

Lessons learned while creating a public-private partnership to deliver programs to children affected by AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Summary

Hope for African Children Initiative (HACI) is a partnership initiative mobilizing additional resources to support community-based actions for children affected by HIV/AIDS and their families in Sub-Saharan Africa whilst placing vulnerable children's issues at the center of national and international policy discussions. Establishing trust and building consensus among and between partners demand considerable investment in time and efforts - sometimes a painful but necessary process. Translating partnership objectives into grassroots realities is a challenging participatory exercise requiring patience, flexibility, trust, and understanding.

Introduction

Established in the summer of 2000, HACI is a unique partnership that brings together five organizations - Care, Plan International, Religions for Peace, Save the Children and the Society of Women and AIDS in Africa - with the purpose of increasing the capacity of African communities to provide care, services, and support to children affected by HIV/AIDS and their families. The private-public nature of this initiative enables HACI to leverage funds from different sources to support the start-up and/or scaling-up of successful child-focus community-based programs. To facilitate this process, administrative and management structures were created at the global, national, and community level. Core partners have the capacity to receive and manage funds from bilateral and multilateral donors as well as from private and public funders. As other partners join HACI at the country level, the capacity to mobilize and use additional resources to support successful CBO activities will increase exponentially.

A small Nairobi-based secretariat services a global level board - the Program Policy Council - and has financial and program oversight for HACI country level activities. At the moment, small HACI country offices in Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda service Country Policy Councils (CPC) that set country-specific policies, award grants, and provide guidance and support to programs. Presently HACI has a 10-country focus: program activities have started in Kenya, Malawi, and Malawi; preparatory activities are in progress in Cameroon, Mozambique, and Senegal; and future earmarked countries are Ethiopia, Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia.

Materials and Methods

Between September 2001 and May 2002, the following methods were used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the HACI partnership: key informant interviews and focus groups at community, national and global levels; document reviews; and observation of partnership activities of the PPC at the global level and of three national level CPCs in Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda.

Results

Preliminary results have shown some important challenges inherent to the process of developing and operationalizing a joint conceptual model. Even though it is still early in the partnership, two important lessons have been learned: adequate investments in time and efforts are critical in establishing trust and building consensus among partners and participatory approaches are key in translating partnership objectives into grassroots realities.

1. Partnership trust and consensus

Establishing trust and building consensus among and between partners demand considerable investment in time and efforts. Whilst the building individual relationships are important to successful partnership, HACI has recognized that organization-to-organization relationship is a sine-qua-non. A level playing field is necessary for all partners to contribute effectively and equitably. HACI partners are continuously investing heavily in reconciling different organizational cultures, policies, politics, principles, and practices that transcend their organizational bureaucracies: programmatic, financial, administrative and legal. Areas often needing consensus building include defining critical elements in contractual agreements such as fiduciary responsibilities and budgetary arrangements, country host agency systems support to HACI programs, CPCs and program deliverables by community-based organizations (CBOs) grantees, access to and disposal of tangible and intangible program assets, and conflicts of interest and acceptable methods for their successful resolution. HACI is addressing the issues of trust and consensus by facilitating the flow of information among all partners through an electronic listserve and the HACI website.

2. Partnership objectives and grassroots realities

Translating partnership objectives into grassroots realities is a challenging participatory process requiring patience and flexibility, trust and accountability, diplomacy and understanding, and mentoring and nurturing. We are learning that original conceptual objectives must be shaped by grassroots realities. HACI has already identified hundreds of CBO activities worthy of support and is working hard with others to mobilize additional resources to support them. HACI's fast track grants program is a big strength but also it's Achilles tendon. HACI cannot meet all the CBO requests, leaving many disappointed. For CBOs receiving HACI support, HACI has learned to make haste slowly. We do not expect rapid results. However, 26 CBOs to be funded have already been identified in Kenya, 30 in Uganda, and about 10 in Malawi. Other CBOs will be considered for capacity building rather than direct program funding.

Conclusions

Lessons learned include: need to establish trust and build political consensus at all levels, translate international objectives to meet grassroots realities, transcend organizational bureaucracies, translate conceptual into practical action, award grants, channel resources, bridge differences and invest in capacity building of quality organizations.

References

1. KAMAL MALTHORA: *Between Rhetoric and Reality: Essays in Partnership in Development*, North-South Institute, Ottawa; Renouf Publishing, 1977.