City HIV/AIDS Strategies
A City Response to HIV/AIDS in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
By
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Introduction

The global HIV/AIDS pandemic is affecting all levels of society, creating orphans and deepening levels of poverty, threatening to reverse years of development efforts. This poses a significant risk to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. While all people are at risk, gender and economic inequalities, stigma and discrimination and cultural norms put the poor, particularly young women at greater vulnerability. In urban centres, along key transport routes between rural and urban settlement and in high density unplanned settlement, vulnerable groups are particularly at risk of contracting HIV. City and Local governments find themselves in the front line in the fight against HIV/AIDS as they providing a critical bridge between national efforts and community needs. In an effort to strengthen this bridge the UNDP and UN-Habitat together with the Urban Management Programme (UMP) are piloting eight innovative city consultations to test and develop participatory methods, tools and techniques for supporting municipal governments in addressing HIV/AIDS and poverty¹. The first consultation to be launched, in May 2003, was in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad and Tobago: A Situational Analysis

Trinidad and Tobago, with a population of only 1.3 million, has been ranked 17th in the world, 5th among the English speaking Caribbean countries and 1st among the larger Caribbean countries, with regards to the incidence of HIV/AIDS (World Health Organisation, 2002). This should be appreciated within a regional context where average adult HIV prevalence has reached approximately 2.5. The Ministry of Health Trinidad and Tobago estimates that there were over 9000 cases of HIV in 1999. Actual figures may be as high as 39,000 (University of the West Indies, Nov 2000). HIV/AIDS is presently among the leading causes of death among young people with increasing numbers of young women at risk. 70% of AIDS deaths occur within the 15 to 44 years of age group. The capital Port of Spain has the highest adult AIDS morbidity in the country.

Trinidad and Tobago has recently been taking steps to combat HIV/AIDS. A national consultation has resulted in a five year National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan. This recognises that HIV/ADS is a development issues and seeks a holistic, expanded and co-ordinated response. The Strategy identifies local government has having an important role to play, particularly in advocacy, policy development and prevention of HIV transmission. However, local government in Trinidad has limited autonomy, funding and technical capacity. Certainly there is a poor understanding of HIV/AIDS. The Ministry of Local Government and the City of Spain Corporation (the Municipality) requested assistance form UMP-LAC² to assist, within the framework of the National Response and Local Government Reform program, in developing a city response to HIV/AIDS.

The City HIV/AIDS Response

The City Consultation in Port of Spain is being managed by UMP-LAC in co-ordination with UNDP New York. UMP-LAC has engaged the regional anchor institution IPES - Promotion of Sustainable Development to provide technical support to the process. The objective of the process is to develop an effective multi-sector citywide response, led by the Port of Spain Municipality, to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, by the end of April 2004. This will seek to reduce new cases of HIV, particularly among the youth, and to mitigate the negative livelihood implications of HIV/AIDS on vulnerable communities. It links UNDP Transformational Leadership methodology with a participatory urban management process (City Consultation), in order to elaborate a local government response and city partnerships, with community and civil society groups, to reduce new cases of HIV linked to poverty reduction, gender equality and human rights. The process will take place in four phases (see figure 1).

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² Other City Consultations have been launched in Blantrye, Malawi, Mumbai, India, Beirut, Lebanon, Santo André, Brazil.
³ Regional Urban Management Programme Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, Quito, Ecuador
Phase One commenced with an Appreciative Inquiry Workshop. Fourteen persons representing the municipality, civil society groups and the community, came together to learn how to conduct a stakeholder inquiry. The facilitators trained with the required techniques interviewed over 40 city stakeholders. This achieved a map of HIV services in the city, broad stakeholder sensitisation and support for the city consultation process, as well as a positive reflection on the positive core of the city in addressing issues around HIV/AIDS and development. The Mayor established a HIV/AIDS Project Team, housed in the Municipality, who with the support of a local NGO, Community Action Resource (CARe) commenced a situational and impact assessment of HIV/AIDS on the City its citizens and institutions. This will be validated by stakeholders during phase III.

Phase Two saw further sensitisation, mobilisation and planning activities. In October 2003 a workshop was held, bringing together representation form local government, civil society and the private sector to discuss issues around HIV/AIDS in the city and to commence the elaboration of a vision and strategy. Six (6) breakthrough projects/activities where identified against which participants committed themselves. Furthermore 8 breakthrough coaches where trained to facilitate the teams charged with taking forward these activities. One of the most significant results to date has been the development by the Corporation in partnership with the HIV/AIDS Alliance, of an awareness and sensitisation event within the City to celebrate World Aids Day, which was held on the 1st of December. UNDP also successfully trained 10 community leaders to facilitate participatory dialogues with youth in their communities, including communities of PLWHA and Commercial Sex Workers. These leaders are now commencing the role out community workshops across the city, which is supporting community dialogue and planning on youth sexuality, HIV/AIDS, Poverty, stigma and discrimination.

Phase Three will commence in March 2004. The objective is to finalise a City HIV/AIDS Strategy and to identify three Priority Action Programmes (implementation plans). This will incorporate a municipal workplace policy and mainstreaming of a HIV/AIDS response across the service delivery functions of local government. A Steering Group will also support the process with the development of a funding strategy and lobbying activities at the national level. A key challenge will be to co-ordinate municipal actions with the activities of other city actors, state, private and NGO. Hence considerable focus is on the development of effective city partnerships. Project management training will enable local partners to elaborate the plans and finalise them.

Phase Four concludes the City Consultation and will be focused on the systemisation of the process. This will document what took place, results and impacts and lessons learnt from the perspective of different actors. Tools and techniques used through the process will also be documented and disseminated. Finally, while implementation will largely be in the hands of the Port of Spain Stakeholders UMP-LAC and UNDP will continue to support knowledge management and capacity building activities at the regional level. For example through UMP-LAC Port of Spain is networked within a UN global city knowledge exchange programme called CITY-AIDS.

Current Results & Impacts
Over 30 city actors, including the Mayor, National Aids Programme, UNDP Trinidad and Tobago, and civil society groups, have committed, through an Inter-Actor Agreement to participate and contribute towards the elaboration and implementation of the City Strategy.

Community Action Resource (CARe), which is dedicated to advocacy and representation of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) has strengthened their capacity to work with government, improving lobbying efforts on behalf of PLWHA.

The Port of Spain Corporation has established a HIV/AIDS City Consultation Team to manage the process. This is being supported by a Steering Group, which is advocating, lobbying as well elaborating a funding strategy.

Awareness and sensitisation of HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination, gender and poverty reduction has been increased among a wide range of city actors, through various participatory forums and events, including the training of community leaders to undertake participatory dialogues with their communities.

The Port of Spain Corporation has partnered with various civil society groups celebrated WORLD AIDS DAY (December 1st) for the first time, by raising awareness and providing information in downtown Port of Spain.

The Port of Spain Corporation and CARe have participated together at the CITY-AIDS knowledge exchange programme, in Lyon, France where they strengthened networks with cities in the region and internationally on CITY-AIDS competency.

Lessons Learnt

The nurturing of participatory dialogue on culturally sensitive issues related to HIV/AIDS within the Corporation, among municipal wards, communities of commercial sex workers and PLWHA is important in building trust, commitment and understanding.

A strong focus on technical training, related to HIV/AIDS, participatory and management tools and techniques, is required for the Port of Spain Corporation, CARe and civil society partners, in order to strengthening local ownership and skills to support the process.

The joint political and administrative support from the Mayor and CEO has been critical to the success of the process and commitment of councillors and Departmental Heads.

The establishment of management structures, the HIV/AIDS Project Team and Steering Committee, with the representation of PLWHA, Civil Society and potential donors, has proved important to achieving broad local ownership and gaining recognition as to the importance of local action at the city-level.

Conclusions

The city consultation in Port of Spain is an important innovation that demonstrates how local government can play an important role, with other city stakeholder, in mobilising local responses to HIV/AIDS in support of National HIV/AIDS and poverty reduction programmes.