



## **Concept note for GGLN Regional Learning Event: HIV/AIDS, Local Government and Human Settlements Planning,**

In 2005 approximately 5.54 million people in South Africa between the ages of 15 and 49 were estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS. Women make up 55 percent of those infected while HIV prevalence is highest among poor, marginalised South Africans as conditions of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment have been fundamental in increasing the risk of HIV infection. These factors also affect the capability of people to cope with the subsequent health and socio-economic effects of infection.

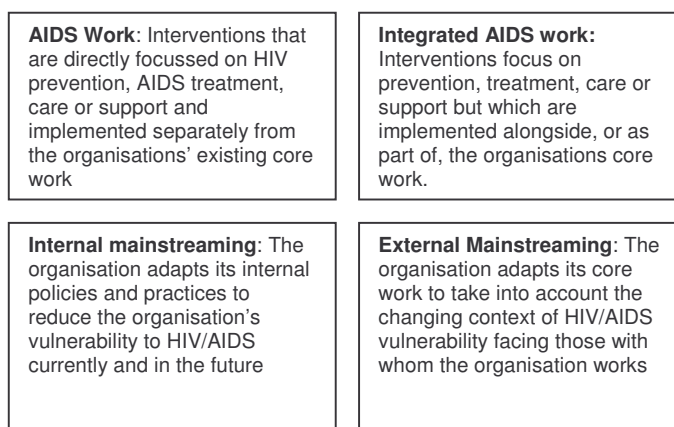
Only recently, however, has the link been made between poverty, underdevelopment, inequality and HIV/AIDS and the role that local government plays in addressing these issues. As the sight of service delivery, local government, in particular, has an important role to play in terms of addressing development backlogs which have been instrumental in increasing vulnerability to the disease among the poor and those living on the margins of society. For example, lack of access to basic services like housing and adequate shelter, water and sanitation, and electricity not only means that poor people are at increased risk of contracting HIV but also that they do not possess the necessary resources to deal with the impact of full blown AIDS. In a country where a large proportion of citizens continue to lack basic services and where high levels of poverty, inequality and unemployment persist, an effective HIV/AIDS strategy requires a nuanced approach. In order for such an approach to succeed, the epidemic can no longer merely be seen as a health issue or as the responsibility of the individual.

In order to develop an effective response, local governments should consider HIV/AIDS when carrying out their everyday work through a process known as mainstreaming. This means that government departments need to implement a comprehensive and expanded response to the epidemic, both internally and externally, even when their core business is not directly related to HIV/AIDS. For example, when municipalities produce their Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), it is essential that consideration is taken of how the provision of services like water and sanitation or transport affects the day to day lives of citizens. This means that they have to assess whether or not vulnerability to HIV infection increases because people have to make use of standpipes that are in areas where there is no effective lighting and where they are at risk of being attacked. It is particularly relevant in terms of addressing the risk for women and children as they are most likely to carry the responsibility for household chores like water collection. At the same time municipalities should also ensure that employees, through their day to day work, are not placed in a vulnerable position for contracting the disease.

In response to this, there have been some attempts by government departments as well as the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) to develop plans aimed at guiding municipalities towards understanding their role in responding to the epidemic. The following guides have been developed:

- South African National Strategic Plan for 2007-2011 (NSP) which highlights the fact that poverty and underdevelopment have contributed to increasing vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and that local governments play an important role in an effective response
- Department of Provincial and Local Government's (DPLG) Framework for an Integrated Local Government Response to HIV and AIDS. This framework was launched in April 2007 and is an attempt by the DPLG to promote HIV/AIDS as a broader issue of development and governance with a role to be played by all spheres of government at national, provincial and local level. The DPLG has developed an implementation plan to accompany the framework.
- SALGA is currently in the process of developing a national plan for HIV for local government that would be aligned with the NSP and DPLG framework. This plan is meant to serve as a reference point for municipal implementation and monitoring of HIV strategies.

The aforementioned documents attempt to guide municipalities toward the understanding that they should develop a set of interventions (illustrated by the diagram below) that look at all aspects of HIV/AIDS. It is important to have focussed interventions when addressing HIV/AIDS. For example, it is important that municipalities concentrate on interventions that raise awareness about prevention, treatment, care and support. These can be once off or it can be ongoing programmes that exist alongside their day to day work. Yet, these still imply a mainly biomedical approach to HIV/AIDS. Municipalities should therefore also ensure that they adopt an approach that focuses on reducing vulnerability both internally as well as reducing vulnerability in the communities that are the main users of their services.



This approach also implies that municipalities, in order to respond effectively to the needs of the communities they serve, should engage with those communities and relevant groups on this issue. For this reason, civil society organisation and other community networks (eg. Stokvels, women and childrens groups etc) have an important role to play in ensuring participation and providing municipalities with the necessary information and/or support to respond adequately to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The importance of participation is becoming increasingly clear in light of the changing needs created by HIV/AIDS. For example, municipalities now have to respond in innovative ways to the needs created by child and female headed households as well as providing the necessary socio-economic resources required to respond effectively to HIV/AIDS. In particular, the need for shelter and sustainable human settlements where people are

able to access the necessary resources that would decrease both vulnerability to infection and allow them to cope when HIV positive, has become extremely important. Services can therefore no longer be provided without taking into account the effects that the HIV/AIDS epidemic has not only on households, communities and society as a whole but also the ability of municipalities to carry out their mandate.