



PROGRESSIO



POLICY BRIEF No. 9/2012

**THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN PROMOTING THE UNIVERSAL ACCESS
TO HIV TREATMENT IN ZIMBABWE**

Introduction

The challenge facing local government and development partners alike in Zimbabwe is how to develop the public administration leadership capacities to enable them execute their mandated functions, serve the people and sustain development. Somewhat critical, is how to leverage the potential of decentralisation to facilitate access to HIV treatment at health centre level as close to communities as possible. This paper seeks to provide critical analysis and subsequent recommendations for policy and practice on the role of local government in facilitating access to HIV Treatment in Zimbabwe.

Background

Zimbabwe is one of the Southern African countries heavily affected by the HIV epidemic. While there has been a steep fall of HIV prevalence from 18% in 2005 (DHS 2005/6) to 15% (DHS 2010/11), HIV remains a priority challenge with approximately one in every 10 people living with HIV in Zimbabwe, therefore needing HIV treatment. AIDS has scarred the population, killed an estimated 1.9 million people to date¹, and continues to cost tens of thousands of lives every year. The sustainable treatment of existing AIDS cases and the prevention of new HIV infections (each leading to a long term commitment of treatment) are therefore equally pressing issues. Local government roles in sustaining treatment are therefore key and should be clearly defined.

Study objectives

- Discuss the operational infrastructure of local government structures for HIV/AIDS systems in Zimbabwe
- Discuss the factors affecting access to HIV and AIDS services and how local government in Zimbabwe could provide the most efficient mechanism to address the identified gap factors;
- Identify recommendations, strategies and actions to strengthen responses to HIV and AIDS treatment at community and primary care level for local government action, as recommended by communities and stakeholders alike ,

¹ Cumulative AIDS deaths estimated by Spectrum/EPP software in 2010

Study methodology

- Desk review - literature review and policy review
- Participatory consultative workshops; focus group discussions and interviews in five NANGO regions of the country namely (Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, Masvingo, Mutare).

Key findings from the study

- The current statutes are not specific on the role of local government in health and most of the subsections are subject to contestation, imprecise and vague
- The proliferation and uncontrolled role and influence of the private sector has continued to roll back the frontiers of government, in effect pushing for minimizing the role of local government and narrowing down the field of operation .
- The effects of the proliferation of the private sector has led to the deterioration of the delivery of public services especially those that are closely linked to the satisfaction of the general public interest – these include failure to:
 - *Remunerate the health workers,*
 - *Maintain the health facility infrastructure,*
 - *Provide medicines;*
 - *Communicate well with patients etc.*

Although substantial progress has been made towards providing Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) in Zimbabwe, the country managed to achieve 58% against a target of 80% by the end of 2010. A number of key gaps and challenges relating to the provision of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) include:

- Inadequate human resources for rollout of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) services
- Financial resource constraints in rolling out the recommended World Health Organisation (WHO) 2009 guidelines.
- Inaccessibility of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) services due to infrastructural and equipment as well policy constraints.
- Weak referral systems
- Weak monitoring and evaluation system for the Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) programme

Key recommendations from the study

- There is need to review and revise local government statutes to specify minimum service delivery standards in Health.
- The local Government Act review should be specific on allocation and expenditure of funds towards health delivery services
- Monitoring and enforcement of laws for governing the environment is critical for health service delivery and equally important as a social determinant of health and HIV/AIDS service.
- Urban and rural district councils should work closely with the local council health facilities to ensure service delivery for HIV systems.
- Local government should resuscitate the health services fund and employ public accountability mechanisms to ensure performance and integrity management

- There is need to link the taxes paid by the public e.g. from refuse collection with the quality, quantity, and timeliness of the services – this includes ensuring that the wider elements of HIV treatment services are provided such as provision of ARVs at health centre level.
- Health workers should be well remunerated and incentivised as well as constant maintenance of health systems equipment, provision of nutrition and psychosocial services.
- There should be clear practices, a domain of values and principles through which the local government prepares, makes, implements, monitors, controls, and evaluates its decisions and policies as well as its performance of the full range of its functions including the delivery of services that are critical to human development.
- Local government should be the ‘people’s enabler and grantor of the fundamental basis of human development and security including freedom of individuals, protection of life and property, justice, protection of basic human rights, stability, and peaceful resolution of conflict whether in allocation and distribution of ARVs, CD4 count machines, liver function tests equipment or otherwise.
- Local government should invest in activities that restore trust from the public – so that communities are able to defend local government as indispensable for the sustainability of HIV treatment in Zimbabwe
- Various stakeholders like National Aids Council, Nat PHARM, Non-Governmental Organisations, donors, relevant government ministries, Faith Based Organisations, communities at local, national, regional, and global level should come together and complement each other and embrace the value and virtue of partnerships among the various sectors.
- Actors in the private and civil society sectors across all levels need to galvanize and leverage experiences, knowledge, skills as well as resources for effective response to public needs using local government structures to put services and resources as close to communities as possible.

NB. This policy brief is a summary of the policy monograph on the role of local government in promoting the universal access to HIV treatment in Zimbabwe by Fortunate Machingura (fmachingura@gmail.com). The policy monograph was developed by the National Association of NGOs (NANGO), the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) from the University of Zimbabwe and Progressio-Zimbabwe with the financial support from the European Union. For more detailed information on the policy monograph contact Mr. Marongwe Machinda at NANGO offices in Harare at machinda@nango.org.zw or Mr. Mweembe Christopher at Progressio Zimbabwe in Harare at chrismweembe@yahoo.com