

LEADERSHIP FOR RESULTS
UNDP's response to HIV/AIDS



DISTRICT PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION
STRATEGY NOTE AND GUIDE

The Answer Lies Within



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Foreword

The drafting of this district-level strategy note and implementation guide was made possible by a group of development planners and experts brought together by the HIV/AIDS Group of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) over a period of two years. The document is designed as a tool to assist the district or sub-national officials in planning and implementing development programmes that include HIV/AIDS. The approach aims at increasing the involvement of local people in decision making and shows how outcomes of decisions in a plan can be implemented with accountability. Finally, it reinforces monitoring and review processes as a key component of the planning and implementation process at the district/sub-national level.

The sub-national level may comprise the state, province, region, municipality, district, county, sub-district, parish or communes depending on the geography, political and administrative system of the country in question. In addition, this may depend on the autonomy and decision-making powers of decentralized entities, which vary considerably from country to country in terms of the extent of decentralization or devolution of authority and functions. Population characteristics also play a key role in the definition of the sub-national level. In countries where the population is high, for instance, Nigeria and India, the size of a district may be much larger than the entire population of other countries such as Swaziland or Botswana.

This document is tailored to smaller sub-national entities with the view that, large sub-national entities—such as those in China, India or Nigeria—will undertake the equivalent of the development planning and national strategic process. In this Guidance Note, the ‘the District’ is considered the most common decentralized entity for HIV/AIDS planning and implementation as well as local service delivery. Experience with the UNAIDS district response initiative indicates that this level is where community initiatives and local governance come together. The term ‘district’ will thus be used to represent the different ways by which they are referred to in various countries. District planning and implementation is an essential part of every national development response. As such, any attempt to strengthen the processes will be informed and in tandem with overall support to strengthen national development and strategic planning processes.

This document outlines general principles, strengths and challenges faced by many countries in addressing HIV/AIDS, and introduces holistic and empowering methodologies as a way of strengthening the district response to produce results that reverse the epidemic’s trend. It is dedicated to placing emphasis on implementation and scaling up responses with full engagement of government, civil society organizations (CSOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), traditional authorities, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and the private sector as equal partners in district decision making, resource allocation and review processes.

The purpose of this document is to place the individual at the heart of the district planning process and generate stakeholder accountability through the use of transformative leadership techniques. The district level is the anchor for influencing national policy and aligning community-led responses with national development planning processes. The document is to help move development efforts from a 'planning orientation' to 'response implementation at the decentralized level' in order to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the goals of the Declaration of Commitment of the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS).

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1. District Planning and Implementation

Revisiting District Planning and Implementation Process

Planning is defined differently according to contexts. It is said to be the “deliberate social or organizational activity of developing a strategy of future action to achieve a desired set of goals for solving different problems in complex context. This is underpinned by the power and intention to commit resources to act as necessary to implement the chosen strategy”.

In recent times, planning has come to be seen as a much broader set of human activities, encompassing the provision of physical infrastructure as well as public and social services, including health, education, sanitation, shelter, and transport among others. Besides the technical, analytical and design components, planning is seen intensely as a political and value-laden activity.

The term ‘*district planning and implementation*’ in this document refers to the state-led processes by which decisions relating to the future social and economic growth of a geographically demarcated area are undertaken and closely linked to the national planning and implementation processes. In many countries, government ministries are given this responsibility, which usually occurs in yearly cycles. Statistics indicate clearly that existing district planning and implementation processes have not been able to cope with the development challenges, including HIV/AIDS in many African countries.

Rationale for Focusing on the District

The district represents the level where participation and empowerment of both individuals and communities is most feasible and is the level where opportunities for collective action and accountability are most likely. Key stakeholders (decentralized sectors and institutions) are also better able to interface with each other, and, more importantly, with the communities they serve. It is at this level that outcomes and impact can be measured directly. In this respect the role of local governments in bringing about innovation and in creating a supportive environment for implementation of development programmes, including HIV/AIDS responses is critical. Furthermore, the district authority provides opportunity for promoting linkages, and integrating the voices and choices of social groups and communities into local programmes.

Key District Planning Challenges

Responding to HIV and AIDS at the district level must be an inclusive, mobilizing and multi-sectoral process that involves decentralized government agencies, private-sector institutions and civil society. Current approaches and responses to HIV and AIDS do not always adequately address the twin problems of inclusion and empowerment of local stakeholders. Often, power relations limit the actions that communities and committed individuals can take.

Additionally, the established underlying causes of HIV and AIDS and poverty such as sexual abuse, alcoholism, stigma, discrimination, unequal access to resources by the poor and most vulnerable (particularly women and girls) remain key challenges in addressing issues of HIV and AIDS and poverty at the district level.

Most district HIV/AIDS responses are planned and implemented separately by government institutions, NGOs and other development partners. This traditional fragmented approach continues to raise additional challenges. Among them is how to de-emphasize the overreliance on separate responses and aim at a more comprehensive response based on shared understanding of a district's specific socio-cultural and economic drivers and impact from the epidemic. Processes for resource allocation and accountability for results are often not effective, while expected outcomes are hindered by poor coordination, duplication of efforts, and limited transparency of development practitioners. Additional challenges to sub-national planning and implementation processes include:

- ❑ How to sufficiently analyze the current and future impact of HIV/AIDS on various sectors, households and individuals.
- ❑ How to actively interact and engage government, civil society organizations and international partners in addressing HIV/AIDS issues at the district level.
- ❑ Provision of adequate human and financial resources for scaling up responses and supporting implementation at community level in a timely manner.
- ❑ How to institute and apply effective systems that ensure personal and collective accountability and guarantee results.
- ❑ The need to constantly sharpen the skills of key district decision makers and service providers in HIV and AIDS.

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