

Monitoring and evaluation of regional responses to HIV: Tying it all together with CRIS

Over the past few years efforts have intensified in the Pacific to control the spread of HIV and to provide treatment and care to those already affected by HIV or AIDS. A coordinated approach is now in place with ratification of the second Pacific Regional Strategy on HIV/AIDS 2004–2008 by all PICT member countries (SPC 2005a). The strategy has brought together disparate programmes and agencies working with PICTs to tackle HIV and AIDS. There is now a clear framework for guiding the accelerated regional response to HIV.

How do we know if these efforts are making a difference? This is a simple question that is often difficult to answer. Monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of HIV and AIDS programmes is important to gauge if resources are being targeted correctly. There is interest both within and outside the region in the success of local efforts against HIV and AIDS. Evaluation can occur at all levels, including programme inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and eventual impact. Moving across this continuum, it becomes increasingly difficult to evaluate the effect of a programme. Monitoring inputs, activities and outputs is relatively straightforward, but it may take many years for the endstage results of a programme to become apparent. Where resources are limited, evaluation activities are often limited to output-level analyses.

The Pacific Regional Strategy's overall goal is “to reduce the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS whilst embracing people infected and affected by the virus in Pacific communities”. This was selected to correspond with PICTs' international commitment to the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Target Seven: “To have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS” (UN 2005). Within this overall goal are three “Purpose” level objectives that are also tied to indicator frameworks under the MDGs, the Declaration of Commitment made by the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, June 2001 (UNGASS), and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The three Regional Strategy purposes and their indicator components are:

1. To increase the capacity of PICTs to achieve and sustain an effective response to HIV/AIDS, as evidenced by increased achievement against the following UNGASS “National Commitment and Action Indicators”:
 - 1.1 disbursement of national funds on HIV/AIDS-related activities;
 - 1.2 development and implementation of national policies; and
 - 1.3 delivery of national programmes covering:
 - 1.3.1 voluntary and confidential counselling and testing,
 - 1.3.2 prevention programme reach,
 - 1.3.3 prevention of maternal to child transmission,
 - 1.3.4 supply of ante-retroviral medication to infected persons, and
 - 1.3.5 protection of the blood supply.
2. To strengthen coordination of the regional-level response and mobilise resources and expertise to assist countries to achieve their targets via evidence of improved:
 - 2.1 communication
 - 2.2 partnership and mutual mission
 - 2.3 common decision-making.
3. To help PICTs achieve and report on their national and international targets in response to HIV/AIDS via increased and improved reporting on MDG and UNGASS reports, as evidenced by:
 - 3.1 number of countries submitting UNGASS and MDG reports;
 - 3.2 number of indicators collected in country reports; and
 - 3.3 number of indicators collected using UN guidelines.

The Regional Strategy framework thus acknowledges that regional organisations, including SPC, will continue to work with national authorities to collect, analyse and report against MDG and UNGASS targets (SPC 2005b).

How is this best achieved? Tying the Regional Strategy to the above international reporting frameworks brings some advantages. Firstly, considerable work has already been undertaken in the review and choice of indicators thought to best reflect the effectiveness of national programmes to combat HIV and AIDS. A number of resources are available for collecting National Commitment and Action indicators, including a UNAIDS National Composite Policy Index (NCPI) of twenty policy issues to be reviewed twice during the lifetime of the regional strategy. Various surveys are also in place to review the extent of programme reach. The United Nations joint programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has also developed a reporting system — the Country Response Information System (CRIS) — for collecting core indicator data directly related to MDG and UNGASS commitments (UNAIDS 2003). The use of international indicators also enables standardised reporting and cross-regional comparison to further illustrate how each country is progressing and identify areas of further need.

The CRIS system is a web-enabled database, written in SQL to enable broad connectivity and flexibility for use in different settings. All core UNGASS indicators for monitoring generalised, concentrated or low-level HIV epidemics are included, along with definitions and help notes on reporting these (UNAIDS 2005). It also allows for construction of further non-core indicators and inclusion of research project findings. Multi-country data can be entered when utilised as a regional monitoring tool. The system can thus be adapted for local use, and tailored to meet Regional Strategy monitoring requirements. Data once entered can be exported for direct transfer to UNAIDS to meet country reporting requirements. CRIS will thus enable countries to monitor their progress towards the overall goal and purposes of the Regional Strategy. Donors and other key stakeholder organisations will be able to review this progress in order to better assist countries fulfil their commitments and identify how best to target further resources in the continuing effort to control HIV in the region.

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