

Global HIV/AIDS Initiatives Network: Strategy for Advocacy and Dissemination

Key principles

At the *Researching Global Health Initiatives: Developing and International Network* workshop in London (21-24 March 2006), participants embraced the idea that research should result in policy change. This document is to assist Network members in planning a key part of the research process – to remind all members to allocate sufficient resources and time for advocacy and dissemination.

The devastating nature of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the large amounts of funds flowing into countries make this research highly sensitive. Countries are under pressure to be accountable to GHIs, and hence have significant interest in whether studies produce positive or negative accounts, as well as being accountable to the intended beneficiaries (vulnerable groups and PLWAs). Having a clear advocacy and dissemination strategy will help to address and allay stakeholder concerns.

Among the principles to help define a strategy for advocacy and dissemination, the following are important:

- Identify the most appropriate ‘leverage points’ for catalysing policy change. This involves engaging with appropriate stakeholders, organisations and decision-making bodies, including government and non-government organisations (NGOs), and delivering findings at appropriate points in policymaking cycles. It is important to target the specific policies it is expected the research can influence, rather than unrealistically aiming for wholesale policy or legislative change across the health sector. It will therefore be essential to be familiar with policy contexts, and decision-making structures and processes within countries, and to tailor communication and advocacy strategies accordingly.
- Early and ongoing dialogue and engagement with key stakeholders is critical in promoting their buy-in. Presenting results at the end of studies alone will not effectively influence policy. Consulting stakeholders in the early stages of research and at appropriate intervals will help ensure studies are relevant to current policy directions.
- Research findings need to address the interests of all the different stakeholders and be relevant to current policy directions. Messages need to be delivered using a range of formats that are accessible to different stakeholder groups and appropriate to their needs. Research should provide policy-relevant messages and make concrete recommendations that decision-makers are able to act on.

Advocacy and dissemination within countries

The following covers some important issues to keep in mind when planning advocacy and dissemination activities:

1. There may be considerable sensitivities about the research process within countries since GHI resources represent a large proportion of country budgets for health. Recipient countries are accountable to GHIs and are often chronically short of resources, and hence have an interest in whether studies produce positive or negative accounts, if they fear these could influence ongoing GHI support as part of performance-based funding.

- Researchers need to clarify the purpose of the country study with stakeholders: it is not an audit of a country's performance against targets set by GHIs, but are intended to generate lessons that will help extend the evidence-base for policymaking and strategic planning.

2. Country stakeholders such as policymakers are likely to see the research as more beneficial and less threatening if their country study is part of a network of coordinated country studies.

- Researchers should emphasise to country stakeholders that studies will raise common issues and problems experienced across multiple countries relating to GHIs, as well as country-specific issues. This should help alleviate sensitivities about the impact the study findings may have on GHI funding within countries.

3. Stakeholder buy-in is critical to the success of country studies at national and sub-national levels. The following steps could be taken:

- Early and ongoing communication with stakeholders is essential. Consulting key policymakers/decision-makers and other stakeholders will help to focus the study on those issues that are of current and future policy relevance.
- Inviting stakeholders to be a part of an advisory group would also help focus the study on appropriate policy issues, as well as promoting stakeholder buy-in.
- Clarify the study objectives with stakeholders from the outset and demonstrate its relevance to them, as well as how findings will be communicated, to whom and how different stakeholders may use them.
- Stakeholder workshops and meetings are important means of launching a study.

4. Engaging a range of organisations and decision-making partnerships is central. Targeting particular messages and recommendations to the most relevant organisations will increase the prospects that they will be acted on. Key organisations could include:

- The Ministry of Health (including National AIDS Control Programmes – NACPs) and other relevant government departments.
- National AIDS Councils or similar national AIDS coordinating bodies.
- In-country representatives of (a) multilateral agencies that have a remit for supporting governments such as UNAIDS, WHO, World Bank and UNICEF and (b) bilateral donor agencies that fund or deliver HIV/AIDS-related interventions.
- Country representatives or entities that are linked to specific Global Health Initiatives such as GFATM Principal Recipient(s), Local Fund Agent(s) and members of the Country Coordinating Mechanism.
- NGOs and networks of NGOs.
- People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and related advocacy groups.
- Sub-national stakeholders such as local authorities, district health managers and local NGOs.

5. Generating different types of findings and messages during the study will be useful:

- Early outputs could include the results of policy and service delivery mapping studies.

- Later outputs could include lessons on what works in particular settings, the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to implementation and the factors enabling and inhibiting interventions.
- Outputs towards the end of the study should identify the positive, negative and unanticipated effects of Global HIV/AIDS Initiatives.

6. Producing concrete and achievable recommendations for policymakers and other decision-makers will be essential.

7. Research needs to provide stakeholders with understandings of a complex, multifaceted policy context. It is important when disseminating findings to clarify complex issues and to synthesise findings so that packages of information are accessible and useable.

8. Findings should be presented in a range of appropriate formats:

- Research reports are important outputs. These can be supported by policy briefing sheets as a more effective way of communicating messages to policy-makers.
- Using websites, email briefings and the mass media may be appropriate and effective means of conveying messages stemming from the research.
- Stakeholder workshops and meetings are important means of sharing findings with and getting feedback from policymakers and other stakeholders at appropriate intervals. It can be useful to plan ahead by identifying future country-level decision-making meetings and aiming to attend these. Knowing who will attend, and the meeting agenda will help to tailor messages and present them in the most appropriate format.
- Individual face-to-face meetings may be appropriate for engaging some stakeholders and organisations around issues of particular relevance to them, and may help to communicate and get feedback on more sensitive issues that they might otherwise reject if made more publicly.
- Working closely with an existing HIV/AIDS related body such as the National AIDS Council over the course of the study should be an effective means of promoting country buy-in and ownership for country studies, engaging a range of organisations and enhancing the prospects that the findings are acted upon.
- Appointing an in-country organisation to act as an advocacy partner may be an effective approach to translating research into policy. NGOs may be relatively independent and flexible, but may lack credibility among policymakers. A government agency may have credibility among other government agencies, but may be resistant to communicating research findings that are contentious or critical. Nevertheless, whilst an advocacy partner may provide valuable support it is important for country teams to retain control over these processes.

Advocacy and dissemination at the global level

1. The Network will disseminate research findings to the following groups of global level stakeholders:

- The Global Health Initiatives for HIV/AIDS: the GFATM, PEPFAR and World Bank MAP.
- Multilateral agencies including UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation.
- Key government development agencies supporting HIV/AIDS interventions across the country studies including Irish Aid, USAID, Sida, DANIDA, DfID and others.
- Network and country study donors, e.g. OSI.
- Relevant global organisations such as the Clinton Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Relevant global civil society groups, networks of PLWHA and key groups that advocate around policy issues on global public health.

2. An important role of the Network is to coordinate and streamline communication with global stakeholders in order to promote greater impact on policy change. The transaction costs for research users in engaging with a single Network of studies will be lower than with multiple uncoordinated studies. Indeed, the collective power of the messages emerging from many complementary country studies is likely to be much greater than any one individually, thereby increasing the prospects of influencing global policies.

3. It is important to generate both context-specific and multi-country policy lessons. Hence, a key activity of the Network will be to generate comparative outputs on key themes and synthesise findings from multiple country studies, to inform policy across countries as well at global level.

4. Support in preparing study outputs for global audiences and peer review among Network members will be a key means of improving the quality and increasing the legitimacy of the studies, and hence extend their global impact.

5. It is important to consult with global stakeholders on the most effective approaches to communicate with them. As at the national level, a range of approaches to advocacy and dissemination will be appropriate including:

- Reports, briefing sheets and email briefings.
- The Network website including links from and to other related websites.
- Participation and presentations at global stakeholder workshops, meetings and international conferences.
- Individual face-to-face meetings with key global stakeholders.
- Inviting global stakeholders to attend the Network international workshops in 2007 and 2008.
- Generating articles for international peer-reviewed academic journals.

For further information on the *Global HIV/AIDS Initiatives Network* please contact:

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Or visit the *Global HIV/AIDS Initiatives Network* website:
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