

AIDS Advocacy Alert

Reviewing national AIDS responses - HOW TO GET INVOLVED



Prepared by the International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO)

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This AIDS ADVOCACY ALERT **is the first in a series on UNGASS and Universal Access** that aims to inform the community sector about opportunities to be involved in country reporting and global reviews of national AIDS responses.

The UNGASS Declaration of Commitment (DoC) on HIV/AIDS, adopted by all UN member states in 2001, provided a comprehensive framework to halt and to reverse the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2010, and included specific and measurable milestones for 2003, 2005 and 2010. Every year, governments report on progress they have made towards implementing these promises.

In addition, as part of the review on progress in 2006, UN member states made further commitments through the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS, including setting ambitious targets for the end of 2006 to scale up the response to the HIV epidemic towards the goal of reaching universal access to comprehensive prevention programs, treatment, care and support by 2010.

Both the UNGASS DoC review and the universal access target setting processes are well underway, within existing commitments to involve civil society. Governments are expected to submit to UNAIDS the country progress report on the implementation of the DoC by **January 31st, 2008**. Countries were also expected to have set universal access targets by now, and UNAIDS is mandated to support national processes that include civil society to validate ambitious and comprehensive targets. The UNGASS DoC implementation review and reporting provides the opportunity to do this validation.

The country progress reports are meant to reflect reviews and input from all national stakeholders, government and civil society, in what UNAIDS calls the "joint responsibility" of national reporting. However, civil society is often not adequately involved. As a result, in 2006, more than 30 "shadow reports" were prepared by the community sector and forwarded to UNAIDS for inclusion in the global report. Shadow reports will be accepted again for the 2007 round of reporting.

Key dates

- **Now!** Multi-stakeholder country reviews of progress, report preparation, and validation.
- **31 January 2008:** Deadline for submission of official and shadow country progress reports to UNAIDS office in Geneva.
- **End of June 2008:** United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York to review progress on the implementation of the DoC.

10 Key Actions **You** Can Take Now:

1. **Ask** the UNAIDS Country Coordinator (UCC) in your country about what the UNAIDS country office is doing to facilitate input from civil society throughout the DoC review process. Reporting is the joint responsibility of national governments and civil society. **Request** that UNAIDS facilitate an inclusive and participatory process among all stakeholders, including in the review, reporting and validation stages. A list of the UCC is available by emailing universalaccess2010@icaso.org.

2. **Mobilize** your civil society colleagues and partner organizations to advocate for the meaningful involvement of the community sector in the review and reporting processes¹. **Establish** a UNGASS (and Universal Access) working group (or similar) within your organization or network and encourage your colleagues to engage actively with these processes.

3. **Contact** the National AIDS Program (or equivalent) and ask about the plans to involve the community sector in the UNGASS review and reporting process. **Find out** who in your country will be leading the preparation of the report and try to arrange a meeting with that person. The review process and report preparation should involve meetings of stakeholders, including for validating the report. Ask your government or the 'lead' person for the exact dates and location of the meetings and offer to help organize them. You could use/adapt the "sample" letter provided as Appendix 1 (with copies of the UNAIDS communications available on request by emailing universalaccess2010@icaso.org).

4. **Find out** if the targets for universal access have been set in your country and ask for any documentation. A list is available on the UNAIDS website (www.unaids.org) and by emailing universalaccess2010@icaso.org. **Share** any documents you receive with your civil society colleagues at the country level and send a copy (if possible) to the email address above.

5. **Share** all the information you find about these processes in your country (internally and with the rest of the world). This will increase accountability and transparency and will provide support for advocacy actions.

6. **Analyze** the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment, the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS and the different reports that your government has prepared in the past (e.g. the country reports of the DoC² and Universal Access targets available on the UNAIDS website). **Determine** if the process has been inclusive and transparent and if the reports submitted reflect the realities of your country.

¹ See "Coordinating with Communities" guidelines on involvement of the community sector in national AIDS responses, found at www.icaso.org, as an aid to planning and supporting meaningful involvement.

² Country reports listed alphabetically at: <http://www.unaids.org/en/publications/2005ungassreporting/default.asp>

10 Key Actions **You** Can Take Now:

7. **Review** your country's response in the last year, based on the UNAIDS Guidelines for monitoring the Declaration of Commitment for 2008 reporting³ and your own knowledge of the needs and programmatic responses. This should be done with the involvement of community sector groups, especially with people living with HIV and other vulnerable and at risk groups. Use data and information available from your own program reports and participatory community assessments. **Contact** ICASO at universalaccess2010@icaso.org for supportive tools and referrals to resources to help undertake for this community sector review.
8. **Participate** in the 'official' review and report writing processes using information and data obtained through your own review and analysis.
9. **Publish shadow reports** and submit to UNAIDS (ungassindicators@unaids.org) if you believe that the 'official' report does not adequately represent the national response to the epidemic, the progress of the implementation of the DoC, and the setting of realistic and comprehensive universal access targets.
10. **Contact** ICASO if you are interested in receiving more information and if you have questions (universalaccess2010@icaso.org), or go to www.icaso.org. Also go to www.ungasshiv.org.

Distribute this AIDS ADVOCACY ALERT and copies of the documents mentioned above to your colleagues.

You can obtain copies of this guide in four languages (English, French, Spanish, and Russian) on the website of the International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO) www.icaso.org.

³ Monitoring the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS: Guidelines on Construction of Core Indicators - 2008 reporting (available at http://data.unaids.org/pub/Manual/2007/20070411_ungass_core_indicators_manual_en.pdf)

Background: UNGASS DoC, Universal Access, and the role of the community sector

Six years ago, under the heading of 'Global Crisis - Global Action', the United Nations General Assembly held an unprecedented special session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS) - the first time the General Assembly had ever addressed a specific health issue.

The resulting **UNGASS Declaration of Commitment (DoC)** on HIV/AIDS adopted by all UN member states provided a comprehensive framework to halt and to reverse the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2010, and included specific and measurable milestones for 2003, 2005 and 2010. Every year, governments report on progress they have made toward implementing these promises.

Based on the commitments by governments to **universal access** made at the 2005 World Summit and the Gleneagles G8 Summit, scaling up to achieve universal access has generated new momentum toward improving and integrating comprehensive prevention, treatment, care and support within multisectoral national responses.

On 2 June 2006, member states at the 87th plenary meeting of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted a Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS, as a follow up to the review of progress implementing the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. In 2006, countries recommitted, among other measures, to set ambitious targets for the end of 2006 to scale up the response to the HIV epidemic towards the goal of reaching universal access by 2010.

The Political Declaration includes a commitment to setting ambitious national targets for 2010, with interim targets for 2008. This Declaration commits UN member states to *"pursuing all necessary efforts to scale up nationally driven, sustainable and comprehensive responses to achieve broad multisectoral coverage for prevention, treatment, care and support, with full and active participation of people living with HIV, vulnerable groups, most affected communities, civil society and the private sector, towards the goal of universal access to comprehensive prevention programs, treatment, care and support by 2010"* (paragraph 20).

The ambition of achieving "Universal Access" is starting to dominate the current global AIDS policy environment. It has been presented by some as a process to scale up the AIDS response. However, Universal Access is more than simply scaling up the response. Universal access should result in the ability of all people to have equal access to the quality services or commodities that they need to meet their HIV prevention, treatment, care and support needs.

Given some of the inadequacies in target setting, the Programme Coordinating Board of UNAIDS in June 2007 requested that "UNAIDS provide clearer direction and awareness-raising on universal access, and to support national processes that include civil society, especially key populations, to validate ambitious and comprehensive targets and incorporate them into costed national plans by the end of 2007."

The process for setting and reaching the targets for universal access can not be separated from the DoC implementation and review process. Setting targets for universal access should start by defining the priorities in each country, identifying the key stakeholders, setting ambitious and realistic targets, identifying the [probable] obstacles and then identifying a sustainable path to reaching those targets. It is a complex process that must be inclusive, participatory, accessible, realistic, comprehensive and equitable. Reviewing the progress in implementing the DoC should be the basis for this analysis.

In 2008 and 2010, governments are expected to report back on the progress towards reaching and actually achieving universal access. They will do so during the DoC review, reporting against the targets they have set at country level. It is therefore critical that the community sector is fully involved in the target setting process as well as in the DoC and universal access review and reporting processes.

Monitoring progress

Successes in responding to HIV and AIDS are measured by the achievement of concrete targets. To measure these achievements, UNAIDS developed a set of core indicators to measure progress in the implementation of the DoC. These indicators are divided in four categories (a) national commitment and action; (b) national knowledge and behavior; (c) national impact; and (d) global commitment and action. Each year, UNAIDS reviews the indicators (based on the country reports received) and makes some adjustments. Of the 23 DoC indicators, UNAIDS has suggested to use 8 of them to set targets for universal access.

At the end of July 2007, UNAIDS organized a meeting to increase regional capacity to provide high quality technical assistance for the preparation of the DoC country progress reports. It was mainly focused on training M&E regional consultants that will be managed by the UNAIDS Regional Support Teams (for a list of these Teams, write to universalaccess2010@icaso.org). They will provide in-country support for the preparation of the country report. Civil society was present at the meeting because consultants got to hear first-hand about civil society-led M&E experiences and the important role that other stakeholders besides the government must play in the review and reporting process. Civil society participants actively engaged in the discussions and raised several issues about the current indicators and processes. A full report - prepared by civil society- is available at: www.icaso.org or by emailing universalaccess2010@icaso.org.

Countries are taking the commitment to review and report on the implementation of the DoC more seriously. In 2003, only 55% of member states submitted country progress reports to UNAIDS. In 2005, 72% did. For 2008, it is expected that not only will more countries submit reports, but also that the reports will be complete and of high quality.

The role of the community sector

The community sector needs to make sure that the review of progress in implementing the DoC and the universal access targets set actually reflect the local epidemics. They need to ensure that the review is comprehensive, that data is disaggregated, and that it includes an analysis of how the country has responded to the needs of the communities most affected. Having active and meaningful involvement in the official review process will therefore be critical.

However, the community sector has often found it difficult to be involved in government-led processes, as they are frequently excluded or restricted to tokenistic involvement. In recognition of this, for the first time in 2006, UNAIDS accepted 'shadow reports' from community sector advocates. These were used to inform the United Nations Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly on the progress made in the implementation of the UNGASS DoC. These shadow reports were acknowledged as complementing the information submitted by the governments and served as an advocacy tool for community groups in the 'official' processes at the country level to highlight the gaps, barriers and opportunities in implementing the DoC.

Appendix 1: Sample Letter to national AIDS authority - Civil society involvement in the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS review process.

Dear Mr/Mrs/Dr,

On behalf of our organization/community working group [insert name of organization or group] and as a member/s of civil society, I am writing to you to request our involvement in the preparation of the country progress report on the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, due January 31st, 2008.

This review represents an important opportunity for all stakeholders in the national response to HIV and AIDS to identify how effective we have all been in preventing new infections, and in providing treatment, care and support to all those in need. The important role that civil society organizations play in the response to the epidemic provides them with a unique and grounded perspective and access to information that would be invaluable to the review.

The Declaration of Commitment itself calls on civil society groups to be an integral part in the preparation of the progress reports. In support of the review process in 2007/8, UNAIDS has highlighted that the "reporting is the joint responsibility of national governments and civil society", using "relevant data for the report from a wide range of sources, from government ministries to civil society partners", and to "analyze and review this data with all relevant stakeholders."⁴ We are committed to working to achieve this in partnership with you.

Therefore, we would like to arrange to meet to discuss this involvement, including other national organizations working on HIV and AIDS, especially people living with HIV and other vulnerable and at risk groups. Please can you share with us any existing information you have on the review process and timelines, including suggested dates and locations of meetings?

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your Organization/group's name and address

⁴ From the communications sent from Peter Piot, Executive Director, and Paul Delay, Director of Evaluation, at UNAIDS, in the dissemination to governments of the *Guidelines on the Construction of Core Indicators for 2008*.