

Fact Sheet: Community Systems Strengthening

A. What is community systems strengthening?

Community systems strengthening (CSS) refers to initiatives that contribute to the development and/or strengthening of community-based organizations (CBOs). Community systems strengthening aims to maximize the community's response to HIV, tuberculosis and malaria and its access to and utilization of health services. Importantly, Community systems strengthening aims to foster the generation of quality demand for services through an increased role of the community in the design, delivery and monitoring and evaluation of services.

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. Beyond community-based service delivery, community based organizations play a unique role in maximizing health results through advocacy and mobilization.

It is important to ensure that community systems strengthening relies on community-based needs assessments in order to identify gaps in services at the community level and to ensure these gaps are properly addressed in strategy development and implementation.

Components of community systems strengthening:

- **Building Capacity** of community-based organizations to strengthen the core processes needed to provide an increased range of quality activities that may include:
 - Physical infrastructure development, including obtaining and retaining office space, basic office equipment and utilities, bank accounts, and continuous telecommunications services;
 - Organizational systems development that is distinct from support for specific programmatic activities, including improvements in financial management, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, information and knowledge management capacity and governance processes.; and
 - Technical capacity building including support to enhance programmatic quality and scale in existing and new interventions. This could include technical support and sharing good practice.

Capacity building activities referred to above can include human resources¹, training, internships, learning exchanges, advocacy, building and improving knowledge management systems and community focused operational research.

- **Partnership Building** with a range of stakeholders at the local level. This may be to improve planning processes, policy dialogue with key institutions and service providers,

¹ As per Round 9 guidelines, Human Resources include salaries, wages and related costs (pensions, incentives and other employee benefits, etc.) relating to all employees (including field personnel), and employee recruitment costs.

coordination, enhance impact and collaboration, and to avoid duplication of service delivery. It can include civil society network development and strengthening.

- **Ensuring Sustainability.** This could include a focus on supporting initiatives to plan for and achieve predictability of resources in the longer term in order to increase the sustainability of resources for the country-wide, multi-sectoral response to the three diseases.

B. Which types of organizations benefit from community systems strengthening initiatives?

While 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 non-government organizations that support and/or extend service delivery to hard to reach key affected populations². This includes people who may not be visible to existing service access points due to geographic, social or other factors.

Community systems strengthening initiatives support the work of a broad range of non-governmental organizations including, but not limited to, organizations of people living with and/or affected by the diseases, community-based advocacy groups, home-based care organizations, faith-based organizations, women's organizations, youth organizations, vulnerable group organizations, community centers, and private sector organizations.

C. What do we want to achieve with community systems strengthening?

The mounting scale of the three epidemics of HIV, tuberculosis and malaria has increased pressure on national systems to scale-up and improve the quality and effectiveness of implementation efforts. This will only be successful with strengthened community systems.

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

To deliver a 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 these emerging organizations are located in rural or remote areas, operate with limited human resources, and are often staffed by volunteers. Many lack experience and systems to access resources that could strengthen their underlying management systems and improve their operational effectiveness in service delivery.

To maximize these community-based responses Community systems strengthening is needed in order to:

- expand coverage of service delivery;
- provide emergency responses to the epidemics at community level;
- achieve service coverage for hard to reach and marginalized groups;
- inform and improve public policy, including policy analysis, advocacy and leadership development;
- mobilize members of society as actors in the fight against the three diseases, particularly non-governmental sectors such as religious leaders, media, businesses, and academia;

² The Global Fund adopts the UNAIDS definition of *key affected populations*.

- complement the public sector in efforts to scale up towards universal coverage particularly among hard to reach populations; and
- support community mobilization to achieve greater access to services.

The Global Fund pays special attention to the role of communities in fostering enabling environments for the implementation of evidence-based programs. In particular, communities play an important role in fostering the social, legal and political environments that enable the scale up of evidence-based interventions. These interventions are needed to scale up national responses and in particular to reduce the vulnerability of marginalized groups and empower them to tackle the diseases with proven responses. This could include addressing root causes of stigma and political and legal barriers that inadequately protect against human rights violations and prevent affected communities accessing services.

D. 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.

The Global Fund is encouraging applicants to include measures to strengthen community systems relevant to in-country contexts as a standard component of all proposals.

Applicants are encouraged to consider community systems strengthening needs as an integral part of:

- Assessments of disease programs and health systems, ensuring that they identify those areas where full involvement of the community is needed to improve (a) the scope and quality of service delivery, particularly to those who are hardest to reach, and (b) evidence-based policies, planning and implementation; and
- Overall program implementation, including strengthening, (a) community-based organizations ability to enhance evidence-based public policies, planning, and implementation; and (b) sub-recipient or other implementing partner systems and capacities to improve the quality and sustainability of in-country services delivered throughout the community.

The Global Fund also encourages Community systems strengthening initiatives to ensure a gender sensitive approach to service delivery and overall program implementation (see Global Fund Fact Sheets '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 cross-cutting funds to support Community systems strengthening. Information on this possibility is provided in the Guidelines for Proposals, within the description of 'health systems cross-cutting interventions'.

Where the planned initiatives address concentrated epidemics in underserved marginalized groups across several countries in the same region, it may be appropriate to apply for Community systems strengthening through a regional or non-CCM proposal.