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FIVE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ICASO FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN GLOBAL FUND COUNTRY DIALOGUE

In a second guidance note as part of its Navigating the New Funding Model^[1] series, the International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO) has developed a series of five key recommendations for better engagement in country dialogue by civil society organizations (CSO) and representatives of key affected populations (KAP).

The Global Fund has made clear that grants under the new funding model (NFM) will not be approved unless there is documented involvement of those stakeholders or their representatives in the development of the national strategic plan from which the concept note for Global Fund grants must be drawn.

While the Fund has resisted being prescriptive about the extent to which these groups must be involved in the dialogue process that leads to the development of the concept note, there has been an increase in technical assistance available to countries in order to solicit and improve their participation.

The country dialogue process involves a number of stages outlined by the Fund^[2], which, as ICASO's note emphasizes, should not be limited to: (i) single meetings of the CCM, (ii) a Global Fund-specific process, and (iii) conclude with the submission of the concept note.

Country dialogue, according to the note Civil Society and Key Populations and the Country Dialogue, is described as “an ongoing and dynamic process through which the various partners establish and evolve a shared vision for responding to the diseases in each country”, which ICASO explains will not resolve all issues ahead of concept note submission.

It suggests three areas of opportunity for CSO engagement: (i) in documentation of impact through evaluation of programs, (ii) in the establishment of the health sector and disease specific landscape in

country, and (iii) in expanding the space for the inclusion of human rights and the input of KAPs in program development and implementation.

As of April 2014, when the note was published, the number of countries that have initiated their country dialogue process constitutes only a handful of the 123 countries eligible for Global Fund support from 2014-2016, among them three early applicants: Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar and Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe's experience is described in the guidance note as an example of an expedited country dialogue process. Led and coordinated by the CCM, with the inclusion of CSOs and KAP representatives, the process took one month from consultation to concept note development. This expedited process was possible as the NSP was already in place^[3].

Myanmar developed its concept note before the transition to the NFM. The pre-existing concept note drafts were used during the country dialogue processes and it was noted that this limited the influence that the process had on the final concept notes.

The DRC country dialogue process began eight months before concept note submission. This process was led by the CCM and involved a wide variety of stakeholders from across the country. This longer period of country dialogue enabled CSOs and KAP representatives to ensure that the needs of KAPs were comprehensively covered in the concept note.

Finally, the guidance note addresses Moldova's work to bring CSOs and KAP representatives into caucus to develop a comprehensive strategy that will be used to advance their priorities during the country dialogue process.

The guidance note provides 5 key recommendations for effective country dialogue and 3 points for managing the process:

1. Develop a cohesive strategy by CSOs and KAP representatives before the country dialogue will provide better outcomes during concept note development.
2. Give information on the NFM to CSOs and other stakeholders through workshops will allow for higher quality participation during country dialogue.
3. Engage with the development and review of the national strategy is extremely important in order to assess the quality of KAP data.
4. Allow for mechanisms to enable KAPs to contribute will improve communication with constituents and improve transparency of the country dialogue process.
5. Document comprehensively all meetings and resolutions along with invitations to non-civil society CCM members will strengthen the civil society position within CCMs and during concept note development.

Management of the country dialogue process may be improved by ensuring all documents and meetings are in the appropriate language, that there is inclusion of remote and rural communities, and that country dialogue is approached as more than just a series of meetings leading up to concept note submission.

Country dialogue should be positioned as an inclusive process of review, development, and adaption of budgeted disease-specific NSPs along with the process of raising funds to implement parts of the NSPs through development of a concept note.

[1] <http://www.icaso.org/files/civil-society-global-fund-application-preparedness-guide>

[2] <http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/fundingmodel/process/>

[3] http://www.aidspace.org/gfo_article/country-dialogue-lessons-zimbabwe

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