



**Report on GGLN Regional Learning Event
'HIV/AIDS, Local Government and Human Settlements Planning'**

Hosted by Isandla Institute and the Built Environment Support Group

Cape Town Hollow Hotel
Queen Victoria Street
Cape Town
18 July 2007

Isandla Institute and BESG would like to thank the GGLN
for providing funding to host this learning event.

1. Background/Motivation for event

According to recent statistics by the South African Department of Health, an estimated 5.4 million South Africans are living with HIV. The epidemic has disproportionately affected those in poor and underdeveloped regions. This has led recent research to repeatedly emphasise the role of underdevelopment and poverty in not only increasing vulnerability to infection but also decreasing the ability of people to develop effective coping strategies to deal with HIV infection. In South Africa an important factor contributing to the spread of the epidemic has been the inability of policy makers to adequately take into account these factors of underdevelopment and inequality in increasing vulnerability. Instead, the South African government (like most other governments in the world) has based its response on the ABC (Abstain, Be faithful, Condomise) approach, which primarily emphasises personal responsibility in remaining safe from infection as well as focussing on the provision of treatment to people who are HIV positive. This narrow approach does not take into consideration the factors that preclude people from taking personal responsibility for infection and treatment. For example, it fails to adequately account for the impact that the lack of access to basic services like water, sanitation and sustainable and habitable human settlements have on people's ability to make decisions about their lives.

As the main site 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 and susceptibility to the disease among the poor and those living on the margins of society. For example, lack of access to basic services like housing, water and sanitation, and electricity not only means that the poor and marginalized 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.

As a network of organisations that focuses its work on local government, the organisers felt that it was important for member organisations of the GGLN to understand the role of local government in responding to HIV/AIDS. We believe that HIV/AIDS is a cross cutting issue with relevance to all key local governance issues of interest to the GGLN. Thus the reason for proposing this learning event was to stimulate discussion about the implications of HIV/AIDS for local governance and development and, vice versa, how local governance and development can reduce vulnerability to HIV infection, enhance the coping capabilities of households and communities affected by HIV/AIDS and strengthen organisational systems in that regard. In addition, the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) has recently introduced its *Framework for an Integrated Local Government response to HIV and AIDS*. This Framework, which is to be rolled out nationally over a period of four years, recognises the role of municipalities to mainstream HIV/AIDS by making it part of their day to day work. The introduction of this framework further highlighted the need for all, working at local government level, to adequately understand what is required from municipalities in developing an effective response to HIV/AIDS.

A concept note and a questionnaire were sent to participants prior to the event. While the concept note provided a brief introduction to the issues and how HIV/AIDS can be addressed by local government through the human settlements agenda, the aim of the questionnaire was to determine the current engagement of organisations, if any, with local government on HIV/AIDS.

2. Key Objectives for event

- To enhance GGLN members' understanding of HIV/AIDS as a local governance and development issue
- To provide a space for exchange of ideas experiences and lessons related to HIV/AIDS and local governance and development among GGLN members
- To explore if and how members of the GGLN (individually and/or collectively) can (better) integrate HIV/AIDS in their development approach and future work

3. Session 1: Presentations and comments

Mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS

The learning event consisted of two sessions, with the first session intended as an introduction to the relevant issues while the aim of the second session was to encourage interaction and engagement about the topic in light of the earlier presentations. The first presentation, by Stacey-Leigh Joseph of Isandla Institute, provided an introduction to how HIV/AIDS can be mainstreamed in the day to day work of local governments through the human settlement agenda. One of the key comments in the presentation was that the traditional response of ABC is not sufficient as there are various socio-economic and physical factors that impact on people's ability to choose safe sex. The presentation then made the links between HIV/AIDS, poverty, inequality and inadequate access to basic services and infrastructure. Based on this, Stacey-Leigh concluded that the sustainable human settlements agenda provides the appropriate policy impetus for local governments to respond to HIV/AIDS in a comprehensive and developmental manner.

The second presentation, by Masingita Khandhlela, on behalf of the DPLG, reiterated the developmental aspects of HIV/AIDS. She provided an outline of the DPLG's strategy to ensure that HIV/AIDS is addressed at municipal level. She emphasised that not only is local government carrying the burden of HIV and AIDS but it is also in the ideal position to lead the response to the epidemic. Therefore, the key aims of the framework are to establish a common understanding about the role of local government and how DPLG can provide support to municipalities.

There was general agreement amongst participants that it was important for government to recognize their role in providing resources and assistance to those individuals, households and communities that were vulnerable, particularly in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. A concern was also raised that when talking about the demographic most affected by HIV/AIDS, namely young, African women, we do not forget the role of men. Therefore, there was a suggestion that programmes which address the issue of gender inequality (highlighted as a key contributor to vulnerability) should not only focus on women and children, but should also take into consideration the disempowerment of men in South African society.

In response to the DPLG presentation, one of the key comments was that the framework was "good in theory", but that the capacity issues at municipal level might hamper its implementation. For example, many municipalities are struggling with the basics and it would be hard for them to understand the concepts of vulnerability and mainstreaming, let alone use these to inform their work. It was further suggested that municipalities' inability to ensure an effective and efficient indigent policy shows that they do not have a thorough understanding of how this affects people's ability to provide for their day to day needs. In addition, there was a feeling that the framework lacked an adequate monitoring and evaluation component. Members also felt that the power struggles at all three spheres of government affected the roll out and implementation of policies. This resulted in

pertinent issues being politicized while also hampering integration of plans and coordination between different departments. In response to these concerns, Masingita indicated that DPLG recognized its role particularly in ensuring that senior management buys into the plan. Also, DPLG intends to implement a targeted roll out where municipalities would be assisted in understanding their roles. However, she emphasized that DPLG recognized the constraints faced by municipalities and were themselves constrained by a number of challenges. Groups/forums such as the GGLN are therefore important in order to assist with the roll out as well as acting as a support function

Msunduzi case study

Two more presentations were made, highlighting the Msunduzi case study, in which BESG was involved. As the researcher involved in the research on the Msunduzi Municipality's HIV/AIDS Strategy, Terence Smith provided an outline of what was entailed in this response, the achievements and also the challenges. He indicated that the Msunduzi strategy was an innovative response because it included representatives from government, civil society and also business and most importantly had a political champion who was a committed senior official in the municipality. Though it had prevention and treatment as key focus areas, it specifically tried to address the issue of vulnerable children. One of the achievements of the strategy was that it created linkages between different sectors, which promoted opportunities for constructive engagements. The strategy also allowed for cross-sectoral engagements that not only minimized duplication of interventions but also improved the level of service provision. However, there were also a number of challenges that impeded the strategy, including an over-reliance on financial contributions from NGO partners, which was deemed to be unsustainable. In addition, there was a lack of monitoring and evaluation capacity and, very importantly, insufficient direct involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Cameron Brisbane provided an update on the strategy and some explanations for its demise in the past two years. Amongst the factors that led to the breakdown of the partnership was the fact that the process of internal restructuring within the Msunduzi Municipality resulted in some of the key people involved in the project being relocated to different positions. This led to not only a lack of continuity but also impacted on the ability of the Mayor (who was previously the political champion behind the strategy as Deputy Mayor) to continue her role as a key driver of the strategy. Added to this was the fact that the work of the steering committee was hampered by bureaucratic processes within the municipality.

One of the key observations of these presentations was that a political champion can play a very important role in ensuring that programmes enjoy "buy in." However, there should not be over reliance on a specific individual as this could ultimately constrain the process, as was the case in the Msunduzi strategy. The issue of available resources was identified as an ongoing concern while it was again noted that political tensions always play a role and often divert the attention from the relevant issues.

A second presentation by Cameron Brisbane dealt with the work currently being done by BESG to address the housing and shelter needs of children through experimenting with creative responses within the current policy frameworks of the KwaZulu-Natal Housing and Welfare Departments. One project BESG has been involved in was the refurbishment of a place of safety to serve as a halfway house for children awaiting placement in foster care. The refurbishment was undertaken using funds provided by the provincial Housing Department. Another pilot project is the establishment of community foster care homes that cater for six children and a houseparent. Capital funding for the construction of the homes was provided by the Department of Housing, while the ongoing operational costs of

the homes are funded through a combination of foster care grants and a top up from the NGO managing the project. Both these pilots have been completed. A third pilot project currently underway is the home extensions project. This project entails the addition of rooms and bathroom facilities to relieve overcrowding in houses where families have taken non-biologically related children into their care.

4. Discussions

For the second part of the learning event, participants were divided into two separate groups where they were expected to discuss the presentations, whether this changed their understanding of HIV/AIDS and what this means for their future work. While some GGLN members have been engaged with HIV/AIDS from a developmental perspective (most notably BESE, Ruliv and Isandla Institute), during the report back discussion it was clear that many participants felt that the presentations and discussions broadened their perspective on HIV/AIDS within the developmental context. Participants agreed that the impact of HIV/AIDS and the understanding of how this affects households, communities and society, was the culmination of a long process. In addition, more work needs to be done that looks at issues like housing, poverty, vulnerability, etc. Participants suggested that GGLN members want to include HIV/AIDS in their work could/should call on other members who have more experience and knowledge in this area. It was also agreed that GGLN members themselves should work closer together in order to contribute to and draw from each other. Another key area that was highlighted is the need to mobilize community groups so that they can bring this issue to the attention of ward committees and other political representatives.

There was agreement that the GGLN as a body should put out a clear message that HIV/AIDS is fundamentally a governance and developmental issue. Though the suggestion is not necessarily that the GGLN have an HIV/AIDS focussed programme, it was suggested that the GGLN ensures that the issue is made a focus in its future work. A way should be found to document case studies and work done by member organisations on HIV/AIDS. The GGLN as a collective should also consider finding a way to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the DPLG framework. However, a suggestion was made that there should be a distinction between the network and "lead partners" and there should be agreement that some partners (depending on their capacity and expertise) could take on specific roles in the process.

An important point that was made was that current processes should be used as vehicles for highlighting HIV/AIDS. For example, the GGLN should ensure that it is included in its 'State of local government report'. Also, the GGLN should be engaged in the upcoming review of the White Paper on Local Government. A suggestion was made that the GGLN find specific themes for this process and that relevant members are approached to research, collate and edit the data for submission. All present also agreed that it was crucial for the GGLN to focus on building a relationship with DPLG.

It was also noted that the groups should keep in mind that revision of the Public Participation Policy Framework was being done through CPP and that the draft has been circulated for input.

5. Way forward

Some suggestions and questions were raised on how the GGLN can take these issues forward. They include:

- Expansion of the database to reflect what members are doing regarding HIV/AIDS. It was suggested that the questionnaire sent to members can be used as a first step in terms of gathering this data. The information can then be made available on the GGLN website.
- Alignment with existing initiatives. For example, it was suggested that the newsletter or 'State of local government report' be used as tools for highlighting HIV/AIDS.
- Members should make use of each other's resource and expertise.
- Possibilities for research on this topic:
 - Including HIV/AIDS in the White Paper process (A suggestion was made that the reference group approach Jaap de Visser from the Community Law Centre, who is in the process of developing a concept note on the White Paper process)
 - Developing case studies
 - Use of GGLN local learning exchange programmes to improve knowledge and experience on this issue
 - However, question arises of whether the GGLN puts out a call for tenders for this research or whether it is up to members to take the initiative and put in proposals. Terence agreed to discuss this issue with the reference group during its next review session.
- How can GGLN be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of DPLG rollout and implementation of its HIV/AIDS framework? What would be the scope of such involvement?
- GGLN should consider the possibility of not just advocating towards the state but also targeting peer organizations.
- GGLN should consider developing a position paper on HIV/AIDS? A possibility is to expand on Isandla Institute's concept note (that was provided to participants).
- Suggestion of a regular feature on HIV/AIDS in the newsletter and on the website.

The meeting agreed that one way of making all the discussions and resolutions of this event actionable was to select a lead partner who could take charge of these initiatives. These issues are to be discussed with the reference group at their next meeting.

Please see annexures for all presentations as well as the concept note and questionnaire.

For any further information on the learning event, please contact Stacey-Leigh on 021 465 8751 or staceyleigh@isandla.org.za



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