

## Fact Sheet: Community Systems Strengthening

### A. What is community systems strengthening?

Community systems strengthening refers to initiatives that contribute to the development and/or strengthening of community-based organizations in order to improve knowledge of, and access to improved health service delivery. Specifically in the context of applications to the Global Fund, community systems strengthening initiatives are encouraged to achieve improved outcomes for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria prevention, treatment, and care and support programs.

In this context, community systems strengthening areas of activity may include a focus on:

- **Building capacity** of the core processes of community-based organizations to provide an increased range, or quality of services, through, for example:
  - > Physical infrastructure development, including obtaining and retaining office space, holding bank accounts, and improving communications technology
  - > Organizational systems development, including improvements in the financial management of community-based organizations, and the development of strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, and information management capacities
- **Building partnerships** at the local level to improve coordination, enhance impact, and avoid duplication of service delivery.
- **Sustainable financing**, including a focus on supporting initiatives to plan for and achieve predictability of resources over a longer period of time with which to work for improved impact and outcomes for the disease(s).

### B. Why is community systems strengthening important?

The mounting scale of the three epidemics of HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, and the more recent availability of significant financial resources to respond to the diseases, has increased pressure on national systems to scale-up and improve the quality of implementation efforts. Scaling up the response to the three diseases will not be successful without strengthened community systems.

Contributing to ensuring a broader, multi-sectoral approach to national HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria program implementation, an increasing number of community based organizations have evolved to fill service delivery gaps at the community level. However, many of the emerging community based organizations are located in rural or remote areas, operate with limited human resources, and are often staffed by volunteers. Many also lack sufficient experience and systems to access resources that could strengthen their underlying management systems, thereby improving their operational and implementation effectiveness in service delivery for (and beyond) the three diseases.

The Global Fund recognizes that the presence of strong, sustainable community-based organizations is an important element of ensuring program impact, sustainability, and results for HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria prevention, treatment, and care and support efforts.

Whilst recognizing the important role of government and quasi-government community-based organizations in service delivery, community systems strengthening initiatives are of particular importance to the full range of non-government organizations that support and/or extend service delivery to, especially, *key affected populations*<sup>1</sup>, including people who may not be visible to existing service access points due to geographic, social or other factors. Community systems strengthening initiatives may therefore be required to support the work of a broad range of non-governmental organizations, including home-based care organizations; support organizations for people living with and/or affected by the diseases; faith-based organizations, women's organizations, youth organizations, and community centers, and private sector organizations.

### **C. Incorporating community systems strengthening into Global Fund proposals**

The Global Fund continues to support community systems strengthening initiatives as part of the overall framework for improving health outcomes for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria. Starting in Round 8, the Global Fund is encouraging applicants to include measures to strengthen community systems relevant to in-country contexts on a routine basis in proposals for new and continuing funding.

Applicants are encouraged to consider community systems strengthening needs in:

- Their assessment of disease programs and health system weaknesses and gaps, to ensure that identification of program needs considers the community systems that are necessary to improve the scope and quality of service delivery, particularly to those without current access; and
- The overall program implementation strategy, including strengthening of sub-recipient or other implementing partner systems and capacities to improve the quality and sustainability of services delivered throughout the community.

How community systems strengthening initiatives may support efforts to ensure a gender sensitive approach to service delivery and overall program implementation in the context of Global Fund proposals is also encouraged through reference to the Global Fund's Fact Sheets entitled 'Ensuring a Gender Sensitive Response' and 'Sexual Minorities in the context of HIV epidemics' available through the Global Fund's website.

The Global Fund's revised Guidelines for Proposals include a non-exhaustive reference to areas of work that may be supported by the Global Fund to improve access to and/or the quality of services, such as:

- Initiatives to improve community-based program implementation and service delivery, including strengthening core institutional capacity through physical infrastructure development, and organizational and systems strengthening; and
- Partnership building at the community level, focusing on the building of systematized relationships among and between community-based organizations to improve coordination.

Where the planned initiatives benefit more than one of the three diseases supported by the Global Fund, it may be appropriate to apply for community systems strengthening through an approach that cuts across the three diseases. Information on this possibility is provided in the Guidelines for Proposals, within the description of 'health systems cross-cutting interventions'.

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<sup>1</sup> The Global Fund adopts the UNAIDS definition of *key affected populations*.