



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

THERE ARE MORE CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES ON CCMS NOW, BUT DO THEY HAVE THE SKILLS THEY NEED?

In the past few years, representation of the civil sector – NGOs and communities – on CCMs has increased, particularly in response to recommendations that key populations be included. However, the initial excitement that accompanied this change has been replaced by growing frustration and complaints from different stakeholders.

What happened is that there was a realization that the technical capacity of the civil society representatives matters as much as their physical presence, and that this capacity was often lacking.

It is desirable, in particular, for civil society representatives to be familiar with the Global Fund procedures and policies; to have experience in budget planning, proposal development, and conducting advocacy; to be able negotiate with the state officials; and to be accountable when representing big group of populations. Thus, effective participation requires multiple skills.

Some community representatives are unhappy with their own performance, and some are criticized by the communities and organizations that nominated them. This discussion occurs frequently at regional gatherings and in closed community pages on Facebook.

A member of the Kyrgyz NGO “Tais Plus,” Kristina Makhnicheva, believes that part of the problem is that organizations that were doing advocacy work a decade ago are now delivering services because The Global Fund focused on service provision for so many years – and, so, these organizations have lost their advocacy skills.

There is a general consensus among CSO and community representatives that, in the absence of standards and text books on community involvement, one of the most effective ways to resolve this problem is to “learn by doing” – i.e. to roll up your sleeves, get involved, make mistakes, and then learn from these mistakes. GFO talked with a number of these representatives. They said that the growing number of regional initiatives were particularly useful in this regard.

The joint advocacy initiatives organized by the regional programs and the program monitoring widely practiced by community representatives in the Russian Federation and Kyrgyzstan were mentioned as relevant opportunities to learn. Online webinars were also considered effective for getting information and building skills. If such webinars are recorded, they can cover a wide audience.

“Community empowerment starts by formal participation,” Vitali Rabinciuc, the leader of PULS, an advocacy group for people who inject drugs, told GFO. “When a community representative is given opportunity to participate, he or she sees the gap in competences, and so starts thinking about self-development and learning.”

The Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (EHRN) leads and participates in a number of regional programs implementing cross-country advocacy and community empowerment activities. EHRN’s program director, Anna Dovbakh, told GFO that “understanding of Global Fund language is important for community representatives, but it is not a key obstacle to their meaningful involvement and to their ability to influence decisions.”

Dovbakh said that based on EHRN’s experience, one of the factors that could make CCMs and its working groups more productive is regular participation in all CCM gatherings (not just the official meetings). This is not always possible, she said, as usually there is no funding available to cover the costs of transport and accommodation for community representatives who are not working for grant-funded projects or NGOs.

Another factor, Dovbakh said, is having basic knowledge of budget processes, economic planning principles, national programs, and state procedures.

A third factor is being able to nominate to the CCM community representatives who are influential and who would be accepted and listened to. However, Dovbakh said, there is a significant lack of experienced community leaders. “Unfortunately, community mobilization components of national grants from The Global Fund and other donors in our region vanished at least three years ago. This mean that only a few leaders from communities who are funded to provide services could remain in the area. National networks that are not providing services are disappearing, which mean that there is no system of watch dogging.”

One of the regional initiatives supported by The Global Fund that target community empowerment is Harm Reduction Works – Fund It! The initiative, which covers six countries, trains communities on budget processes (including how to advocate on budget issues), and on NGO skills.

Another regional program dealing with the technical capacity of the communities is Partnership for Equitable Access to the HIV Care Continuum in the EECA Region. A partnership between EHRN and the East Europe and Central Asia Union of People Living with HIV (ECUO), this initiative aims at enhancing the effectiveness, accessibility, and sustainability of HIV treatment programs in the EECA region with special emphasis on KAPs.

EHRN often organizes various workshops, trainings and meetings to enable community leaders and representatives to enhance their policy advocacy, budgeting, and representation skills. One example is a workshop conducted in Kiev on 21-23 June for CSO and community representatives from Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia on “the budget, advocacy, and evaluation of investments and priorities of HIV

prevention, diagnostics, treatment, and care services.”

Many of the training activities that are part of the regional programs are really workshops where participants discuss problems, share experiences, and come up with ideas for how to get things done. This is a form of learning by doing.

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