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HIV/AIDS M&E - *Getting Results*

These reports describe activities, challenges and lessons learned during the Global AIDS Monitoring and Evaluation Team's (GAMET) work with countries and other partners.

Strengthening Partnerships in HIV Monitoring and Evaluation:

How joint missions build and strengthen partnerships to support the realization of the third "one" – national M&E systems

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Summary

There is growing interest in joint M&E missions from countries and development partners. They are proving to be one way to strengthen regional and national M&E partnerships, and provide more effective, efficient support to countries working to develop functioning national HIV and AIDS Monitoring and Evaluation systems. This note explains the background to joint missions, and the results they have achieved. It offers suggestion for preparing for a joint mission and follow-up activities.

'The grip of AIDS will only be broken by effective programmes at country level. The difficulty is that agencies and funders ...operate quasi-independently of one another. What never happens is an event or process to develop integrated country strategies that focus only on the country – not on the interests of the agency, funder, or constituency...'

Richard Horton, The Lancet, Vol. 368, August 26, 2006: pp 716-718

1. The importance of harmonization: the Three Ones principles and GTT recommendations

The "Three Ones" principles for managing HIV responses at country level¹ suggest that every country should have: one national HIV strategic plan, one national AIDS coordinating authority and one national HIV M&E system. These principles were set up to guard against the proliferation of strategies, committees and monitoring systems, which adds confusion, duplicates

effort, increases transaction costs for countries, and detracts from impact.



Photo: courtesy of UNAIDS

During the "Making the money work"² meeting held on March 9th 2005, development partners, governments from low and middle income countries, civil society, UN agencies, and other multilateral and international institutions agreed to form a Global Task Team (GTT) to develop a set of recommendations aimed at improving institutional support of the AIDS response at international and country levels, with a particular focus on multilateral organizations. Weaknesses in implementing the HIV response were identified and the GTT was tasked with suggesting solutions to these challenges.

¹ A working group developed these guiding principles at the 13th ICASA conference in Nairobi in 2003. This led to a consultation on harmonization of AIDS support held in Washington D.C. on 25th of April 2004, where representatives of countries, donors and international organizations formally endorsed the "Three Ones" principles.

² 'Making the money work' is a call to harmonize and align the global response to put existing and future funds to optimal use while reinforcing the need for continued scale-up of the national AIDS responses (http://data.unaids.org/publications/irc-pub06/jc935-3onesinaction_en.pdf)

2. The importance of partnerships: status of operationalising the 3rd of the “Three Ones”

Why are partnerships important? Experience suggests that partnerships are important because:

- a) **Most HIV M&E systems are not fully functional:** A rapid assessment undertaken by the UNAIDS Regional Support Team (RST) for East and Southern Africa in 2006 indicated that most countries (65% - 13 countries out of 20)⁴ in the East and Southern Africa region have in place M&E plans that have yet to be implemented. The assessment made it clear that more support is required to operationalise the 3rd of the Three Ones. Creating partnerships can help ensure harmonization at country level (among country level actors and international development partners) and will maximize the benefits to countries.
- b) **National HIV M&E systems will benefit more from a combined and coordinated approach** than disjointed actions by individual agencies/organizations in pursuit of the same goal. Furthermore **partnerships ensure that all partners follow the same vision:** Building partnerships require that all interested parties subscribe to a common goal and agree to use a uniform approach or at least complimentary approaches to attain the goal. This means that all partners' plans should be in line with the national priorities as guided by the national M&E operational plan -- a “roadmap” to achieving the national set of M&E objectives.
- c) **Partnerships promote the use of similar concepts:** “Cross fertilization” of ideas encourages sharing/ transfer of knowledge and experience in developing innovative approaches to monitoring and evaluating programmatic responses. The ‘road map’ concept (see Getting Results series)⁵ is very useful. A road map is an agreed summary of all the activities needed to implement the national HIV M&E plan that also defines responsibilities of all actors and costs. After joint missions observed the benefits of a road map in one country, the concept was also used in other countries to ensure that there are no critical gaps in the national M&E plans; to define resource requirements, partner roles and responsibilities; to ensure optimum use of resources

⁴ This information is based on direct discussions between the UNAIDS RST-ESA and countries in the region.

⁵ See “Using National HIV Monitoring and Evaluation Road Maps to reach the “Third One” more quickly and efficiently”, GAMET and Country Partners, available on line at www.worldbank.org/aids (please go to “Getting Results”)

The GTT developed 25 ‘actionable’ recommendations in four thematic areas.³ The recommendations aimed at streamlining and simplifying the HIV response at international level, while at the same time harmonizing procedures and practices to improve effectiveness of country-led responses. GTT recommendations 4.1 and 4.2 relate to joint participatory reviews and M&E, and suggest that:

- Within existing participatory reviews of national AIDS programs, UNAIDS assist national coordination authorities to lead participatory reviews of the performance of multisectoral institutions, international partners and national stakeholders that build upon existing Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) standards and criteria for alignment and harmonization;
- Multilateral institutions and international partners assist national AIDS coordinating authorities in the strengthening of their M&E mechanisms and structures that facilitate oversight of and problem-solving for national AIDS programs.

Six specific GTT recommendations that focus on M&E are elaborated within these two broad recommendations:

1. development of a scorecard accountability tool and global review of partner alignment;
2. a joint monitoring and evaluation facility;
3. joint monitoring and evaluation country support teams;
4. placement of UNAIDS M&E advisers in national offices;
5. increased M&E role of civil society and academic institutions;
6. improved dissemination of M&E information.

These GTT recommendations for HIV M&E can only be implemented if there are M&E partnerships among development partners and with governments. This paper shows how joint M&E missions can serve as one avenue for strengthening regional and national M&E partnerships.

³ The full list of recommendations is available at: http://www.unaids.org/html/pub/una-docs/implementrecommend_24aug05_en_pdf.pdf

through efficient allocation; and to prevent duplication and unplanned information products.

- d) **Partnerships create a common platform for sharing information** on plans, results, and new tool and method developments in the field of M&E.

3. Establishing and maintaining partnerships

Partnerships take time and energy to maintain. It is crucial for partners to build trust and a strong bond and spirit of team work. Creating partnerships requires:

- Defining the potential partners in strengthening the system.
- Defining key priorities for each partner and assessing available financial and human capacities.
- Reaching consensus on roles and responsibilities, including leadership.
- Agreeing on a common platform to share information, including plans and progress reports.
- Developing a joint support plan that clearly defines strategic areas to be supported, individual responsibilities and resources requirements. Within the acknowledged realities of differing funding mechanisms and administrative cultures, the plan should also show the resources available and any remaining funding gaps. Each individual agency/organization will be responsible for providing leadership in the areas specified in the plan.
- Building information sharing platforms at the regional and national level, e.g. regional M&E partners' forum and national technical working groups (TWGs) are instrumental in joint planning and information sharing.

Organizing joint missions brings internal and external technical resources together in time and space. Such missions ensure a common voice and promote advocacy on priority issues because they enable all partners to speak with one voice. They also ensure joint periodic monitoring of progress on the joint plan. While the driving ethic of harmonized technical support is to strengthen in-county ownership and leadership, we have come to understand the value and recognize the need for periodic injection of coordinated external technical support and mentorship.

4. Results from joint M&E missions to five countries in East and Southern Africa

At the beginning of 2006, key partners working in East and Southern Africa, including the US Government, World Bank, UNAIDS, and the Global Fund, held a number of meetings where the idea of joint missions

was determined to be a useful step in supporting country efforts to establish one national HIV M&E system. So far, five countries have benefited from joint M&E missions: Lesotho, Namibia, Rwanda, Swaziland, and Tanzania. The missions were planned well in advance, lasted up to five days and afforded an opportunity for the relevant officials from NACs, line ministries, various stakeholders including implementers (mostly civil society) and development partners to provide adequate input and most importantly tap into the visiting technical expertise of the group. Benefits of these missions were:

- a) **Development partners met with key stakeholders and shared technical information.** During the five days the mission got firsthand knowledge about exactly what was going on, an opportunity to have a close look at the operations (if any) of the existing M&E system(s), meet with key players in the country to discuss successes and challenges, hold in-depth discussions with relevant staff within the NAC (or equivalent) – where necessary even with staff based at sub-national levels – on their roles and responsibilities, and participate in national M&E Technical Work Group (TWG) meetings. The host governments, through the NACs or equivalent, received a significant level of feedback and technical input to national programmatic processes (in this case M&E) in a timely fashion.
- b) **The joint mission could support the country-level partners.** The joint mission partners were able to assist the country-level M&E technical advisers to develop new strategies or find new solutions – particularly where the country-level partners were facing a difficult issue that they were unable to solve.
- c) **The joint missions served as an opportunity to introduce new country-level staff, to discuss at length the challenges at country level and possible adjustments to the M&E advisers' job description to respond effectively to these needs.** This also shortened the learning curve. For more established officers on the ground, the mission re-focused the existing scope of work (job description) to better respond to the needs of the host country. The UNAIDS M&E advisers' and other existing expatriate support is thus deliberately refined to help maximize and harmonize local and internationally committed resources for implementation of effective M&E systems.
- d) **It raised the credibility of development partners.** This approach raised the credibility of the partners, both internally and externally, among key stakeholders, and especially governments, through their NACs (or equivalents). The missions created an 'enabling environment' for on-going programmatic reviews of key documents such as the M&E roadmap (where a roadmap was not available the host country has relied on visiting expertise to

guide the process of its development). The implementation of a well developed roadmap has invariably incited tremendous interest in collaboration from partners (especially international partners) in-country.

- e) **It provided NACs with an opportunity to advocate for targeted support.** The NACs (or equivalents) have used this assistance to effectively advocate for targeted support to the national M&E agenda, hence establishing a basis for synergy. The roadmap in particular also validates the work of country level partners. It also brings to the fore partners who have historically worked in an isolated manner, as they are able to see how and where they can apply their comparative advantage.
- f) **It provided national stakeholders with an opportunity to participate more effectively in the national HIV M&E system.** One national entity in Swaziland determined that if they did not collaborate, their efforts ran the risk of being missed on the national M&E radar screen. In short, based on assessments of the information shared by the mission, potential stakeholders concluded - at their own discretion - that the benefits of being part of the national M&E agenda far out weighed the costs, and that not collaborating would be disadvantageous.
- g) **Joint mission partners were able to share experiences and lessons with members of the M&E TWG.** Although the entry point is the NAC (or equivalent), the second most important entity is the M&E technical working group (M&E TWG) – a grouping of government ministries, implementers, development partners, universities/research institutions etc, all with a role to play in implementing the national M&E agenda. Given its mandate to oversee the national M&E aspect of the HIV response, the M&E TWG draws directly from the missions' input to guide and help sustain their operations. The opportunity to share experiences, lessons and practical examples from other countries in the region in a timely manner has been a key achievement of the joint missions. In particular, challenges related to implementation of the national M&E system are easily identified, in a participatory manner, and discussed thoroughly for plausible solutions, drawing on other countries' experiences.

5. Important issues to consider in organizing joint missions

Joint partnerships, through their synergy, can add value through efficient and effective implementation of technical assistance and support to host country agencies. The following principles may be key to establishing effective partnerships:

- that the comparative advantages of the partners compliment and not compete with one another;
- the decision to partner with any given organization should be regarded as a dynamic and symbiotic process;
- a series of meetings addressing a variety of relevant topics with key stakeholders representing both development partners and different governments ministries may also be a vital prerequisite.

The preliminary meetings provide a forum for various partners to compare their strategic objectives and intermediate results. The meetings also offer an opportunity to thoroughly discuss the perceived and stated needs of the host country for technical assistance and to identify which organizations are capable of supporting those requests. These partnerships usually are most productive if the relationships initiated during preliminary meetings are nurtured and developed and are responsive to the changing needs of the host country.

Discussions that determine whether a joint M&E country mission makes sense can be initiated in the context of the UN AIDS Theme Group, NAC, or one or more development partners on the ground. Note that the decision to proceed on this course is at all times based on the guidance and request of the host country. Discussion with the national counterparts is usually an important and necessary step. If partners agree to a joint mission, the initiating partner may take the lead in organizing other partners' participation, thereby lessening the burden of scheduling and facilitation of meetings to both the host country agency and the mission partners. Prior to the joint mission, thorough review of relevant information pertaining to the host country's M&E agenda is paramount. The information should normally be provided several weeks before the visit, to ensure that all participating partners have ample time to read and digest materials.

An initial draft of joint mission objectives will form the basis of discussion and finalization of plans for the joint mission between the host country and development partners participating in the specific mission. Additionally, the draft of joint mission objectives may identify gaps in the implementation of the technical assistance and provide the opportunity to engage further partners. If the country has an M&E Plan or M&E Road Map, this document needs to be reviewed by multiple partners to be certain that the mission objectives correspond to the documented M&E technical assistance needs of the host country. The initiating partner will produce the first draft of the mission objectives; other mission participants add to the draft in turn. Once a draft is complete, it is sent to a selection of development partner and host country stakeholders for review. Finally, the mission objectives will be deemed final and act as a work plan for the mission.

Schedules for the mission should be based on availability of development partners and of host country agencies. Again, this is a dynamic and idiosyncratic process that requires flexibility. Once dates have been proposed, the necessary actions by host country agencies to ensure that appropriate meetings and activities are scheduled must commence. In this sense, joint missions may be viewed as a true partnership – each agent is responsible to complete a task in order for the mission to proceed as planned.

6. Follow-up Activities after a joint mission

To ensure sustainability and continuation of the activities engaged in by the joint mission, it will be necessary to provide all stakeholders with information about the implementation of the activity and its outputs. First, a **joint mission report** describes the activities completed by the mission and the short term activities following the mission. The writing of the joint mission report ought to follow the same process as drafting the joint mission objectives. Namely, the initiating partner produces the first draft of the report, with other mission participants adding to the draft in turn. Once a draft is complete, it is sent to a selection of development partners and host country agency stakeholders for review. Finally, the mission report is deemed final and considered an output of the entire joint mission. In addition to being an information product, the joint mission report may also be viewed as a management tool which guides follow-on activities to the mission, just as the mission objectives are used as a work plan during the mission.

As a further option, a **website** may be developed that lists a country's development partners, the technical assistance they offer, and the activities in which they engage in-country. Such a website could provide an opportunity for development partners and their project implementers to have a quick snapshot and to identify potential collaborations, thereby reducing the need for long, unproductive meetings in which partners describe themselves and their activities.

Also, it would be beneficial to share the joint mission report with the Regional M&E Partner's Forum, so that they are informed of latest developments and of the status in the region.

Technical documents that address the key recommendations of the GTT must also be appropriately warehoused and easily accessible to stakeholders. The aforementioned website could also act as an appropriate repository for these documents, which would be produced in and by the host country, by development partners providing technical assistance to the host country, as well as other development partners and academic institutions.

7. Going forward

The first few joint missions may be the beginning of a more formalized process in future. The joint missions that have been carried out so far have been the result of structured discussions between individuals providing technical support at country level, and not the result of a global and formalized decision to undertake joint missions. As indicated above, the missions are arranged once the host country requests a joint mission or in line with a partner's scheduled activities outlined in a work plan. In future, joint missions may become more formalized through, for example, a joint program of work at the regional level amongst all partners supporting countries in a region.

A strong indication of the value of joint missions is the steadily growing demand for them from other countries in the region. Information on the benefits of joint missions continues to filter through the UNAIDS M&E advisers based in various countries and other sources through "word of mouth". The UNAIDS RST for East and Southern Africa intends to include the sharing of information about the value of joint missions in their 2007 work plan to ensure that more countries can easily access the technical support they need. This note describing joint missions also may be useful guidance for similar partnerships focused on M&E at sub-national levels and donor funded programs. The list of suggestions is not exhaustive and should not be taken as a rigid prescription for effective partnerships in M&E technical support. Rather, it is intended to share experience and ideas, in response to growing interest in joint missions as one way for partners to find common ground and work together more effectively and efficiently to support national HIV M&E systems.

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