

HIV, Health and Development



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Innovative Approaches - UNDP Philippines

2011



Decentralizing AIDS Responses - Local Government

Key features of this novel HIV programming and partnership-building initiative:

- Policy support for national and local multi-sector AIDS responses
- Capacity development to support increased partnerships between national, regional, and local governments
- Training, advocacy, and improved HIV and AIDS awareness for local government officials

Country	Philippines
Focus area	Decentralization, capacity building
Audience	National and local government officials, local community members, community groups
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Background

HIV prevalence is still remarkably low in the Philippines. In December 2011, 268 new cases of HIV infection were reported. Total cases in the country amounted to less than 8400 people¹. With a total population approaching 100 million people, those who are HIV-positive still represent less than 0.1 percent of the population. At first glance, these figures would suggest little reason for alarm. Closer inspection though of the data proves that the situation is more worrying.

The UNAIDS *Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic* in 2010 noted that the Philippines was one of only seven countries in the world where HIV incidence had grown more than 25 percent in the past 10 years. Figures in 2007 showed that there was an average of one new case a day. By 2011, this figure had risen to between six and seven new cases per day. This dramatic acceleration of new infections may just be the tip of the iceberg. Today, young people aged 20-29 represent six out of 10 new infections, and 96 percent of all new infections in 2011 were through sexual contact².

Unprotected sex accounts for nearly 90 percent of all transmissions and yet condom use remains stubbornly low. Based on the 2009 Integrated HIV Behavioural and Serologic Surveillance, condom usage among the most at-risk-populations in the country – men who have sex with men (MSM), female sex workers (FSWs), and injecting drug users (IDUs) – ranges from 11 to 65 percent. Likewise the country remains far off targets of key Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for HIV, particularly with respect to indicators 6.2 (condom use at last high-risk sex) and 6.3 (proportion of population aged 15-24 years with comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV)³.

The fight to prevent this epidemic from exploding in the country is governed by Republic Act 8504 – the Philippine AIDS Prevention and Control Act of 1998. However, due to the decentralized system of government in the country, operational responsibility for HIV prevention and control efforts falls on Local

Government Units (LGUs) and local AIDS councils wherever they exist. The difficulty in establishing a national response is that LGUs are largely autonomous; national policy is guidance for local governments and not binding.

An assessment of the 3rd AIDS Medium Term Plan from the Philippine National AIDS Council (PNAC) showed that only 18 of the 48 localities identified as highly vulnerable were reached with preventive interventions while only 10 received comprehensive essential prevention measures. As of 2007, on-going projects supported by the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria (GFATM, rounds 3, 5 and 6) covered 37 cities – only 2 percent of the country – even though they represented at least 75 percent of the total national AIDS budget⁴. The National Capital Region, despite having the fastest growing rates of new infections in the country, still does not have a full-scale AIDS response.

The reality on the ground was that while HIV policies were present, interventions to prevent and provide services for people most-at-risk, indirectly affected by, or living with HIV has been underfunded and uncoordinated. Technical, human, and financial resources at the local levels do not meet the needs for effective HIV prevention. Further, since HIV has traditionally been viewed as a health issue and not a development issue, it has been hard to pull in different government departments together and to coordinate policies more effectively. The country's ability to respond to and plan for the growing HIV epidemic has been seriously hampered by these two characteristics and the result of this institutional gap can be seen through the stunning acceleration of HIV cases.

Addressing the Gaps

To help better translate national policy into local responses, UNDP formulated a programme in 2008 that worked with PNAC and the UN Joint Team on AIDS to increase institutional leadership and improve local commitment to HIV and AIDS. The goal was to bridge the gap between national institutions and local ones, as well as encourage Local Government Units to implement local responses and ensure that they had the necessary technical support to be successful at it.

The country situation is not all grim as we are witnessing a number of local governments, in partnership with a range of stakeholders, taking on the challenge of instituting their own local responses to HIV and AIDS.

- Renaud Meyer, UNDP Country Director in Philippines

1 Philippine HIV and AIDS Registry, National Epidemiology Center, Department of Health

2 Ibid.

3 Philippines 2010 UNGASS Progress Report

4 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic, 2010, UNAIDS

National Policy Achievements

- The Joint Memorandum Circular ‘Guidelines on the Formation and Operation of Regional AIDS Assistance Teams (RAATs)’ issued by DILG, DOH, and DSWD together was a binding document that covered the formation and operations of the RAATs; it strengthened the cooperation and coordination among the three departments, clearly delineates areas of responsibility, and provides a framework under which they can pursue complimentary programming.
- DILG and DSWD have both issued internal guidelines on implementing STI, HIV, and AIDS Prevention programmes in their workplaces. They represent the first department-wide HIV-focused workplace policies; DILG is integrating their policy into the employee health programme.
- Governments in Regions VI, VII, XI, and ARMM have issued executive orders mandating the establishment of local AIDS councils.

To do so, the Programme sought to address three key factors that contributed to inconsistent and low rates of local interventions.

1. The lack of a sub-national mechanism for advocacy and technical support was a primary reason that national policies were not being translated into local response and thus the Programme sought to reinvigorate a network of Regional AIDS Assistance Teams (RAATs) first established by PNAC in 2007. These teams would bring together three main government departments – the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and the Department of Health (DOH) – and facilitate regional coordination and translation of national policies.
2. At the same time, a group of local AIDS champions would be identified in major cities and municipalities that the RAATs could tap in order to serve as technical advisors and support for local governments.
3. Finally, to address low awareness of the HIV issue at the local level and build support for the establishment of local AIDS councils and increase local responses, the Programme aimed to partner with the Local Government Academy (LGA) to integrate HIV awareness training in the orientation curriculum for all incoming local government officials.

Together, these three approaches would lay the systemic foundation for sustainable local AIDS responses.

The Work

‘Leadership for Effective and Sustained Responses to HIV and AIDS’ began in 2009 as the anchor component of UNDP’s overall HIV Programme in the Philippines. It was Component 1 of a five pronged response to the

expanding HIV epidemic in the country. Working with LGA as the implementing partner, Component 1 started by bringing together the three main government departments that would take part in the establishment of the RAATs.

In two major workshops during 2009, the departments came together and made crucial decisions about the structure of the RAATs – determining what role the RAATs would play, the scope of each individual department’s responsibilities, and how the RAATs would complement other initiatives. These workshops also sought to bring all the participants to a common understanding of the underlying factors contributing to the HIV epidemic and establish a baseline of knowledge necessary for meaningful cooperation on interventions. In November 2009, the efforts of the workshops resulted in a Joint Memorandum of Agreement that led to the operationalization of the RAATs. Under the leadership of Hon. Austere Panadero, Under-secretary, DILG, this inter-departmental memorandum was the first agreement on coordinating local HIV responses in the Philippines.

At almost the same time, UNDP and LGA began integrating general HIV awareness courses into the orientation curriculum that all newly elected local officials undergo. The timing was ideal, since 2010 was a major election year, and the corresponding trainings would be a perfect vehicle to emphasize the importance of local programming for HIV responses. The Joint Memorandum, specifying the individual roles of each department, also led to greater clarity for local government officials who sought assistance in developing responses. As of 2010, nearly 900 local government officials have been trained by the HIV Programme.

Equally important, the operationalization of the RAATs in all 17 regions allowed them to become a resource for local governments. The Programme worked with RAATs to identify vulnerable LGUs in target regions and potential candidates for local AIDS champions. This

Local Impacts

Since the Programme began, 99 new local AIDS councils have been established while 44 local AIDS policies have been developed. This local presence has already impacted responses at the provincial and local levels. For instance, the provincial government in Cebu passed a resolution in 2011 requesting all LGUs to establish functional local AIDS councils. The Cebu City Council, also in 2011, approved a mass motion requesting that the LGBT sector be included in the 'Gender and Development' implementation being led by Hon. Alvin Dizon (Cebu City Council member and one of the participants in the UNDP sponsored LGU-MSM Dialogues), which lays the foundation for a broader Anti-discrimination ordinance in the city.

information was then utilized by RAATs to provide more in-depth training and orientations to newly elected officials in 2010, following up on the introduction in the LGA curriculum. The programme also set up a website for RAAT members that provided a central repository of research, policies, and other resources that RAATs could reference and pass along to LGUs.

already issued their own policies mandating the establishment of local AIDS councils. In addition, 44 local AIDS policies had been developed. While the long-term impacts of the Programme have yet to be proven, in three short years the Programme has successfully laid the institutional foundations with the relevant departments, supporting increased and deeper local HIV responses.

There has been a great improvement in the last two years with regards to localizing the response to HIV and AIDS, because now it is really the (RAATs) taking action.

- Dr. Ferchito Avelino, Former Executive Director, Philippine National AIDS Council Secretariat

Throughout 2010 and 2011, the Programme began a series of initiatives that aimed to contribute to better understanding the needs of LGUs and greater knowledge sharing. The RAATs served as a focal point for gathering information on existing local AIDS councils and their functionality. In partnership with the non-governmental organization ACHIEVE, the Programme supported a policy review of local HIV ordinances in two cities in Metro Manila, Quezon City and Pasay City, which recommended enhancements in the current policy environment and programmes for implementation among LGUs. Working with the University of the Philippines Centre for Local and Regional Governance, the Programme sponsored a study that resulted in a step-by-step guide for local governments in setting up local AIDS responses. At the end of 2010, the Programme sponsored the first annual C.H.A.M.P. (Catalytic HIV and AIDS Mitigation Programme) awards, which recognized the best local AIDS responses in the country. Winners received cash grants for local programming

The programme's ability to rapidly put into place broad institutional supports for local AIDS responses has been due largely to strong internal leadership and clearly defining roles and responsibilities. From the start, the Programme targeted key advocates at the highest levels within the relevant stakeholder organizations. Converting these advocates to internal champions proved to be crucial in pulling other decision-makers on-board. Having the Programme promoted from not only outside organizations, but also from influential people within the government was crucial. Champions at the secretary and under-secretary level enabled the Programme to convene leaders from other government departments that might otherwise have been difficult to engage. It also facilitated the establishment of a national Technical Working Group, bringing in high-impact actors from the breadth of stakeholders, including civil society, the health sector, and government representatives.

National support has also translated into action at the local levels. The partnership among DILG, DOH, and DSWD in setting up the RAATs was made possible, partly due to the strong advocacy from national level leadership. Equally important was the active engagement of regional representatives at an early stage. The early meetings in 2009 represented an investment of significant time and effort by the Programme to define roles and responsibilities for each actor. By bringing together the eventual members of RAATs to help define how the teams would work, the Programme passed ownership of the RAATs from PNAC, UNDP, and any other national level departments to the regional members themselves. Future discussions could then be focused on programmatic concerns and not bureaucratic ones. Indeed, the Joint Memorandum that came from those initial meetings has served to

Factors for Success

By first quarter of 2011, 99 new local AIDS councils had been established and 250 Local AIDS champions and advocates were recruited. RAATs were operationalized in all 17 regions, and four regional governments had

Local governments are able to be in a better position to craft a more effective strategy because they know their area (and) they know how communities would handle these problems, and the kinds of vulnerabilities that are also present in their areas.

- Hon. Austere Panadero, Undersecretary, Department of Interior and Local Government and Vice-Chair, Philippine National AIDS Council

guide institutional cooperation on HIV throughout the country.

Partnerships have also contributed to the success of the Programme. Identification and engagement of local AIDS champions has drawn heavily on existing partnerships between government departments, UNDP, and local community organizations. These partnerships have also played an important role in the provision of technical assistance and training to LGUs and in ensuring that local AIDS councils are operational and effective. The orientation training for newly elected LGU officials drew on the combined knowledge of both RAATs and local civil society organizations.

Finally, the Programme operated under tight deadlines in order to take advantage of a favourable development situation. From its operational start in late 2009, the Programme recognized that the 2010 elections provided a valuable opportunity to expand awareness and build institutional capacity and structures. Building on existing orientation processes and the infusion of enthusiasm from newly elected officials provided the Programme with a significant edge in terms of gaining commitments of local officials.

Lessons Learned

In many ways, the 'Leadership for Effective and Sustained Responses to HIV and AIDS' has helped establish a foundation for HIV responses at the sub-national level. Through the support for government-led regional HIV response bodies and increased awareness and promotion of local response, the Programme has helped establish well-defined roles for different government agencies both within the Programme and outside of it. It has also helped lay the foundation for future coordination, and meaningfully affected the ability of LGUs to implement HIV-focused interventions. Through the course of this work, the Programme learned valuable lessons that can be applied elsewhere.

Any broad-based multi-stakeholder initiatives such as those undertaken by the Programme require significant investment up-front in creating buy-in and ownership. While it may mean a longer lead-time before tangible results can be seen, it ensures greater sustainability



and more relevant results. For example, in the planning workshops for the RAATs, important discussions took place that highlighted local issues and concerns that may otherwise have gone overlooked. Taking these issues into consideration, when defining how the RAATs would work, means that both RAATs and local institutions will be more responsive in the long-term.

Further, in the Philippines, HIV has traditionally been managed as a health issue. It was clear from the start though, that for the long-term viability of the initiative, each partner would have to play their own unique and equally important roles. Indeed, each partner would have to see itself as an integral actor in the solution to HIV. Thus, the Programme worked to clearly define the expected contributions from each department and to undertake 'levelling' exercises with relevant actors. The impacts on the three government departments have been far-reaching; DILG has been the first Philippine government department to adopt a general workplace HIV policy, while DSWD now sees its role in delivering services to people living with HIV as an integral piece of its work.

Working with multiple government departments can lead to bureaucratic paralysis, especially when dealing with a division of duties and responsibilities. In order to avoid this, a key decision was made to allow flexibility by setting leadership roles within the regional teams; rather than making it an issue for national level departments, RAAT leadership would be determined by individuals and interests by each team. The programme's willingness to adopt practices outside of the box has been key to its success in establishing new sub-national institutions.

If we want to make Albay a liveable province, then we have to improve our health sector. We do not want to act when the problem is already there; when there are already many (HIV) cases, it will be more difficult. Is it not better to prevent it, instead of having to give a cure?

- Herbert Borja, Albay Provincial Government Board Member and Co-Chair, Albay AIDS Council

Sustainability

The value of the Programme's work in building sub-national institutions and advancing local interventions can already be seen. RAATs have been instrumental in facilitating dialogues between LGUs and local community groups focused on the most-at-risk-populations of men who have sex with men and transgender persons. These groups, the focus of a different component of UNDP's HIV Programme, have been mostly under-targeted and misunderstood in traditional HIV responses. However, the identification of local AIDS champions and the formation of local AIDS councils have given them a forum to express their needs and voices and become more involved in crafting local prevention programmes.

There are open issues to be addressed, to ensure long-term sustainability of the RAATs and support of local AIDS champions and councils.

- RAATs are currently composed of representatives from DILG, DOH, and DSWD. These groups are not the only stakeholder departments, and there have been discussions about including the Department of Tourism and the Department of Labor and Employment amongst others. This will require RAATs to revisit composition, areas of responsibility, and issues of ownership and national reporting structures; the long-term viability of the RAATs

will also require a more well-defined funding mechanism that includes cost-sharing among participating organizations;

- A large portion of the work that has been done by the Programme is awareness building and training of staff at regional and local levels, which makes staff turnover a significant issue especially amongst elected local officials. While the long term benefits of having HIV-aware leaders spread throughout the country is undeniable, in the short-term, the effectiveness of the RAATs and local AIDS councils will depend on continued training and support outside of the scope of this programme;
- As more local AIDS councils are established and more HIV responses are undertaken, there will be greater need for the systematic collection and dissemination of knowledge and experiences gained, as well as the implementation of a monitoring mechanism based on the national monitoring and evaluation framework.
- Successfully addressing these open issues can greatly support the efficiency of the sub-national institutions that the 'Leadership for Effective and Sustained Responses to HIV and AIDS' component of UNDP's HIV Programme has helped institute. The real impacts in the future will validate these activities, as the institutions are given time to affect local HIV interventions across the nation.

Catalytic HIV and AIDS Mitigating Programmes

In 2010, UNDP started the C.H.A.M.P. award to recognize some of the most noteworthy local HIV responses in the country and to set precedence to other LGUs. These responses exemplified strong leadership and successful multi-sectoral participation and partnerships. Beyond commending awardees for their achievement, the C.H.A.M.P. winners provide other LGUs with successful examples of local responses to reference as models. In addition, emerging C.H.A.M.P.s are also recognized for promising initiatives, often in the early stages.

Award Winners:

2010 (Arlene Zambales Center HIV and AIDS) from Zambales City which demonstrated commitment and

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