

Section One

Introduction to HIV/AIDS impact assessments

An HIV/AIDS impact assessment is an exercise to describe the potential or likely impact of the epidemic on an institution, like a local authority, by describing the current situation and modelling scenarios into the future. An impact assessment may include costing the impact of the epidemic on the functions and operations of the LA. It may even cost out various HIV/AIDS interventions and their cost benefits compared to the cost of doing nothing.

Overall, in establishing how to proceed, the team responsible for the impact assessment should consider the following questions:

1. To what extent is HIV/AIDS already a problem in our LA?
2. What data do we have to support this position or perception?
3. To what extent does political and public commitment already exist to building a response to HIV/AIDS?
4. How can the impact assessment process contribute to strengthening commitment and support?
5. What capacity and resources – human, technical, financial – are available to address HIV/AIDS?
6. What further resources will we need?
7. What strategic partnerships do we need to build (e.g. with Government, donors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector)?
8. Who needs to be involved in the impact assessment process – political decision-makers, community leaders, key sectoral representatives, women and young people, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs), etc?

There are sound reasons for conducting an impact assessment as the evidence produced allows for a much more proactive response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, in particular relating to those factors can be influenced or manipulated to minimise their impact. In addition, a LA can use the platform created by an impact assessment as a powerful advocacy opportunity or to initiate interventions – such as HIV/AIDS prevention programmes for employees.

An impact assessment can therefore provide critical information for planning an informed HIV/AIDS response, and it is especially important that the process also serve as a catalyst for action and for building a coalition within the LA to respond.

The extent and nature of the impact assessment needs to be driven by practical, pragmatic factors associated with the potential willingness and ability of the LA to play an effective role, its ability to secure the necessary resources and then to build the requisite alliances to respond. To achieve success, this commitment should be evident in three areas:

- ▶ Internally – leadership on HIV/AIDS issues within the organisation;
- ▶ Externally – leadership with other stakeholders; and
- ▶ At a personal level – by acting as a role model, for example by demonstrating solidarity with people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs).

In all three spheres leadership and commitment has the potential to:

- ▶ Minimise the stigma and discrimination that is so frequently associated with HIV/AIDS;
- ▶ Shape the debate about HIV/AIDS;
- ▶ Exert influence and change the pace of action; and
- ▶ Mobilise resources.

The scope of the impact assessment also needs to be informed by the scope and nature of the local HIV/AIDS problem and the extent to which the wider environment is conducive to a comprehensive and sustained HIV/AIDS response.

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In this toolkit three levels of impact assessment are recognised:

- Level 1 - Limited assessment** An informal information gathering process, such as could be done at a consultative workshop with key stakeholders and community representatives;
- Level 2 - Partial assessment** A basic but formal impact assessment, involving limited data collection and analysis; and
- Level 3 - Full assessment** A much more extensive or full-scale impact assessment, which generates models and costs certain aspects of the impact of the epidemic on a LA.

*The emphasis in the toolkit, however, is on **formal** impact assessments, as opposed to informal ones, which implies that capacity and resources – financial, human and technical – are required. In certain circumstances, these may be available within the LA; however, in many instances, some capacity and/or resources will have to be sourced outside of the LA.*

Finally, validation of the findings of an impact assessment is an important step to ensuring ownership at political, institutional and community level. This should take the form of consultative briefings, which will assist in ensuring that the results are used optimally in subsequent planning and programming.

The 7 tools in Section Two were designed to assist a LA to design and conduct an HIV/AIDS impact assessment, to generate information and recommendations to guide its HIV/AIDS response.

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