

Local AIDS councils

NEW DEVELOPMENTS TOWARDS BETTER FUNCTIONING



Despite their potential to advise, support and strengthen local government in its response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic, many local and district AIDS councils are struggling to fulfil this role. This article reflects on a recent event, aimed at looking at the effectiveness of AIDS councils and ways of strengthening their performance. It is also a follow-up to the article on AIDS councils in the August 2007 issue of the *Bulletin*.

On 22 April 2008, CMRA in partnership with SALGA, hosted the first Learning Event of the HIV / AIDS and Local Government Research Network (see insert) with the theme, "Local AIDS councils: How can they be more effective?" The Learning Event, which was informed by an input paper, sought to discuss and clarify the role of local and district AIDS councils (LACs and DACs), which includes the metropolitan AIDS councils in this context. In this article they are interchangeably also referred to as 'AIDS councils'.

While the institutional arrangements, composition and mandate of AIDS councils in the country differ widely, many have in common that they have been re-launched, revived and/or re-established. Some AIDS councils have achieved levels of success but many others continue to experience difficulties in executing their mandate effectively. Various support programmes have been designed and implemented, but this has

not always led to the desired outcome. Recent developments, like the restructuring of the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC), the 2007 launch of the 'Framework for an Integrated Local Government Response to HIV and AIDS' (DPLG, 2007) and the forthcoming Handbook for Facilitating Development and Governance Responses (2007, draft), have allowed for the opportunity to reflect on the current challenges faced by AIDS councils.

The Learning Event was aimed at investigating how these new guidelines and other strategic actions could assist the AIDS councils to play more effective roles in shaping local government's developmental and governance response to HIV and AIDS.

The Learning Event's success was based on bringing together key stakeholders and allowing for discussion on the achievements and challenges facing AIDS councils, as well as

the strategic actions needed to improve the councils' functioning. Delegates included members of the HIV / AIDS and Local Government Research Network as well as representatives from local, district and provincial AIDS councils. Very importantly, the event was also attended by representatives from SANAC, SALGA and the DPLG.

The Learning Event sought to respond to two critical questions:

- How do existing frameworks for mainstreaming HIV and AIDS feed into the issue being discussed?
- How can insights and experiences from the Learning Event influence policy and implementation?



Local perspectives: Municipal case studies

Representatives from AIDS councils were given an opportunity to present their experiences, challenges and successes to the participants (see News Flash).

Their presentations clearly illustrated the varied interpretations of the mandate of AIDS councils. For example, some view their mandate as being responsible for coordination only, while others also aim to act as advisory bodies to municipalities. In addition, the extent of multi-sectoral and political representation differs from one municipality to the next, with some AIDS councils being chaired by a political representative, usually the mayor, while others enjoy little political support and /or buy-in.

Yet it is important to note that there have been a number of successes, like the participation of the North West AIDS Council in IDP Forum meetings. In the case of the eThekweni AIDS Council, multi-sectoral involvement and strong political leadership have been invaluable while the Ehlanzeni District AIDS Council hosted a successful District Child Care Jamboree, attended by different departments and aimed at assisting orphans and vulnerable children to benefit from a range of different support services, including social grants. The Buffalo City Municipal Intersectoral Forum is strong in supporting local community-based organisations (CBOs), while Madibeng Local AIDS Council benefits from a well developed governance system and extensive human resource support with both a LAC

coordinator and an administrator employed by the North West Provincial AIDS Council.

Despite these successes, many challenges remain which prevent the AIDS councils from executing their full mandate as advisory bodies that are also responsible for monitoring and evaluating the provision of services by different stakeholders. Some of the more strategic, institutional challenges reported on by delegates include:

- no links between SANAC and provincial AIDS councils;
- poor working relationships with other structures e.g. DAC, provincial AIDS councils, faith-based organisations and NGOs;
- non-submission of HIV and AIDS plans and reports by sectors, which hampers implementation;
- challenges in operationalising local AIDS councils;
- junior department employees with no authority or decision making power;
- work is hindered by an inability to finalise terms of reference due to legal constraints;
- scope for much stronger political commitment and LACs chaired by non-political appointees; and
- budgetary constraints.

National perspective

Representatives from national level acknowledged that many LACs indeed face challenges that hamper their effective functioning. Presentations were delivered by SANAC, the DPLG and the Medical Research Council. It was argued that in order to fulfil their mandate AIDS councils should have

political support, appropriate representation and expanded partnerships among all the relevant stakeholders. LACS should furthermore monitor, evaluate, collate and distribute information, and ensure that ward committees have an HIV/AIDS portfolio member.

Some of the challenges derive from the mismatch between the LAC and DAC mandate and the current institutional arrangements, which make it difficult to execute this mandate. Moreover, in some cases the mandate itself is not well-understood in the first place. While it is generally agreed that there is no “one size fits all”, national guidelines have recently become available that clarify some of the issues. The guidelines also give advice on the institutional arrangements that can assist LACs to execute the more strategic elements of their mandate, i.e. advising and monitoring. The presenters defined the role and institutional arrangements of AIDS councils as shown in the table below.

This leads to the following summary of the role of AIDS councils:

- **Coordinate and support local implementation** of the NSP;
- **Monitor and evaluate** programmes at local level;
- **Coordinate and build partnerships** and ensure effective communication with all relevant stakeholders;
- **Collate and distribute information** necessary for the effective implementation of HIV and AIDS responses at the local level;
- **Be involved in IDP planning and implementation;** and
- **Support local role players** within the municipal area who are providing HIV and AIDS services.

Finally, the importance of using available resources and tools that

are being developed was highlighted, including the SALGA country plan, the framework developed by the DPLG and the newly developed handbook that accompanies the framework. All these have been developed in line with the goals identified in the NSP and are intended to serve as guidelines for municipalities to respond effectively to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

After event developments

Events after the Learning Event are likely to further assist the improved functioning of the AIDS councils:

- SALGA, on behalf of the network, submitted a memorandum to SANAC with a number of issues for clarification and confirmation as well as recommendations.
- For the first time all provincial AIDS councils came together in a workshop convened by SANAC, with the aim of assessing good practices and developing guidelines.
- SANAC resolved that all provincial AIDS councils will be represented at SANAC level, which will improve effective communication and linkages between the national and local structures.

While it is encouraging to observe the strong commitment from various sides to improve the functioning of AIDS councils, it has become obvious that a key determinant for success is the political and senior management support to the work of AIDS councils. This support is necessary to make the councils a powerful resource to local government, not only in terms of coordination (which many are already doing), but also in **advising and monitoring** implementation, notably through their involvement in the IDP processes. Indeed, if AIDS councils could be given the authority

| SANAC Guidelines | DPLG framework for facilitating development and governance responses to HIV and AIDS | Handbook for facilitating development and governance responses to HIV and AIDS |
|---|--|--|
| Coordinate and support local implementation of the National Strategic Plan (NSP) | Act as a voice for HIV and AIDS and development in the community | Expand partnerships among all the relevant stakeholders |
| Monitor and evaluate programmes at local level | Be involved in IDP planning, implementation and monitoring processes | Effective monitoring and evaluation |
| Build partnerships and HIV/AIDS competent communities | Coordinate planning, implementation and monitoring of HIV and AIDS programming interventions led by municipalities | Collate and distribute information |
| Communicate with relevant stakeholders, particularly ensuring that communities voices are heard | Leverage, co-opt and support role players within the municipal area who are providing HIV and AIDS services | Link AIDS councils to IDP steering committees |
| | Build partnerships and HIV and AIDS competent communities | Ensure that ward committees have an HIV/AIDS portfolio member |
| Source: Report of the Learning Event of the HIV/AIDS and Local Government Research Network | | |

they need, with the enabling institutional arrangements and appropriate representation, they might no longer function mainly as beneficiaries of the municipalities (as is often the case), but also serve as an important technical resource to the municipality itself.

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As a partner in the “Decentralised Response to HIV&AIDS in South Africa” project, SALGA actively promotes the sharing of lessons learned among municipalities, and other relevant local government and HIV and AIDS developments, through various media, including the *LGB*. While the *LGB* articles on HIV and AIDS do not necessarily represent the views of SALGA, any feedback on the articles written so far as well as ideas and suggestions for future contributions are warmly welcomed.

The HIV/AIDS and Local Government Research Network

The Learning Event was the first of four events organised by the HIV/AIDS and Local Government Research Network. Members of the Network are:

- Centre for Municipal Research and Advice
- Democracy in Africa Research Unit
- Department of Provincial and Local Government (dplg)
- Medical Research Council
- South African Cities Network
- South African Local Government Association (SALGA)

- Independent consultants and researchers working on HIV/AIDS and Local Government
- Isandla Institute

The Network’s objectives are to share information and learning, generate partnerships to strengthen local governance processes and responses to HIV and AIDS and document and disseminate good practice. It is supported by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) through its Strengthening Local Governance Programme (SLGP). The SLGP is a partnership initiative with the dplg and SALGA.

News Flash

LAC/DAC Input paper and Learning Event Report

Sections of this article are based on the Input Paper (CMRA, 2008) and the Report of the Learning Event of the HIV/AIDS and Local Government Research Network (Isandla Institute, 2008). The report contains a summarising table of the emerging issues per presentation. The paper, report and all of the presentations can be downloaded from the HIV and AIDS pages of the SALGA website: www.salga.net.

Launch Madibeng Farm HIV/AIDS Project

On the 25th of April 2008 the Honourable Mayor of Madibeng Local Municipality, Councillor Molokoane-Machika officially opened the mobile multipurpose service centre at a farm in Madibeng. The centre is part of a wider project that aims to reduce the vulnerabilities of farm workers and dwellers by improving their access to HIV/AIDS prevention, care, treatment and social services.

The multipurpose service centre will be used for training such as farm workers’ HIV/AIDS peer education and HIV/AIDS training for Community Development Workers, farm workers meetings and income-generating projects. It also provides a fully equipped room for the local Department of Health mobile clinic from which services such as VCT and health examinations can be rendered. The farm workers support project is a good example of a multi-sectoral partnership, involving the local farm management, the municipality, the Department of Health and other stakeholders. The pilot project is

implemented in partnership with CMRA and covers three farms in total, all based in Madibeng Local Municipality.

Library Launch next step in Disability and HIV/AIDS project in BCM

To make municipal services more accessible to people with disabilities, including those living with HIV and AIDS, Buffalo City Municipality embarked on an innovative pilot project last year.

It has several components, including disability friendly services at clinic level, improved access to library services and the development of a database of disability friendly services in the municipality. Last year the municipality conducted the disability training for clinic staff in three clinics. This year it launched the library component and was addressed by the National Minister of Communication, Ivy Matsepe-Cassaburi, through telephone conferencing.

The library project specifically caters for the blind and partially sighted by means of a state-of-the-art computer in the East London Central Library. Among other things the equipment can read out text to blind people and can convert documents into Braille, and for partially sighted people it displays enlarged text of books on a big screen.

The disability project is implemented by BCM in partnership with CMRA and several sectors, including Disabled People Organisations and Department of Health. It is financially supported by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in South Africa.