

## e-Dialogue summary

### Topic 6: The future role of UNAIDS in a changing global environment (06.04-12-04)

#### Dear colleagues and friends!

We would like to thank all of those that have actively participated in the e-Dialogue! This last week has been rich in responses from colleagues in the field, from co-sponsoring agencies and the civil society alike, advising UNAIDS on what it should keep in mind and as a focus for the next years to come and bring a fresh and new way of addressing the HIV epidemic.

The week 6 topic related specifically to UNAIDS, the Secretariat and family of co-sponsors, on its role and effectiveness, especially in the context of the financial crisis and shrinking resources for the HIV response.

- What are the comparative advantages of the UNAIDS secretariat and cosponsors, as a joint program of the UN on HIV and AIDS? What should be its core priorities and what should be dropped?
- How can UNAIDS help in voicing the needs of countries and communities and use its convening power to merge the global agenda on HIV and AIDS with country realities? What do you think UNAIDS should be doing more at the country-level with governments and civil society?
- How can we create a culture of common purpose, where all partners in countries are working towards the same goals?
- How can UNAIDS help in sustaining scale up towards Universal Access in the current financial crisis? What innovative strategies should be pursued to sustain/increase domestic funding?

**Here are the main themes that emerged from the discussions and that were strongly advocated by all.**

#### Advocating for a human rights approach

UNAIDS needs to take a more proactive and normative role grounded in human rights, even though it may challenge traditional views and approaches of national governments and the UN agencies. UNAIDS guiding role and responsibilities includes that it must ensure that human rights and issues such as gender, sexuality and injecting drug use are placed at the centre of government's development agenda. It must ensure that the responses are promoting and upholding individual human rights of people living with HIV, and are linked to broader multisectorial responses, such as maternal health, sexual reproductive programs, poverty alleviation and education.

Some raised that there are dangerous trends to 'remedicalize' the response to HIV by focusing on biomedical fixes, and neglecting structural issues such as human rights and gender. Such trends fail to acknowledge that AIDS often derives from and generates social inequalities, stigma and discrimination and other human rights abuses. UNAIDS must address the human rights violations that continue to drive HIV vulnerability and must continue and strengthen its commitment and capacity to support governments, donors and bilateral agencies to address human rights issues and advocate against discriminatory laws. One participant mentioned that UNAIDS should be an 'activist program' within the Joint program, and ensure real leadership on human rights at the global, regional and country level. This could be done by training staff on human rights. Do you think that should be the case?

#### HIV and health systems strengthening

It was recommended by many that UNAIDS should urgently start making the bridge between HIV programming and its impact on health systems strengthening. For example, developing health care infrastructure and addressing the shortage of health workers may enhance the effectiveness

of the response in many countries. UNAIDS should start seeing HIV not as an emergency issue but rather as a long term chronic disease, and start addressing it accordingly. We must help ensure the sustainability of the response with a long term vision. Actively thinking about availability of 2<sup>nd</sup> line treatment and keeping those people already on treatment is critical for the future. To that end, there is a need for UNAIDS to support more actively research and development of new HIV prevention technologies, evaluate their efficiencies and explore their implementation in different context of epidemic.

We must start thinking about HIV in the future, and what will be the next structural challenges in the next 50 years—like the financial crisis is one at the moment. Encouraging funding of health systems strengthening might also be very beneficial for the HIV response.

### **Greater focus on key populations**

An essential part of UNAIDS response for the next coming years, will be to give greater attention to key populations and most at risk groups—its is time that we take a more serious look at the socio-economic drivers of the epidemic. UNAIDS must continue advocating for the involvement of people living with HIV (GIPA principle) and sustain its efforts for a more meaningful involvement of PLWHIV in decision-making processes.

The concept of UNAIDS as a 'voice of the voiceless' was very much welcomed by participants in the e.-Dialogue. UNAIDS must include human rights and access to justice as well as accountability mechanisms for breaching those rights of the most vulnerable groups. A concrete demonstration of this would be the inclusion of stigma and discrimination as the 'fourth pillar' in HIV response programming, as called by one of the contributors.

### **Decentralizing the response to the rural areas**

As mentioned by many of you, it will be important in the future to increase access to services to the rural areas through the decentralization of services, and thinking of innovative ways of providing health care to those in need (i.e. task-shifting, homebased care, etc..). The communities can be fully engaged in the provision of care and monitoring and evaluation efforts.

### **Prevention, prevention, prevention!**

Preventing new infections was stated as a major priority for UNAIDS, especially injecting more resources and efforts in the PMTCT. It should promote a comprehensive response to HIV, advocating for increased VCT, awareness, education and condom use, as well as promoting new prevention technologies such as microbicide. There must be a much greater focus on funding the prevention interventions that have been to shown to be effective. Access to sexual education will be key to scale up prevention efforts. Evidence demonstrates that young people currently are not equipped with the knowledge that they need to protect themselves. One member of UNESCO, called for education to remain a core priority of the UNAIDS joint program, and that it should address sex and sexually transmitted infections. School-based HIV education programs offers a very cost-effective means of prevention in schools and UNAIDS should actively promote this in the context of their prevention campaigns. It should also emphasize responsible sexual behaviour, as mentioned by one participant.

### **Leading the UNAIDS joint program**

UNAIDS the Secretariat needs to continue uniting all the cosponsors around a common HIV agenda, and assist the agencies in their HIV programming. It should be the repository of information both national and local data, IEC materials and other HIV related information and should effectively disseminate this information to all its partners. Knowledge sharing is critical and UNAIDS should take leadership on being at the top of the scientific news, best practices and advances to inform HIV programming.

UNAIDS should also start mobilizing a lot more support from the co-sponsoring agencies, because of its great position and comparative advantage as a coordinating body and convener.

UNAIDS should therefore take full advantage of its position and use its links and partnership to mobilize the international community of partners for full support of the HIV agenda.

One person mentioned that it should avoid being a technical agency, as mentioned by some, but rather continue playing its role of coordination and convener. Some questioned the relevance of the theme groups. One main challenge raised was that of ensuring that the coordinated UNAIDS response is appropriately aligned with national priorities, and not a stand alone independent plan reflecting the agencies agendas. UNAIDS must foster a culture of common purpose, aligned to national priorities and needs.

### **Intensify work with community-based organizations**

CBO are a critical agent of change in the HIV response, as they have direct links to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. UNAIDS, through its partnership advisers, needs to build stronger links with CBOs—and not necessarily going through bigger and more visible civil society groups—this was raised as an issue. Expanding partnerships should be a priority for UNAIDS in order to reach the most people possible.

### **Financial crisis and mobilization of resources**

In these times of financial crisis, UNAIDS will need to more actively mobilize financial resources for the epidemic, and offices will need to better monitor fund utilization and allocation to different projects and their performances. HIV programs in communities will need to be supported and empowered. Local organizations, especially youth groups, find it very difficult to sustain their programs due to a lack of funding. It is imperative that UNAIDS ensures that with limited resources, these are spend effectively and equitably.

### **Linking with the media**

UNAIDS should expand its partnership at the country level to include national and local media, and make HIV issues known to the local population, either through the news or local radio programs and shows. This is critical to raise the issue of HIV and promote simple messages around HIV transmission and modes of transmission. Work with the media should be part of HIV programming.

### **HIV programs in the workplace**

Through actions in the workplace (including in the informal economy and with migrant and mobile workers), we can reach the age group most affected by HIV. Using HIV in the workplace programs to reach young adults should be used as an effective prevention strategy. ILO is at the moment working on a new and stronger international labour instrument on HIV/AIDS.

### **THANK YOU!**

All these great insightful recommendations are being compiled into an e-Dialogue report, and revised in-house to be available shortly to all partners. UNAIDS is extremely grateful for all your support and contributions and has learned a lot from this process. Your recommendations and suggestions will have a strategic implication directing UNAIDS' policy in the coming years.

Kind regards,

The moderation team