessons learned and recommendations

- **Social Assessment is perhaps the weakest link in the design of MAP Projects.** An adequate understanding of the fundamental characteristics of stakeholders and client groups, including their values, beliefs, behaviors, etc. is essential for the design and implementation of both national strategies and specific projects. This is often difficult at the project design stage given the time and resources required and the great diversity of environments involved. The need for a good SA is particularly acute at the community level. Agencies executing community programs, both public and private organizations, should be required to present a social assessment to qualify for support.

- **“Communities of interest” are not well studied.** Baseline information is often inadequate about such groups as migrant workers, refugees, prisoners, sex workers, the military, homosexuals and drug users who all have different social characteristics. This constrains program effectiveness and the effort to scale up.
- **Informal social organizations are key to HIV/AIDS programs.** Social assessments often do not have an adequate appreciation of informal social organizations and networks that can combat HIV/AIDS infection, such as traditional faith healers.
- **Continuous social assessment, or social impact monitoring, is vital to understanding program performance.** As indicated in Chapter 16-M&E- tracking implementation performance and impact is especially important in MAP projects, that are by their nature experimental. Social impact monitoring is a particularly important and often neglected aspect of M&E, given the basis for the epidemic and the means to combat it both lie in social behaviors. Strategies and activities need to be adjusted and re-adjusted regularly to ensure they reach the right people in an effective manner. Social indicators need to be a part of the regular M&E monitoring process.
- **Social assessment capacity building is essential.** The integration of social concerns in HIV/AIDS projects can only be achieved by building local capacity for SA, both in implementation agencies (public and private) and at the non-technical level for the NACs and NASSs.
- **Public agencies, especially sector ministries,** should do a social assessment of their own work force and their clients. Public sector ministries should assess the social factors within their own organizations and in their client audiences prior to undertaking MAP-financed activities as a means of establishing relevant programs with strong support and encouraging stakeholder participation.



See Annex 24 (CD-ROM) for further references