



**7th Global Conference on Health Promotion
Nairobi, Kenyatta Conference Centre
Sub-plenary Session Report - Draft**

Tuesday 27th October 2009, 14:00 -15:30

Civil Society and NGOs Closing the Implementation Gap

Focal points

Dr Mary Amuyunzu-Nyamongo, Executive Director, African Institute for Health and Development, Nairobi, Kenya.

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Facilitator

Denys Correll, Executive Director, International Council on Social Welfare ICSW, Netherlands

Rapporteur

Sonia Heptonstall, Representative at UN, Solar Cookers International, SCI

Panelists

Ron Kirk, Life University, USA

“Focusing on Community Assets for Health Promotion: The role of NGOs and Civil Society in Local Empowerment”

Berhane Ras-work, Executive Director, Inter African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Girls (IAC), Ethiopia
“Positive Local Knowledge and Traditional Practices”

Grace Lo, Manager, Community Health and Social Services Unit, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, IFRC, Geneva
“Vital Link in Bridging the Implementation Gap”

Eliya Zulu, Director of Research, African Population and Health Research Centre, Nairobi, Kenya
“Role of Evidence in Closing the Implementation and Scale-up Gap”

Background

Civil society is an expression of community empowerment where groups of people sharing common interests, concerns or identities come together for social and political change. It is a central element in the successful implementation of international and national policy-making. NGOs working with grassroots communities form an essential part of civil society and irrespective of the prime objective for their creation have a concern to enhance health for all.

It is for this reason that the NGOs attending the Jakarta 1997 Health Promotion Conference came together to form an Ad Hoc Advisory Group in support of WHO's Health Promotion policies and encourage information exchange. To continue their partnership the Advisory Group has formalised their status to become the NGO Alliance for Health Promotion.

Health Promotion Conferences have been key milestones in development and have encouraged Civil Society/NGO participation. During these conferences NGOs and Civil Society players have increasingly articulated their roles in Health Promotion. They have offered as much as they had. The Bangkok Charter for Health Promotion includes Civil Societies as partners. Commitment 3 of the BCHP calls for making the promotion of health a key focus of communities and Civil Society.

At the same time, recent research into the social determinants of health, indicates that solutions lie beyond the direct scope of the health sector. By offering a clearing house in Geneva to bring together an inter-sectoral voice for health promotion, the Alliance is hoping to catalyse inclusive efforts and make a contribution to Closing the Implementation Gap.

However, bridging the implementation gap is too big a task for one single organisation. Civil societies and NGOs engaged in communities can act as the bridge that brings global health strategy into local action. Therefore this sub-plenary wants to address the challenges facing Civil Societies and NGOs to bridge the implementation gap and calls for collective advocacy so that communities have greater control over their health and its determinants.

Objectives

1. To present and share initial ideas and experiences on community assets, community empowerment, partnerships, intersectoral cooperation and capacity building
2. To propose actions in which all stakeholders across sectors and at different levels can contribute to Health Promotion
3. To strengthen NGO and Civil Society working relationship with governments, WHO and other partners/agencies

Participants - See attached list

Procedure of the Session:

Margaret Owino, Regional Director for Solar Cookers International, Nairobi introduced the reality of grassroots projects such as solar cooking and water pasteurisation with a melodious traditional Kenyan call. She paraded locally made hot boxes to maintain food cooked by the sun till nightfall.

Gabriella Sozanski welcomed participants and introduced the facilitator and the rapporteur. She expressed thanks to Dr. Gauden Galea, Coordinator of the Health Promotion Unit of WHO and *Desmond O'Byrne*, Senior Advisor to the WHO Health Promotion Cluster for integrating NGOs and Civil Society in the Conference programme. Then she invited Desmond O'Byrne to address the meeting.

Desmond O'Byrne described the vital role that NGOs and civil society have played in empowering communities in improvement of their health and quality of life. He commended the NGO Alliance for Health Promotion for its inclusive vision and commitment to reaching people at the grass roots level, helping to bridge the health equity gap. Dr. O'Byrne noted that current health challenges demand multi-sectoral planning and collaborative action.

Denys Correll, facilitator of the Session introduced the objectives of the sub-plenary and welcomed Richard Parish, Chief Executive of the Royal Society for Public Health.

Mr. Correll raised the current challenges facing civil society. Despite concerted efforts on disease control and innumerable projects on the ground, there remained serious gaps in health promotion. Health promotion strategies must take account of the role of people in their own communities, their perception of needs and respect for local culture.

Ron KIRK, Life University, USA, Chief author of the Alliance Technical Paper: **“Focusing on Community Assets for Health Promotion: The Role of NGOs and Civil Society in Local Empowerment”**

Real change builds on the capacity of all people to take control of their lives, their health and its determinants. The key question is how can we help to empower people to achieve better health and a better quality of life? In this regard the Alliance has sought inputs from its members and summarized a series of projects that exhibit a richness of human relationships leading to successful health outcomes. Open, inclusive community planning and action emerged as key catalytic components for health improvement. This is a work in progress. The indications are that sustainable action needs to be seamless. Synergy is required so that governments, international agencies, ngos and civil society collaborate over the long term to catalyse and reinforce their efforts.

Berhane RAS-WORK, Inter African Committee on Traditional Practices,
“Positive Local Knowledge and Traditional Practices”

The type of synergy called for by Ron Kirk is not easy to achieve. Health is an issue of fundamental importance to all human beings and so an integral part of culture. IAC strategy has been to analyse both the past, the present and future needs of a community when introducing projects to eliminate harmful traditional practices. By identifying local assets it becomes possible to establish

the means for eliminating those that are negative while maintaining the trust of the community being called on to change. All IAC projects begin with community dialogue, identifying local advisers and then initiating new practices. At the same time IAC uses every opportunity for advocacy and lobbying both at the national, regional and international level to ensure the necessary momentum and resources for change

Grace LO, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
“Civil Society – a Vital Link in Bridging the Implementation Gap”

Underlining the critical role of NGOs in closing the equity gap, Ms. Lo highlighted action regarding the social and economic determinants of health. They bridge gaps in provision working through multi level networks that span big cities as well as villages mobilising human capital. Given the obstacles, how can civil society further meet the challenges involved in successful health implementation? Their advantage lies in local access. The fact is that NGO projects offer continuous community dialogue. Government officials inevitably move from post to post. Well established international ngos provide global networks linking the local to major cities and connecting remote villages through the advent of modern information technology.

For sustainability, NGOs need the recognition that comes from consultative status and official relations with national and international institutions. Financing remains an issue. A balance is required to ensure NGOs maintain an independent voice while cooperating with bureaucracies. More attention is required to bringing local successful projects to Government attention and so ensure their incorporation in the health system.

Eliya ZULU, African Population and Health Research Centre
Role of Evidence in Closing the Implementation and Scale-up Gap

NGOs have an overriding need to document outcomes hence the need for research. Limited resources make it essential to define priorities and this calls for identifying best practices. What works? Monitoring and evaluating policies,

projects and programmes is the key to understanding what resources are needed and where they might be directed to best purpose. *He spoke of his new appointment to a Kenyan research centre and willingness to develop guidelines to help NGOs with appropriate tools when setting up projects.*

At the same time, understanding current international trends is critical. Global migration to urban areas is redefining the concept of those that are the neediest. Change in any public sector requires cost effective strategies that Governments can scale up. NGOs and civil society as a whole must provide evidenced based data to connect their work with the health commitments of governments and the national imperative to report on policies central to the UN system and international decision-making.

Key messages

were projected for comments and Mr Correll opened the discussion.

- Governments must create conditions for an enabling environment so that Civil Society and NGOs can express their role as advocates empowering grass-roots communities.
- For success Health Promotion requires attention to national and international policy-making. Such policies must go beyond disease control and examine the cross-cutting implications of social and economic determinants which ultimately decide success in health promotion.
- Civil Society is an essential element in both national and international decision-making. It must be recognized as an indispensable force for health promotion.
- Resources must be allocated within local, national, regional and international health programmes to enhance knowledge on the best means to scale up successful Civil Society projects.
- Civil Society is known for promoting innovative projects. In support of scaling up guidelines for evaluation are required which mainstream evidence based data.

Discussion

There were three interventions.

A. An official representing a foundation raising the fragmentation of NGOs and that they should be trustworthy (valid point given proliferation over the recent years) particularly so since GA 1996/31 increased NGOs in consultative status to include regional and national NGOs. The increase in numbers also raises the lack of public awareness as to how policy at all levels is made and the role of advocacy in relating to authority structures.

B. An official from the Ministry of Health in Uganda

C. A Nigerian participant raised the issue of informal health providers in the slums. Governments need to structure a system engaging civil society and NGOs to provide good honest services.

In Conclusion, Berhane Ras-Work followed up on the issue of NGO fragmentation. The NGO Alliance for Health Promotion was an initiative to encourage policy consensus and cooperation across a spectrum of NGOs and in this way encourage a holistic approach to health promotion. Encouraged by WHO, and with a HQ in Geneva, the Alliance hopes to contribute by linking NGOs intersectorally and helping to catalyse efforts to close the Health Promotion gap.

Grace Lo also addressed the NGO fragmentation issue, stating that NGOs' diversity and grass roots connectedness can also be viewed as a strength.

Dr. Zulu responded to the query regarding low quality untrained providers. He advocated for greater documentation/research to enhance the quality of health services and outcomes.

The session was closed.

Based on the presentations and the discussion the following

Concluding messages have been formulated and forwarded to the drafting committee of the final document of the Conference for consideration when finalising the Call to Action

1. For more effective health promotion, governments and international agencies must deepen their engagement with civil society and NGOs to create an enabling environment that empowers grass-roots communities.
2. In addressing the social determinants of health, civil society is an indispensable resource in health promotion because of its strong connection to the diverse needs of the community.
3. In order to bring to scale successful projects for broader implementation, civil society and NGOs are responsible to enhance their accountability by monitoring and evaluating their programs for effective resource allocation at all levels.

Participants' list of NGO sub-plenary session, Nairobi, 27 October 2009

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