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SDC HIV and AIDS Community of Practice



Capitalisation Series: SDC Supported Projects and Activities in HIV/AIDS

A fact sheet elaborated in the frame of the 2009 SDC Backstopping Mandate with support from the Swiss Centre for International Health of the Swiss Tropical Institute

Introduction

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of committed people who come together to share and learn from one another, either face-to-face, or virtually, through the dedicated CoP internet platform.

Objectives

- Support and help shape the institutional implementation of SDC policies, strategies and guidelines regarding HIV and AIDS
- Foster the exchange of information and practices between members in response to HIV and AIDS, with a particular focus upon mainstreaming

Project Description

The AIDS epidemic remains a global crisis with impacts that will be felt for decades to come. SDC has sought to mainstream an appropriate response across its country offices around the world engaged in development assistance and humanitarian aid. In 2001 a CoP was launched in response to SDC HIV and AIDS focal persons' concerns about the new and challenging task lying ahead and to facilitate the provision of mutual support. Those involved in the CoP share a genuine interest in the theme of HIV and AIDS, as well as in each other's practices. Participation is voluntary and the interaction informal. Members are staff of the SDC and its implementing agencies, stationed either in Switzerland, Cooperation Offices, or projects in partner countries. From an initial cluster in southern Africa, membership has grown spontaneously across the organisation and by early 2009 the CoP had 80 members. This includes SDC HIV/AIDS country representatives from regions including Asia and francophone countries in Africa, as well as members of partner organisations such as NGOs.

The CoP's main instruments include moderated e-discussions (with country-focused inputs moderated by peers, and thematic inputs led by moderators), periodic regional workshops with field visits as well as general advice seeking, information sharing and circulation of documents.

Outcomes and Achievements

- Growing network of active members involved in mainstreaming HIV and AIDS, with increasing participation and ownership of its members
- Toolkit on mainstreaming HIV and AIDS, considered to be best practice at the international level (UNAIDS, GTZ, WB, WHO, UNDP, etc.)
- Various Cooperation Offices and implementing agencies have organised workshops on mainstreaming HIV and AIDS and implemented action plans

Communities of Practice are internationally valued for the important role they play in sharing and managing institutional knowledge. One CoP member reflected, "I came to realise that the challenges that I am facing in mainstreaming are not only being experienced in my Cooperation Office alone, but also in others. Through the

CoP I have come to learn how to keep the momentum going in the whole HIV mainstreaming process – to set objectives for a particular period, review the extent of their achievement and then move on to others.”

An evaluation of the CoP was carried out in 2007. At that time, membership included 58 participants working at various levels for SDC, both in partner countries, and at the headquarters. A growing network of active members is today involved in mainstreaming HIV. Over the years, contributions by members have increased significantly, reflecting increased ownership by members. The SDC toolkit on mainstreaming HIV/AIDS, which was developed with a high degree of involvement of the CoP, is today considered to be international best practice by organisations such as UNAIDS, GTZ, WB, WHO, UNDP and others. Various SDC Cooperation Offices and implementing agencies have organised workshops on mainstreaming HIV/AIDS and implement HIV/AIDS action plans. Lessons learned from the evaluation include that the CoP is well appreciated as a forum for continuous learning. It motivates and enables HIV and AIDS focal persons in their work. Participation in the internet platform shows waves of activity. Keeping the momentum was identified as one of the major challenges. Providing support to improve the quality of member contributions, strengthening introduction procedures for new members, and organisational support, incentives and resources for participation in the CoP were highlighted as areas with room for improvement.

SDC Partnership

This Community of Practice is owned and funded by SDC. Members are primarily the SDC staff at various organizational levels.

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More about this Project

www.communityofpractice.ch

(From here download the CoP flyer and the evaluation report of the 2007.)