REPORT ON REGIONAL GRANTS FINDS INFORMATION BARRIERS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

A new research report has found that civil society and community groups face a range of critical information barriers with respect to the Global Fund's regional grants in Africa. The report acknowledged that while several studies have detailed civil society participation and community engagement in national-level Global Fund processes at the national level, few have sought to understand the extent to which these groups are able to engage at the regional level. The title of the report – "You just find things happening in a cloud over your head" – captures the overall disconnect that civil society involved in implementation on the ground express about regional grants. A GFO article with the same title shared preliminary results from this research project back in April.

Image not found or type unknown

The report was published by the Eastern Africa National Networks of AIDS Service Organizations (EANNASO) in its capacity as host for the Regional Platform for Communication and Coordination for Anglophone Africa (part of the Global Fund's Community, Rights and Gender Special Initiative).

Results in the report were drawn from 43 key informant interviews conducted with stakeholders in four African countries: Botswana, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Uganda. EANNASO chose to conduct interviews in these countries because they were involved in a high number of regional grants; these four countries are included in nine out of the eleven regional grants in Anglophone Africa. Both Botswana and Uganda are each included in five regional grants.

Seven key themes are presented in the report: knowledge, communication, engagement, coordination,sustainability, accountability, and value.

According to those interviewed for the research project, the limited knowledge of regional grants among civil society at country level (the first theme of the report) stems from the narrower consultation and dialogue process leading up to regional concept note development, as compared to the country dialogues that occur for national funding requests. Research participant Dennis Tinyebwe, the Executive Director of the African Network for Care of Children Affected by HIV/AIDS (ANNECA) in Uganda, said "I don't think they understand regional grants as well as they understand the country grants, and again it's largely because of the mechanisms of involving them." He said that knowledge would improve if regional applicants were required to go and consult in each of the countries that are part of their program, but that this is often too time consuming and resource intensive. In another analysis of regional grants, some regional applicants expressed frustration about investing a year and a half into concept note development for a three-year program.

The second theme – communication – centered on the role of the CCM as the key vehicle for feeding information about regional grants back to communities. According to the report, community representatives are involved in concept note development to some extent, but feedback to communities later on in the process is limited. This is largely linked with CCM (dis)functionality. Dick Muwhezi, with The AIDS Support Organization (TASO) in Uganda, said, "We never got to see the final product, but I know the consultations were continuous and I hope it made a difference." The report noted that CCM members are seen as responsible for communicating back to their constituents about progress on regional grants, but this does not always take place. Oscar Motsumi, with the Botswana Network of AIDS Service Organizations (BONASO), and a civil society CCM member in Botswana, acknowledged that feedback is hampered. "We are challenged in terms of how we represent out constituency, because we never have resources to get our members together," said Motsumi.

Image not found or type unknown

Joshua Wamboga-Uganda Network of AIDS Service Organizations (UNASO)

The fourth theme in the report was coordination, something which is critically important given the high number of regional grants which often overlap. "Coordination becomes the constraint. Then you suffer," said Junior

Molefe, with Men for Health and Gender Justice, in Botswana. Civil society and community groups expressed that coordination is a challenge in large part because people do not know who is implementing the regional grants. As a result, duplication may be occurring and going unnoticed. This was mentioned with respect to both between national and regional grants and between multiple regional grants which cover the same county. Indeed, four of the seven respondents from Nigeria stated that they do not know who the principal recipients (PRs) or sub-recipients (SRs) of any regional grants are. Jacqueline Alesi, from the Uganda Network of Young People Living with HIV/AIDS (UNYPA), emphasized that knowing who the implementers are is critical since "our role is to make sure that during implementation we are there, to help monitor."

The fifth theme in the report underscored the need for community ownership at local level in order for regional grants to be truly sustainable. "Regional grants can be sustainable if the community are involved in the development and implementation of the project," said Mike Akanji from the Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERs) in Nigeria. Nana Gleeson, with the Botswana Network on Ethics, Law and HIV and AIDS (BONELA), agreed, noting that "We've seen previous grants that didn't do so well. I think it was because of some inherent lack of ownership." Another interesting point on sustainability was raised by Pilot Mathambo, with the Pilot Mathambo Centre for Men's Health, in Botswana, who further emphasized the importance of local-level involvement: "If you do legal and policy change at regional level, you also need to change people's attitudes on the ground, otherwise it's no use."

On the theme of accountability, the report highlighted issues of key populations representation in particular. Many of the regional grants in Anglophone Africa center on human rights issues and network strengthening for key populations. A key informant from Nigeria noted that "One of the [accountability] mechanisms is the CCM, as communities and affected populations are sitting on these." But, Mike Akanji (TIERs) noted that "The regional programs have one regional coordinating mechanisms (RCMs). However, key populations are not represented on the RCM."

Engagement with regional grants (the third theme) is clearly affected by the limited knowledge and communication about what is going on. A member of the Mozambique Civil Society Platform for Health Coordination (PLASOC) noted that "since we participate in the development of the national strategic plans, we know about the content of the national grants. Not the regional ones." A member of the Mozambique CCM also highlighted that engagement is often hindered as some regional grants appear to go around the CCM when engaging with countries. She said, "How can the regional applicants enter a country through the Ministries and forget there is a coordinating institution? Or, if they don't recognize this institution, there is something wrong!"

The last theme explored in the report – value – exposed respondents' views about whether they think engaging in regional grants is worth it for them. Despite the aforementioned challenges, most respondents felt strongly that regional grants are critically important and that civil society and communities should be supported to better engage. Laila Alberto Jose Sueye, with Tiyane Vavasate, a sex worker – led organization in Mozambique, said "I'm very impressed that the Global Fund remembers sex workers. In my country, nobody wants to talk about sex workers." She continued to say that the "Global Fund improves the enabling environment, which is very important. Regional grants are important for this." Maatla Otsogile with the CCM Secretariat in Botswana agreed, noting, "We think there's strength when you combine our efforts. Doing something regionally is very, very, important. These regional grants are very, very necessary."

The report closes with five recommendations (or "action points") resulting from the interview analysis:

- increase access to information on regional grants, beyond relying on CCMs as the sole communication channel;
- increase community involvement in the conceptualization, design, and evaluation of regional grants;
- create opportunities for civil society and community groups at country level to be recipients of certain components of regional grants in order to ensure greater buy-in and sustainability;
- prioritize technical assistance, capacity building, and funding which facilitates civil society and community groups' ability to hold regional grants accountable; and
- provide consistent and reliable feedback to all countries and communities involved.

Annexes to the report include tables and maps of the 11 regional grants covering Anglophone African countries, including the names of PRs, the amounts of the grants, the countries covered, the scope of the grants, and key contact details.

[Read More](#)