

**Technical Support Facility for West and Central Africa**

**Regional Training on Strategic and Operational Planning in HIV and AIDS**

**6-9 April 2010**

**Accra, Ghana**

## **Background**

UNAIDS Technical Support Facility for West and Central Africa in partnership with the World Bank Institute organised a four-day training of programme managers and consultants on strategic and operational planning from the 6-9 April 2010 in Accra, Ghana. The countries that participated in the training included Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, The Gambia and Nigeria.

The training was organised following requests from countries for capacity building in the application of Results Based Management (RBM) principles, methodology and processes in the development of strategic and operational plans in the region. Most of the participating countries are either preparing to develop third generation strategic plans (Sierra Leone and Ghana) or are developing operational plans for new or existing strategic plans. Capacity development in the application of RBM was meant to improve the planning process to ensure strategic plans are evidence based and results oriented.

The selection of participants (programme managers and consultants) was meant to bring together the experts working at country level from different perspectives to develop common understanding between the managers and the consultants expected to apply RBM.

## **Objectives of the workshop**

Overall objective of the training was to create a platform for consultants and programme managers to gain knowledge and share experiences in developing National HIV and AIDS Strategic and Operational Plans that are results-oriented, evidence-based and well prioritized. Specifically, the workshop aimed at developing the capacity of the participants to:

- Develop common understanding of strategic and operational planning
- Understand RBM principles, components and processes
- Identify the challenges and possible solutions in application of RBM in country level contexts
- Develop a strategic results framework
- Effectively manage the strategic and operational planning process
- Develop a country road map for strategic and operational planning

## **Key modules**

The workshop covered the following modules:

- HIV epidemic analysis
- HIV response analysis
- Results Based Management and development of a results framework
- Operational planning
- Coordination and management of operational plans
- Road map for development of strategic and operational plans
- Management of technical support

## Key issues and challenges in strategic and operational planning

### **Key issues and challenges**

The workshop focused on key issues and challenges in strategic and operational planning in the West African region which include:

#### 1. Lack of evidence to inform strategic planning

Successful application of RBM requires recent data on the epidemic and the response. Up to date data is critical in prioritising and setting baseline and targets for the strategic plan. It was acknowledged that most countries lack evidence that is required for effective prioritisation and targeting of the strategic and operational plans and therefore will face challenges in applying RBM.

#### 2. Weak M&E systems

The issue of weak M&E systems across most countries in the region is related to lack of evidence. The poor data collection and irregular reporting creates gaps in tracking process in implementation of the operational plans. Countries also have challenges in harmonising the M&E systems to ensure all partners report on common indicators and focus on common targets.

#### 3. Unavailability of qualified consultants

It was noted that countries have difficulties accessing consultants skilled in application of RBM and use of planning and analytical tools such as EPP/SPECTRUM, NASA, Resource Needs Model, Goals Model and Activity Based Costing. These tools are critical for successful application of RBM in strategic planning.

#### 4. Translating strategic plans into concrete results at operational level is a challenge

Some of the countries have difficulties developing operational plans with clear results, prioritised interventions and costed plans. This challenges stems from the manner in which strategic plans are developed. Some of the strategic plans have broad objectives that are difficult to break down into specific outputs and activities.

#### 5. Inadequate preparedness in the development of NSPs and Ops

The workshop highlighted the need for effective preparation for the planning process. Participants noted that the preparations for planning are often not adequate. The planning process starts without a clear audit of the adequacy of available information, the period provided to complete the strategic plan and operational plans is often not adequate and the stakeholders are not sensitised on the technical aspects of the planning process to enable them participate effectively.

#### 6. Poor skills in management of consultants

The management of consultants for strategic and operational planning in the region has generally been poor. Some of the challenges in managing consultants highlighted include:

- Terms of reference are poor drafted: the scope of work and deliverables are sometimes not clearly stated, the scope of work does not match the level of effort required leading to consultants being given few days to complete large scope of work; the deliverables are not well defined hence the quality of work of the consultant cannot be objectively reviewed and new tasks are often added as the work progresses.
- Late sourcing of consultants: some countries noted that they are unable to engage good consultants because they have a short time within which to identify and engage the consultant. Often the skilled consultants are not available at a short notice.
- Lack of technical knowledge among programme managers: This makes it difficult for the programme managers to oversee the work of consultants effectively; they are unable to assess the quality of the work being done and to provide professional input and direction.

#### 7. Limited capacity of stakeholders in use of RBM

It was noted that most stakeholders participating in the planning process do not have adequate understanding of the RBM and the analytical tools being applied. This makes it difficult for the stakeholders to participate in the planning process meaningfully.

#### **Key recommendations of the workshop**

During the workshop, participants recommended and reiterated the need to adopt the following measures to improve the development of strategic and operational plans:

1. Development of a planning roadmap: Countries should develop a comprehensive road map for planning before the planning process starts. This will enable them to identify resource needs and allow adequate time for planning.
2. Engagement of qualified consultants: the countries acknowledged the need to allow more time to identify qualified consultants. The countries will also require TSF to establish a process to mentor other consultants on RBM.
3. Preparedness for planning: this is a critical area for improvement. Countries proposed to make a quick audit of their preparedness to plan before engaging in the process. This will include assessment of availability of data and resources.
4. Improvement management of consultants: there is a need to effectively manage consultants to get the best out of them. Countries acknowledged that providing consultants with short timeframes and inadequate consulting days leads to poor quality work. There is a need to ensure terms of reference are adequate before engaging consultants.
5. Application of RBM in strategic and operational planning: There was consensus that RBM provides sound basis for effective management and accountability of stakeholders in implementation of the operational plan. Countries agreed to adopt

the methodology and use the key analytical tools that form the basis for application of RBM at strategic and operational planning levels.

### **Way forward**

The following next steps were agreed on:

- TSF WCA to establish a mentoring programme for consultants in the region to deepen skills in RBM
- TSF WCA to organise a similar workshop for the French Speaking countries to facilitate a common approach to planning in the region
- TSF WCA to establish an electronic learning platform where participants of this workshop can share experience and resources as they apply RBM in planning