

# Working with civil society to support the national response to HIV and AIDS: experiences from Zambia

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Image: Crowd at Sports Day  
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## STARZ in context

The **Strengthening the AIDS Response Zambia (STARZ)** programme provided technical support to NAC Zambia from May 2004 until August 2009. This has included support for improved participation of civil society and the private sector in the national multisectoral response to HIV and AIDS. The STARZ programme was funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), with technical assistance supplied by HLSP in partnership with JHU-CCP, HDA and PMTC(Z) Ltd.

## Introduction

It is widely accepted that civil society is a key sector in national HIV responses. Civil society is often able to achieve results in areas inaccessible to government and can be an important service provider, especially for interventions relating to HIV prevention and impact mitigation (UNAIDS 2006). Without the effective involvement of civil society HIV responses are likely to be significantly compromised (Poku 2005).

Global processes, including the “Three Ones” principles and the 2004 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, provide countries with a framework for multisectoral strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), harmonisation and coordination (CCIC 2006). Within such frameworks, civil society participation is seen as an important principle, both for ensuring that the perspectives of non-state actors are heard, and for promoting full country ownership. However, successive international reviews suggest that progress towards civil society engagement has been “uneven” and high-level policy statements now advocate for stronger mechanisms for working with civil society (CIVICUS 2007, UNAIDS 2007).

Although international guidelines have been developed to support community and civil society involvement in national HIV responses (see, for example, ICASO et al 2007; Cabassi 2004) there appears to be minimal guidance on how National AIDS Coordinating Authorities can work with civil society partners. Moreover, there is little sharing of lessons learned on the mechanisms and approaches being used (SADC 2007).

The DFID-funded STARZ Programme has been providing technical support to the National HIV/AIDS, STI, TB Council (NAC) in Zambia since 2004. An important component of the programme has been support for civil society's participation in the national response. This has been addressed through administration of a £3.9 million Civil Society Fund and technical support for strengthening NAC's coordination activities. The purpose of this paper is to present the “working model” for engaging civil society developed by NAC Zambia in collaboration with the STARZ Programme.

The working model complements the “capacity development approach” described in an earlier technical approach paper (Mundy et al. 2008) and is intended to assist practitioners in better defining the desired outcomes of work with civil society and applying concepts such as consultation, participation and involvement.

## Concepts of Civil Society

The term “civil society” is used in this paper to refer to all civic organisations, associations and networks that occupy the “social space” between the family and the State who come together to advocate their common interests through collective action (UNFPA/WHO 2008). In the Zambian context, this includes non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), churches and religious institutions, traditional leaders, traditional healers, trade unions, cultural organisations, professional bodies and the media. Within the context of the national HIV response, the term also embraces a number of interest groups that have a particular role to play, for example, youth, people living with HIV (PLHIV), gender-based groups and people with disabilities.

## Civil Society and the National HIV Response in Zambia

Civil society is widely recognised as playing a significant role in strengthening the multisectoral HIV response (Birdsall and Kelly 2007). The potential “added value” of civil society organisations (CSOs) in extending HIV prevention, treatment, care, support and impact mitigation services is well documented (UNAIDS 2006). Moreover, CSOs have demonstrated an important role in facilitating community mobilisation, social accountability, advocacy, policy dialogue, mainstreaming, capacity building and information/skills exchange (ibid). Notably, the expanding roles of civil society beyond HIV service delivery parallels the development of contemporary “good governance” approaches (sanz Corella et al. 2006) and illustrates that CSOs can have a particular role in facilitating linkages between HIV responses, health care and social development in general (Kruse 2002).

In Zambia, some of the desired outcomes of civil society involvement in the national HIV response have been summarised as follows:<sup>1</sup>

- Public sector service delivery complemented and extended – including provision of more comprehensive HIV services/activities adapted to local needs and delivered in locally relevant ways;
- HIV services/activities delivered more cost-effectively through mobilisation of volunteers, skills and resources (local and international);
- Positive behaviour change and prevention enhanced through peer group support, use of role models, promotion of shared values and challenging of harmful practices;
- Increased community mobilisation for the HIV response, with increased local ownership, and improved monitoring and accountability;
- Perspectives of non-governmental stakeholders, including those of vulnerable groups and underserved communities, better represented and pro-poor policies/programmes strengthened;
- Improved communication networks, with linkages at community, regional and international levels extended, to support information exchange, capacity building and sharing of lessons learned.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Mweene and Collins 2007. For a review of international debates on what can actually be attributed to CSOs, and an assessment of data from Zambia, see McIntyre and Carey 2009.

Civil society in Zambia is generally regarded as vibrant and engaged (see sanz Corella et al. 2006). With strong roots in church associations and the trade union movement, civil society has been especially active since the emergence of multi-party democracy in the early 1990s. As in many countries, CSOs were among the first to respond to the HIV pandemic, with initiatives appearing at community level as early as 1986. Since the early 1990s, there has been a tenfold increase in the number of CSOs working in the field of HIV and AIDS in Zambia, with the most dramatic increases occurring since 1999. This has been attributed to an increased availability of funding, as well as an intensified national effort (Birdsall and Kelly 2007).

CSOs in Zambia can be categorised within a four-part typology that includes:<sup>2</sup>

**Type 1 structures:** grassroots and community organisations;

**Type 2 structures:** national and international NGOs, FBOs and other more formalised civil society structures;

**Type 3 structures:** civil society networks, umbrella bodies and associations;

**Type 4 structures:** civil society platforms and fora (where Type 3 structures and some larger Type 2 structures convene around a particular issue).

It is notable that in Zambia around 75% of CSOs working on HIV and AIDS are local organisations (Type 1 and 2 CBOs and NGOs), with over 22% having a religious affiliation, while international NGOs constitute around 20% of the whole (Birdsall and Kelly 2007).

Unlike many other National AIDS Coordinating Authorities, NAC Zambia does not undertake grant-making to implementing partners such as CSOs (Mweene & Collins 2007). The absence of grant-making responsibilities has meant that NAC Zambia has been able to focus attention on development of effective mechanisms for working with civil society, and increasing the sector's engagement in decision-making processes.

## The Problem

A key challenge for NAC Zambia has been the sheer number, diversity and geographical spread of CSOs operating in the field of HIV and AIDS. Moreover, in the past, CSOs complained that their participation in NAC structures and decision-making has been ad hoc, tokenistic and, generally, not transparent.<sup>3</sup>

Over time, political imperatives have meant that NAC Zambia has been careful to emphasise that its legal mandate relates to coordination of the national response to HIV and not to coordination of civil society per se. However, civil society's self-coordination has been weak and it has been difficult for civil society to source adequate resources for developing its own coordination structures and systems. This, in turn, has meant that NAC officers have found it difficult to know which civil society structures and representatives to engage for different tasks at national and decentralised levels. It has also meant that civil society representatives have frequently found it difficult to consult with their constituencies and access strategic information.

## The Response

With support from the STARZ programme, NAC Zambia has developed an approach to working with civil society that aims to address the above issues in a systematic manner. The approach developed sits within a "capacity development" framework. The latter moves beyond traditional capacity building approaches that focus on the knowledge and skills of individuals and organisations, and addresses the concern that trained individuals can make little positive change without a supportive organisation, while an organisation/institution can make little impact without a supportive enabling environment (OECD/DAC 2005).

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<sup>2</sup> See sanz Corella et al. 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Derived from minutes of NAC/STARZ consultation meetings with CSOs in 2005.

The capacity development approach thus aims to simultaneously build the capacity of key individuals or “agents of change” and key organisations, while strengthening the enabling environment. In the case of work with civil society in Zambia this has meant simultaneously building the capacity of civil society representatives and civil society coordination structures (especially Type 3 and 4 structures), while supporting the regulatory, policy and resource environment for the sector. The approach developed has been described in more detail in an HLSP Technical Approach Paper on building strategic partnerships for coordinating the AIDS response in Zambia (Mundy et al 2008).

More recently, NAC Zambia has developed Guidelines on Civil Society Representation in NAC Structures (Musonda and Collins 2009).<sup>4</sup> These guidelines are the culmination of systematic work with NAC structures at national and decentralised levels. They define the requirements of civil society representation, including the knowledge and skills required, as well as the recommended steps for open and transparent selection/election, and constituency consultation. The guidelines are currently being disseminated with technical and training support from NAC that includes knowledge/skills development and provision of resource materials.

Attention has also been given to NAC officers at national and decentralised levels and the need to orientate them to the role of civil society and promote more systematic methods of working with the sector. This, in turn, has led to the development of the ‘NAC model for engaging civil society’ as a standardised approach for working with the sector. Although this model has only recently been formalised, it has emerged from a synthesis of collective experience over several years.

## The NAC Zambia model for engaging civil society

Central to the NAC model for engaging civil society is the idea that different types of NAC activities require different modes of civil society engagement. For example, participation in UNGASS<sup>5</sup> reporting delegations requires a different mode of engagement from joint planning at national and decentralised levels. Experience has led to identification of three different modes of engagement. These tend to fall along a spectrum from consultation and participation, to full involvement, where these concepts are defined as follows:<sup>6</sup>

### Consultation:

Seeking information/advice or “sounding out” civil society representatives and experienced organisations, usually for technically-oriented tasks to ensure accuracy, relevance and/or to seek endorsement.

### Participation:

A more open process that implies democratic stakeholder dialogue and incorporation of “people’s knowledge”. Participation is rooted in processes of information exchange and feedback; it can take place through representation but the emphasis is on sharing the perspectives/experiences of the group, equitable and inclusive information exchange and dialogue.

### Involvement:

In keeping with WHO definitions, civil society involvement is expected to move beyond participation to delivery of programmes and interventions. It includes active definition of problems and objectives, setting priorities, making decisions, follow-up and implementation; it also includes accountability and sharing of responsibilities.

<sup>4</sup> Available through the NAC Zambia website, [www.nac.org.zm](http://www.nac.org.zm)

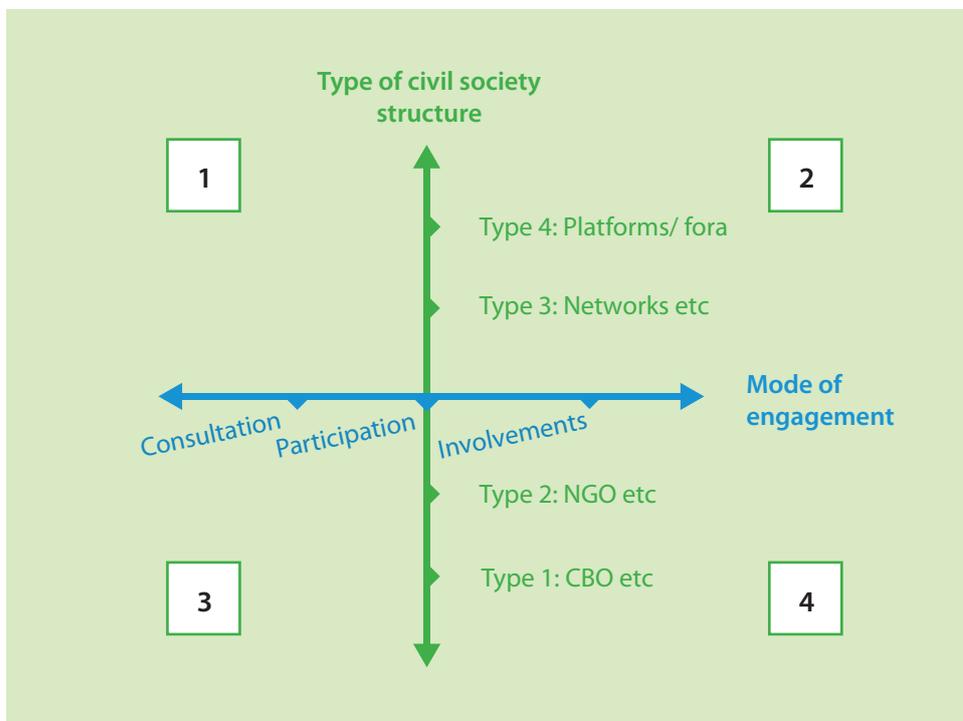
<sup>5</sup> United Nations General Assembly Special Session (on HIV and AIDS) – NAC Zambia is responsible for facilitating compilation of national reports for submission to bi-annual UNGASS meetings.

<sup>6</sup> For a critical discussion of these concepts see Cooke & Kothari 2001 and Cornwall 2004.

Consultation, participation and involvement may not, of course, be mutually exclusive and NAC activities may require different modes of engagement at different stages. What is important is that there is clarity on the reason (or desired outcome) of civil society engagement, and that this is matched to the appropriate mode of engagement.

Next, it is necessary to factor in the different types of civil society structures that need to be involved. For example, joint planning at the district level might best be undertaken with Type 1 CBOs; whereas contributions to Joint Annual Programme Reviews are, perhaps, more efficiently undertaken by Type 3 networks and umbrella bodies. Again, what is required is clarity on the reason for civil society engagement in order to determine the type of civil society structures that needs to be mobilised.

These two aspects of decision-making on civil society engagement can be brought together in the representation below:



*Figure 1: Aspects of decision-making on civil society engagement*

So, for every NAC activity requiring civil society engagement, it is necessary to find the appropriate mix of a) mode of engagement and b) type of civil society structure. Determination of this mix will be shaped by clarification of the reason, or desired outcome, of civil society engagement. For example, in Zambia, development of national Global Fund proposals is often most efficiently done through consultation and participation of civil society networks, platforms and fora (quadrant 1 in Figure 1). However, implementation of Global Fund (GF) grants requires full involvement of CSO principal recipients and sub-recipients (quadrants 2 and 4 in Figure 1); meanwhile, verification of M&E data tends to require consultation with M&E officers in civil society implementing agencies (quadrant 3 in Figure 1).

The following tool supports application of the model to identify the appropriate form of civil society engagement required for any NAC activity.

*Tool 1: Table for completion to identify the appropriate form of civil society engagement for NAC activities*

Task	Reasons for engagement	Mode of engagement required	Type of civil society structure required	Recommended action
For example: Facilitating development of the national GF proposal	For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To build on CSO experiences;</li> <li>To get civil society buy-in...</li> </ul>	For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation</li> <li>Consultation</li> </ul>	For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Type 3 &amp; 4 structures</li> <li>Type 1 &amp; 2 structures</li> </ul>	For example: Invite Type 3 & 4 structures to participate in proposal development based on full consultation with their Type 1 & 2 membership.

## Applying the model: achievements, challenges and lessons learned

The model presented above has been distilled from experience and is now being applied, interpreted and refined through practice. Nevertheless, a number of achievements are associated with application and roll-out of the model:

- Recent reviews of the STARZ programme and the national HIV response have recorded positive gains in NAC's engagement and partnership-building with civil society (see, for example, NAC 2009, Musenge 2008).
- These reviews also indicate that civil society partners value increased transparency in mechanisms for civil society engagement, and this allows them to participate more effectively.
- Minutes of NAC consultation meetings indicate a gradual move towards more purposeful engagement of civil society based on defined objectives.
- Minutes of technical meetings (such as those associated with UNGASS reporting) bear witness to more informed civil society representation, suggesting a positive synergy between application of the model and a capacity development approach to work with civil society.

## Emerging challenges

A number of challenges have also emerged that could impact on the efficacy of the model in the longer term:

- Significant effort is required to promote the model and achieve buy-in. It is necessary to support NAC officers in applying the approach at national and decentralised levels and, at the same time, to orientate civil society stakeholders to the model so that they can participate more effectively.
- The effectiveness of the model depends on strong self-coordination by civil society – civil society needs to be able to provide suitably qualified representatives for consultation, and have systems in place for participation and involvement. There remains considerable scope for further capacity development initiatives in this area, yet limited resources for such activities.
- For some NAC officers, application of the model requires an extra step in planning for events and meetings. This can be perceived as burdensome when schedules are busy.
- The effectiveness of the model is difficult to establish without an M&E system that measures the quality and outcomes of multisectoral partnerships at national and decentralised levels (including those between NAC and civil society). At the present time, these aspects of national M&E systems remain weak in Zambia, as well as in the region (SADC 2007).

## Lessons learned

In terms of lessons learned, there are undoubtedly refinements to be made to the model and some adaptation will be required if it is applied in other countries. The following lessons are, however, informing further roll-out in Zambia:

- The principles of openness, transparency and results-oriented decision-making are crucial for successful application of the model.
- Application of the model needs to go hand-in-hand with capacity development for civil society partners, including strengthening of civil society's self-coordination.
- During orientation and roll-out, stakeholders need to be persuaded that application of the model can reduce excess process and save time in the longer term; it can therefore support the more efficient use of resources.
- Application of the model is oriented to NAC agendas, tasks and activities. These do not always match the agendas and priorities of CSOs. CSOs may, therefore, need to complement the efforts of NAC with their own advocacy campaigns to ensure their perspectives are adequately voiced.

## Conclusion

Despite national and international commitments to include civil society in multisectoral HIV responses, there is little practical information available on how National AIDS Coordinating Authorities can engage CSOs effectively. The development of a “working model” by NAC Zambia in collaboration with the STARZ programme is an attempt to develop a systematic and transparent methodology and support further dialogue on this issue. The contribution of NAC Zambia also illustrates that National AIDS Coordinating Authorities are important sites of learning on coordination of multisectoral programmes. In this respect, work undertaken on engaging civil society has the potential to contribute, not only to national responses to HIV and AIDS, but also to good governance initiatives in general.

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