

Unit 7 – Parliamentary Outreach and HIV/AIDS

Learning Objectives

How can parliamentarians use their representative role to fight HIV/AIDS?

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Be familiar with various forms and tools for legislative public outreach;
- Understand how and why outreach can be used by parliamentarians in the fight against HIV/AIDS;
- Understand the importance of coordinated and joint efforts, for example parliament together with civil society and the media, for an effective response to HIV/AIDS.

Introduction

Engaging citizens in decisions that affect their lives is essential to good governance, a cornerstone of parliamentary procedure. As the representatives of the people, parliamentarians need to be aware of the needs of their constituents, and will be expected to respond to those needs. Therefore, it is very important for parliaments to communicate with the electorate through various forms of public outreach. Parliamentarians are also an important link between the electorate and the executive government, and have an important role to play in voicing the concerns of the people they represent and advocating for changes that will improve their lives to the executive offices and others in government.

Unit 7 will look at various forms of legislative public outreach and how they can be used as tools in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Outreach activities can not only serve to gather important information on how various HIV programs affect the citizens and identify the challenges they face, but also to raise awareness on HIV/AIDS among the population and the parliamentarians themselves. Unit 7 will also examine how parliaments can work in partnership with civil society and the media in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Finally, it will focus on how parliamentarians can act as advocates on key HIV/AIDS issues in their constituencies and vis-à-vis the government.

Defining Legislative Public Outreach

Legislative public outreach can include almost “any systematic effort on the part of the members of the national legislative body to communicate with the electorate” (Legislative Public Outreach on Poverty Issues, 2004). The objectives for conducting public outreach will vary among parliaments and MPs, as will the intensity and the quality of interaction with the public. Following are **three varieties of public outreach**:

- 1) **Information communication** is a one-way relationship from the electorate to the people in which the purpose is to provide access to or to disseminate information. For example, this can be done through fact sheets and websites.
- 2) **Public consultation** is a two-way relationship between the electorate and the people for which the objective is to seek different views or get feedback on a defined issue or agenda, for example through surveys, focus groups or Town Hall meetings.
- 3) **Citizen engagement** is also a two-way relationship in which a more structured partnership has been formed with the citizens in order to define a problem and jointly analyze various solutions. Citizen engagement is often a reflective, deliberate and mutual learning process and can be conducted through citizen advisory committees or citizen assemblies.

Box 1

Making Parliamentary Debate Belong to the People

The Citizens’ Assembly in Kenya is an open and inclusive movement of citizens and organizations committed to the realization of a good constitutional dispensation, social justice and good governance in Kenya through sensitization, mobilization, and engagement of citizens in matters affecting their democratic rights. The objective is to sensitize, mobilize and engage citizens in matters affecting their democratic rights in order to have a more accountable and transparent Government. Regional Citizen Assemblies have been convened all over Kenya in public places that are accessible to ordinary citizens. Discussions have included debates on budget monitoring, HIV/AIDS, a proposed media bill, voter registration, ethnic violence, women’s rights, election violence and leadership. Many members of the Kenyan public feel that they parliament lacks adequate representation or information on policy debates. Citizen Assemblies can provide the space for citizens to participate and engage in policy discussions with MPs to resolve problems that affect them, and hence create a space for making their voices heard.

Source: www.soros.org/initiatives/osiea/focus_areas/governance;
www.citizenassembly.or.ke

Why Conduct Legislative Public Outreach on HIV/AIDS?

Public outreach can assist in making more information available on the true needs of citizens in relation to HIV/AIDS. It assists governments to better reflect these needs when it is designing and implementing HIV/AIDS programs. Members of parliament can gather this type of locally specific information from the areas they represent. In addition, through citizen engagement parliamentarians will be in a better position to pursue policies or programs that reflect the needs and interests of their constituents.

Legislative outreach can also reach subject area experts, academics, think tanks or NGOs to strengthen the quality and responsiveness of constituent interests during the development of laws and policies of the forthcoming policy, for example through committee hearings. Legislative outreach of this kind is particularly helpful where the research capacity of parliament is limited.

Legislative outreach can also be an effective tool for implementing HIV/AIDS programs by raising awareness and educating the electorate on how they can participate in new programs more effectively. Indeed, legislative outreach serves as an opportunity to build public understanding of national HIV/AIDS policies.

Parliamentarians can engage directly with the people who benefit from HIV/AIDS programs, which can be a very effective tool in determining if measures to address HIV/AIDS have achieved their intended impacts.

Box 2

Parliament of Zimbabwe working together with civil society and people living with HIV/AIDS

In 2006, the Parliament of Zimbabwe's Public Accounts Committee conducted a pilot project in partnership with a local NGO called the Women and AIDS Support Network (WASN) to assess the government's national program to provide ARV treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS. The project also analyzed whether the government assistance programs reached the most vulnerable, especially women and children, in the Glen Norah district. This area has a particularly high population density and many low-income families. It's estimated that over 90% of the population is not formally employed, with a majority engaged in informal activities such as vending, cross border trading, and small-scale manufacturing, often meaning high mobility and, hence, an increased risk for exposure to HIV/AIDS. A growing problem in the area is also orphaned children due to AIDS.

The project also involved a group of people living with HIV/AIDS, who took part in carrying out a survey and interviewing 138 people, who were selected from different social backgrounds (education, age, sex, class and religion) and a majority of them were people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. The survey identified limited financial resources as the key constraint to access ARV medications, as many need to prioritize paying for food, accommodation and school fees. Not only was there a cost for doctors consultation fees in many cases, but the costs for the drugs themselves were too high for those affected. The government has a program that gives access to free drugs to vulnerable groups, but a majority of the respondents had no access to these programs. Some stated difficulties in understanding the process on how to access these drugs. Others claimed that health staff only provided drugs to those who favored the government and the ruling party. The respondents also pointed out the link between ARVs and the cost of transportation, as testing facilities and medicines are rarely accessible in the local communities. In addition, obtaining access to services was said to be a very long process, ranging from three months to 5 years to between a positive test and access to ARV therapy. This prohibited many entitled beneficiaries from obtaining access. Another limitation was stigmatization in the family, community, school and health facilities. Community members suggested that financial assistance and the expansion of food programs would be one way to address the limitations to the government program. Others suggested mobile clinics that provided testing, counseling and treatment services, while services for children were not sufficiently considered.

After the survey, the Public Accounts Committee met with health service providers and various stakeholders working in the area of HIV/AIDS, locally in Glen Norah, at the national level, and from the international donor community. They discussed the policy framework on HIV/AIDS and its impact on ARV treatment; the institutional framework to Support HIV/AIDS initiatives; support to vulnerable groups living with HIV/AIDS; monitoring the provision of antiretroviral therapy by government; and local level support to people living with HIV/AIDS. Several recommendations resulted from the discussions, for example that ARVs should be accessed at primary health centers to avoid transportation costs and increase transparency; that a monitoring framework involving members of parliament and the public should be put in place; and that periodic reports on the use of public funds for HIV/AIDS should be developed.

By involving people living with HIV/AIDS and service providers in assessing the government program on ARV provision, the pilot project was able to identify several challenges and results. It was also able to put forward important recommendations on how to adjust current programs from the beneficiaries' point of view.

Source: *Pilot Projects on Community Monitoring in Ten African Countries*, APRN Newsletter, December 2007

The **benefits of engaging with the public** regarding HIV/AIDS include:

- Enhanced civic participation and a better HIV/AIDS-educated public.
- Increased citizen ability to voice their needs and concerns;
- Better laws, policies and programs to meet these needs and concerns;
- The trust between parliament and the citizens it represents;
- More responsive parliamentarians; and
- A parliament that is strengthened as a democratic institution by increased faith in the representative process.

Importance of a Communication Strategy

To be successful, legislative outreach activities and programs must be carefully tailored to the public they want to reach. Parliamentarians must also determine with whom they wish to communicate. In addition, they must decide what message they want to convey to the public or what valuable information they are trying to obtain through public engagement. Are they:

1. *Seeking to promote a positive impact of pending policies or projects* for example if a new law has been passed to provide free ARVs to everyone in need;
2. *Making an effort to educate the public regarding participation in new programs*, for example will HIV treatments or drugs be available for registered patients through the public health clinics?
3. *Are parliamentarians trying to gather a specific piece of information*, for example how many health clinics in their area are able to offer treatment and how do their constituents perceive the accessibility?

These factors will influence what kind of communication strategy is needed.

Parliamentarians also need to have detailed knowledge of the target audience for the legislative outreach, for example regarding its size, location, literacy level and preferences, in order to be able to select appropriate outreach techniques. There are several **factors that influence the ability of parliament to communicate with its electorate:**

- Low literacy rates or multiple languages;
- Limited knowledge of the role and responsibility of parliament;
- Weak or biased media;
- Lack of resources;
- Mistrust of elected politicians;
- Lack of public interest for national policies or initiatives; or
- Public space that is controlled by a single or dominant political party or figure.

By being prepared and having a clear strategy, parliamentarians can help mitigate some of these challenges. It is not only important that the parliamentarians know the message they want to convey and related facts well. It is also essential for them

to anticipate probable questions and opposing arguments and prepare realistic, informed responses in advance. One tool that can be used is a so called message box, which is a simple way to organize one's own thoughts on how to convey a certain message, at the same time as preparing to respond to other arguments.

Box 3	
Message Box for MPs Announcing a New Health Clinic	
<p>Members' message <i>"A new health clinic in this area is good. It will enable an increased number of people to access ARVs"</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The point members want to convey</p>	<p>Opposing arguments <i>"A health clinic in this area is bad. The suggested area is located too far from the people in the poorest communities, and no public transportation is going there, and hence it will not lead to more people accessing ARVs"</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">A probable opposing argument</p>
<p>Opponent's response to Members <i>"Mobile clinics would be a better option in order to increase accessibility by those in need in more remote areas"</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">How opponents might rebut</p>	<p>Members' response to opponents <i>"New roads leading to the health clinic are planned and transportation will also be arranged. The centre will also be involved in outreach activities to reach remote areas. It will have a role to raise awareness and coordinate ongoing activities in the area, which will be more difficult for mobile clinics".</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">How Members can rebut their opponents</p>
<p>Source and adjusted from: <i>Legislative Public Outreach on Poverty Issues, NDI & UNDP, 2004</i></p>	

How will the Outreach Strategy be Communicated?

The appropriate communication vehicle should be identified for the outreach strategy to become effective. This can involve national press coverage: making information available through print mediums such as fliers and posters; local appearances by members; broadcasting public hearings on TV or radio, or other appearances on local TV or radio stations.

In addition, when developing a communication strategy, it is also important to select the appropriate messenger or speaker to convey the message on behalf of parliament. For example, is a representative of the parliament such as the Speaker or the Clerk most suitable? Or would a staff representative from the information

office will be more appropriate. It might also be necessary to invite a technical expert to discuss details and answer specific questions. In some cases it might make more sense to release a press statement.

These factors will also determine what type of outreach is most appropriate.

Legislative public outreach can be divided into four categories:

1. Institution-wide efforts to educate or inform the population;
2. Outreach by committees or by single issue-based groups of legislators;
3. Communication efforts organized by political party caucuses within the parliament;
4. Individual member efforts to communicate directly with specific groups of citizens.

"The best time to plant a tree is ten years ago. The next best time is now."
Old African proverb

Institutional Outreach

When the objective is to educate and inform broad segments of the population with non-partisan information, institutional public outreach can be an effective tool. This can also be used to communicate relevant information on parliament itself to the public, for example on the role of MPs, the status of various policies and the impact of pending legislation. Apart from the public at large, other important groups to consider in institutional outreach efforts are the media, civic organizations, national pressure groups and the international community.

In many countries there is a broad, multi-party consensus to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic and parliaments might feel that it is important to convey a unified message about the need to address this issue. For example, in countries where parliament plays a substantial part in the budget process, parliament may wish to make public allocations that will improve the situation for people living with HIV/AIDS or other vulnerable groups. It might also be appropriate for parliament to identify successful examples of how a pressing issue has been dealt with at the local level and use its public profile and ability to generate media interest to build

awareness of the problem and the successful solution, which might be replicated elsewhere. This can serve to highlight and build public understanding of parliament's role in national efforts to address HIV/AIDS, as well as increase public support of parliament and the democratic process.

Written Information for Institutional Outreach

Institutional outreach often involves producing written information and making it accessible to the target audiences. This can be done through:

- **Newsletters or other regular updates:** This is a means of making basic updates, announcements of facts or statements by the parliamentary leadership available to the public, either in paper copies or electronically. These publications are usually prepared by non-partisan public relations or communications staff who are assigned to either parliament as a whole, or to the parliamentary leadership.
- **Parliamentary records library or information center:** This can be used to preserve records of the work parliament has done, documented through for example, committee reports, reports from public hearings and debates, or information on relevant bills under debate.
- **Parliamentary websites:** Many parliaments have websites that contain general information about how parliament works, the committee system and the elected representatives. They can provide access to information on pending or archived legislation, various reports, parliamentary statements and announcements, the parliamentary calendar and relevant links to government bodies etc. Web-based surveys can also be used to engage directly with the public. This makes it an easy entry point for the public and other interested parties to access relevant information about parliamentary affairs. Websites can also be an effective tool to highlight what parliament or a group within parliament is doing on a specific issue. One example is the website of the *Parliamentarians' Forum on HIV and AIDS* in India (see www.pfaindia.in), which provides important information on what the Parliament of India is doing on HIV/AIDS, provides basic information about HIV/AIDS, gives access to relevant resources and also enables the public to directly express their opinions on certain questions through on-line surveys.

- **Broad communication through the mass media:** Media can be an effective tool for communication with citizens across a broad geographical area. This can be done through written media, television or through radio, which is especially effective where literacy levels are low.
- **Site visits to development projects:** If resources permit, organizing direct visits by representatives of parliament as a whole to engage with the public can prove to be an effective means to showcase legislative involvement and commitment to resolve citizen concerns. In addition, for example if there have been cases of misappropriation of funds to HIV/AIDS projects, a parliamentary visit can demonstrate its commitment to exercise oversight of funds allocated to a specific project. However, it is more common that the appropriate oversight committee conducts this type of visits.

The benefits of institutional public outreach are that parliament as an institution may have substantially greater resources than parliamentary committees and interest groups or individual members to conduct outreach activities. The parliamentary administration might also be viewed as a non-partisan and more credible representative.

Committee or Issue-Based Outreach

Outreach efforts by committees or single issue-based groups of members, such as issue caucuses, commissions or task forces, which can be groups formed by legislators with a shared an interest in an issue, or groups where legislators have been appointed by Parliament to deal with a certain question, often within a set timeframe. These groups can be effective when parliamentarians want to gather or disseminate information on a very specific issue. It can also be used to gather issue-specific pieces of information and, in the case of HIV/AIDS, publicize information about certain policies or to describe their intended impact. These activities are usually aimed at reaching particular segments of the population, for example people living with HIV/AIDS, pregnant women or youth. Issue experts and the media are also important target audiences.

Committees play a key role in executing basic legislative functions, for example reviewing bills before they become approved by parliament. Where parliaments have limited staff and resources to collect important information relating to these bills, public hearings can be an effective tool. Committee hearings can either invite relevant experts to provide information on a specific issue or analyze the impacts of a proposed policy initiative. This mostly involves local experts, but representatives from the international development community can also be valuable sources of cross-national comparative information and might be able to offer best practices cases and tools that have worked in similar situations. Committee hearings can also serve to get direct input from the citizens that will be affected by a bill.

Advance planning and organization by committee members and staff who are coordinating a hearing can achieve a more positive and productive exchange. Here are some **key aspects to consider** during the process:

- Determine the format for the hearing, ground rules for discussions and the time allocated to various portions of the hearing;
- Select someone to chair the meeting;
- Prepare briefing material for the MPs attending the hearing in advance;
- Identify and invite appropriate speakers, for example from relevant ministries; agencies, think tanks, academia, civil society or professional experts;
- Define the role of each presenter and establish mutual expectations, objectives and time limits;
- Make sure there is enough time for questions and discussions; and
- Develop a plan for media coverage.

Committees or other issue-based groups of members can also play an important role in engaging with the public in order to inform them on the expected impacts of a pending policy or reform. By increasing their understanding of these policies or reforms, they are more likely to accept or support them.

These committees and issue-based groups are also well positioned to undertake public education or awareness campaigns. These groups can also play an important role in increasing the knowledge about HIV/AIDS within parliament itself, so that

parliamentarians are better equipped to addressing the challenges their constituents face from a multisectoral perspective.

Box 4

The Uganda Parliamentary Toolkit on HIV/AIDS

Understanding the important role parliamentarians play in HIV/AIDS mitigation, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on HIV/AIDS and Related Matters in Uganda developed a toolkit on HIV/AIDS for Ugandan parliament. The toolkit includes information on the parliamentary response to HIV/AIDS in Uganda; the HIV/AIDS epidemic globally and in Uganda; basic information on HIV/AIDS, STDs and Tuberculosis; how HIV/AIDS affects various vulnerable groups, in particular children, young people and women; various interventions to mitigate HIV/AIDS in Uganda; HIV/AIDS in the community; and information on HIV/AIDS as it relates to human rights and the legal framework.

It was designed to:

- Give political leaders a working knowledge of the main HIV/AIDS issues and interventions in Uganda to facilitate informed, open, non-prejudiced, non-judgmental, non-stigmatizing and non-discriminating communication about the epidemic;
- Help political leaders confront silence, stigma and denial;
- Help political leaders to make treatment and care for people with HIV/AIDS as fundamental to the AIDS response as is prevention;
- Help political leaders as key stakeholders to be at the centre of the action; and
- Help political leaders monitor and evaluate HIV/AIDS interventions.

As a result, the toolkit contributed to the increased knowledge of most MPs in Uganda of their own role in the fight against HIV/AIDS, especially at the constituency level. In addition to the formal HIV/AIDS committee in parliament, a group of MPs has also initiated a voluntary HIV/AIDS Forum. The forum has established a relationship with the Uganda AIDS Commission to enable reporting to parliament on progress on HIV/AIDS fight in the country.

The Ugandan toolkit on HIV/AIDS has also inspired parliaments in other African countries, such as the Parliament of Ghana, which is currently developing a similar toolkit for parliamentarians, based on the Ugandan format.

Source: *Parliamentary HIV/AIDS Communication Toolkit*, developed by Parliamentary Standing Committee on HIV/AIDS and the Office for Parliamentary Professional Development, 2004

Fundamental Components of Awareness Campaigns

Awareness campaigns should have a few fundamental components:

- A clear concise message, for example "*ARVs are now available free of charge at clinic x*";
- A well informed spokesperson, who can make consistent statements that do not contradict statements being made by other MPs;
- Factual information to support the stated claim (for example a map showing the location of the clinic in question);

- Information on where additional information can be found (brochures, contact information to the office etc.);
- Publicity events (for example arranging visits by MPs to HIV clinics or other development sites, interviews with MPs and the beneficiaries of the programs etc.); and
- Media coverage.

There are many benefits for committees and other issue-specific groups, such as standing committees or parliamentary networks on HIV/AIDS, to conduct public outreach. Often these groups receive up-to-date information on the challenges and needs of their constituencies or expertise on HIV/AIDS-related issues, and are able to apply this information directly in their work. This engagement can also help demonstrate their commitment to improve the conditions for people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS.

Outreach by Parliamentary Party Groups

This kind of outreach may use similar tools as committee outreach, but it normally targets current and potential voters of the party, as well as the media. The messages used in outreach activities will reflect the ideology and platform of the party in question, which can be used to show support for proposed policies, or to voice a potential alternative. For example, opposition parties may want their outreach activities to reflect how their proposed policies differ from the governing party's and may be used to present a viable alternative to the current government. The establishment of a political party platform that includes party objectives on how to address HIV/AIDS and other development issues can form the basis for most outreach by parliamentary party groups, and may serve as a mechanism to ensure that party group outreach activities stay on-message.

Individual Member Outreach

Outreach activities by individual members of parliament can be used to gather information on the needs of their constituents in order to inform their work in the legislature, to look at the impact of national initiatives and programs, or to communicate relevant parliamentary information to the people they represent. They will have the most impact when they are tailored to fit local situations and needs. Individual legislators usually have very precise objectives when conducting outreach

activities, for example to show understanding and demonstrate responsiveness to the local needs. In order for them to be able to advocate for increased and more accessible services for their local constituents, it is important for the MP to get a full picture of local conditions and priorities, as well as the key characteristics of the constituency. **Local Conditions of Constituents:**

- Ratio of young to elderly people;
- Number of people living with HIV/AIDS;
- Number and location of health facilities offering prevention, treatment care and support relating to HIV/AIDS;
- Other key institutions and organizations working with HIV/AIDS;
- Predominant ethnic, linguistic or religious groups; and
- Major transportation or communication infrastructure.

Individual outreach activities are based on a two-way communication. **Tools for individual member outreach include:**

- Participatory assessment activities, such as town hall meetings, public forums or organized group discussions;
- Public service announcements (both radio and television);
- Participation in a radio or television call-in show;
- Use of print media by issuing press releases, publishing statements or announcing events;
- Distribution of a newsletter or other relevant publication, alternatively a weekly/monthly column in a local newspaper;
- Presentation of information on reform progress or processes;
- Organization of special events, alternatively attending local events, community festivals or engaging with citizens at a well frequented place, such as a market; and
- Participation in local development and training events, or educational seminars on HIV/AIDS (where the organizers often can facilitate travel costs for the MP to attend).

Some of the major constraints for individual members to interact with their constituents and to conduct effective outreach activities on their own are lack of time, space and resources. If the resources are available, some MPs might choose to

open a constituency office and hold periodic visiting hours, so the constituents can have regular access to the MP. Alternatively, the MP may choose to use existing office space in the municipal or party offices. This can serve to convey a message that the MP is working to meet the needs of his or her constituents.

MPs can also choose to get involved in casework, i.e. work with an individual or group to resolve a particular problem or address a particular issue. In addition, MPs can coordinate with other actors focusing on HIV/AIDS in the constituency or district. This can be done by creating a directory of community-based organizations or NGOs and making the directory available to all stakeholders. MPs are in a position to bring various stakeholders together for the purpose of information sharing and facilitating dialogue, which in turn can lead to improved coordination and less duplication. MPs can also work directly with citizens to initiate small-scale development projects, directing them to where they can find funding, and/or assist in mobilizing donor resources for HIV/AIDS projects in the constituency or district. By creating tangible results for the people living with HIV/AIDS in the constituency, the MP can also help change the perception existing in some countries that MPs should contribute financially to local HIV/AIDS responses or even to individuals affected by HIV/AIDS, even if it means using their own personal assets.

Box 5			
Recognizing the potential impact of various types of outreach			
	ACTOR	PUBLIC OUTREACH EXAMPLES	POTENTIAL IMPACT
INFORM THE PUBLIC	Legislature as a whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parliamentary newsletters • Parliamentary broadcasts • Youth visits/tours 	Strengthen image of parliament as open and democratic; inform citizens of accomplishments and goals.
	Committees and other parliamentary groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public hearings • Press conferences/media outreach • Committee/caucus reports 	Demonstrate that the group is working to advance citizen interests; articulate policy stances.
	Individual MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press releases/brochures • Publicize pending reforms and policy changes 	Establish relationships with media; inform constituents of goals and minimize severe reactions to policy changes.
GATHER INFORM	Legislature as a whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize parliament's library or research services to reach out to experts and interest groups • Interactions with civil society 	Promote informed policymaking; ensure that parliament is truly representative.

	Committees and other parliamentary groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek testimony/request briefings from issue experts and civil society • Utilize public opinion polls 	Group can better decide what policies are priorities; group will be better informed on substance of policy.
	Individual MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour key regions of district • "Open forum" (town hall-style) public meetings 	Identify what issues matter most to constituents/district; improve public image.
TAKE INFORMED ACTION	Legislature as a whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass legislation • Use influence over budget to emphasize problem areas 	Demonstrate the effectiveness of parliament and its important role in solving the country's problems.
	Committees and other parliamentary groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the media to publicize problems • Markup/propose legislation 	Enhance reputation of group; can be seen as responsive to the people's needs.
	Individual MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow through on constituent casework • Hold periodic "visiting hours" in district office 	Improve ability to identify trends and recurrent problems; build loyalty among constituents.
Source: <i>Legislative Public Outreach on Poverty Issues</i>, NDI and UNDP, 2004			

Working with Civil Society

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have been in the forefront of the response to HIV/AIDS in all regions, from the national to community level. The organizations that are based in an MP's constituency and deal with local HIV/AIDS issues on a daily basis possess valuable information regarding the local experiences and problems.

They are also often able to identify current community priorities as well as to uncover possible future challenges. CSOs can therefore play an important role in helping MPs fulfill their duties by providing them

"A mutually beneficial relationship between civil society and parliament can enhance the efforts of both groups ..."

Honorable Anne Makinda, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Tanzania

with technical expertise and the knowledge necessary to take action. They can also be excellent partners for organizing and holding public meetings, where MPs have the opportunity to meet and discuss with various groups and individuals involved in the local HIV/AIDS mitigation, as well as with the people benefiting from such programs. However, in many parts of the world, the relationship between parliaments and civil society is still characterized by mistrust and has therefore been more or less non-existent. In cases where such a relationship has been established and the parties have managed to break down the barriers that have existed between them, it has proven quite fruitful.

Box 6

Civil Society and Parliament working together on HIV/AIDS in Kenya

Since HIV/AIDS was declared a natural disaster, a great number of non-governmental

organizations (NGOs) focusing on HIV/AIDS in Kenya have worked together with the Parliamentary Committee on Health, as parliament as an institution, and individual MPs. Two of them are *the National Empowerment Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS in Kenya* (NEPHAK), a network of NGOs formed by women infected by HIV, and *the Kenya NGO Consortium* (KANCO), which is a consortium of NGOs dealing with HIV/AIDS issues. By organizing consultative forums for MPs, NEPHAK and KANCO have played an important role in raising the awareness among MPs by educating them about the role they can play in the fight against HIV/AIDS. KANCO has also designed a tool kit called "Talking points for MPs" to help increase the capacity of parliamentarians on HIV/AIDS and assist them in addressing specific issues.

Source: *An examination of the role of parliament, parliamentary committees and individual MPs in the response to HIV/AIDS in Kenya, 2005*

Working with the Media

The media have an important role to play in the fight against HIV/AIDS. It can have an educational role by raising awareness about basic facts about HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, as well as to help reduce the stigma. It can also advocate for more effective responses and services on behalf of people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. In addition, the media plays an important watchdog role in uncovering misuse of funding for HIV/AIDS and exposing discrimination and violations against PLWA and other vulnerable groups. The media shares these roles with parliaments. A good working relationship between the two is essential if they are to fulfill their respective duties. This relationship should ideally be based on mutual respect in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Cultivating positive relationships with key journalists can be an important tool for parliaments, committees and individual MPs to increase the likelihood that the media will cover issues on which parliament conducts outreach on HIV/AIDS-related topics. Print, TV or radio media coverage can also provide an effective and low-cost way for members to communicate with large national audiences on specific issues.

Parliamentarians as HIV/AIDS Advocates

As representatives of the people, parliamentarians are responsible for addressing the needs of their constituents. One of their roles is to act as advocates on HIV/AIDS-related issues in order to reduce the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, to promote greater awareness of the disease, and to influence a more effective response. MPs **advocate for HIV/AIDS** by:

- **Breaking the silence:** HIV/AIDS is still a very sensitive issue to talk about in many countries. Parliamentarians can lead by example by using the facts and talking openly about HIV/AIDS with family, colleagues and the public on how the disease is affecting families, communities and the country as a whole.
- **Preventing prejudice, discrimination and stigma:** Parliamentarians can speak out on the need for action to prevent the spread of HIV. They should encourage voluntary HIV testing and counseling as well as be openly supportive of people living with the disease and other vulnerable groups, including the general public, men who have sex with men, sex workers and prisoners.
- **Providing a visible example:** Parliamentarians are role models that people look up to. Those parliamentarians who are HIV-positive and are courageous enough to declare their status can make a great difference in how society behaves and treats people living with HIV. When well-known figures come forward and take a clear stand against stigma and discrimination, it can help others build the courage to do the same.

Box 7

Malawian Parliamentarians promote openness and disclosure

In Malawi, the parliamentary speaker Sam Mpasu revealed that, between 1996 and 2000, 28 members of parliament had died from AIDS. In 2002, cabinet minister Thengo Maloya indicated that he had personally lost three children to AIDS and that 100 important officials had died from AIDS in the previous six years. In 2004, then President Bakili Muluzi revealed that his brother had died of AIDS and urged Malawians to challenge stigma and discrimination. Since then, he has repeatedly urged Malawians to be open about HIV and to go for voluntary counseling and testing. Like his predecessor, current Malawi President Dr Bingu wa Mutharika also tested for HIV and declared his HIV-negative status. Women parliamentarians have also openly been tested for HIV and encouraged others to do so.

Source: *Taking Action Against HIV, 2007*

- **Educating and Informing:** Parliamentarians should make sure they know the facts about HIV/AIDS, for example how one can and cannot contract HIV, what social and cultural factors can put people at risk of infection, and that people living with HIV can live productive lives, particularly if they receive treatment including antiretroviral therapy, care and compassion, and their rights are

promoted, protected and fulfilled. They should also make sure to be well informed on the implications of HIV/AIDS in their constituencies, as well as what services are available and where. In addition, Parliamentarians can take an active part in spreading this knowledge to their constituents, their peers and the public, for example by participating in local training events, public meetings, etc.

- **Mobilizing Action:** Parliamentarians are in a position to spearhead community mobilization against HIV/AIDS in their constituencies, for example by establishing public forums for debate about issues related to HIV/AIDS. They can also influence government, public officials, social, religious and traditional leaders to take positive action and to hold themselves accountable.
- **Advocating for an Effective HIV/AIDS Response:** Parliamentarians should stress the need to make HIV/AIDS a top priority from a multisectoral approach, at the national, regional and local levels. Within a human rights framework, they should also advocate for new or reformed laws and policies that will strengthen HIV prevention, protect those most vulnerable to HIV, and improve care and support for those living with or affected by HIV/AIDS (See Unit 2, as well as Taking Action Against HIV, 2007). Parliamentarians should also advocate for sufficient government allocations for HIV/AIDS-related prevention, treatment, care and impact mitigation measures by using their role in the budget process effectively (see Unit 6). They should also engage with local organizations in their constituencies to ensure that these funds are spent appropriately and according to the needs of the beneficiaries. Parliamentarians can also actively participate in lobbying the international donor community for additional funding, in particular to increase access to HIV treatment.

Unit 7: Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

1. What tools do parliamentarians have to their disposal to conduct legislative public outreach?
2. What are the advantages of the various types of outreach, i.e. institutional,

- committee/issue-based, party group, or individual member outreach, and when is the respective type most appropriate?
3. How can parliamentarians build effective dialogue and work with civil society organizations and the media to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS?
 4. In what ways can parliamentarians advocate for an increased and more effective response to HIV/AIDS in his or her constituency?
 5. Prepare a communication strategy, including a message box, on a pertinent HIV/AIDS issue in your constituency.
 6. Identify key civil society organizations and other stakeholders in your constituency working on HIV/AIDS related issues.

Select Bibliography:

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Legislative Public Outreach on Poverty Issues – Strengthening Parliamentary Involvement in the Millennium Development Goals and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process, NDI and UNDP, 2004

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Parliament and the Media – Professional Development Program for Parliamentarians and Staff, World Bank Institute, 2007

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Public Participation in Canada – The Role of Parliament, Speaking Notes by Amelita A. Armit, Parliamentary Centre, Canada-China Governance Workshop, September 10, 2007

Taking Action Against HIV - A handbook for parliamentarians, IPU, UNAIDS and UNDP, 2007

What Parliamentarians Can Do About HIV/AIDS – Action for Children and Young People, UNICEF, 2003

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(http://www.usaid.gov/stories/tanzania/cs_tz_parliament.html)

East African Initiative (OSIEA), Open Society Institute
www.soros.org/initiatives/osiea/focus_areas/governance

Gender Committee deepens Parliament's role on HIV/AIDS
<http://parlcomm.org.gh/news/1-latest-news/93-gender-committee-deepens-parliament-role-on-hiv-aids>

NLM Gateway
<http://gateway.nlm.nih.gov/MeetingAbstracts/ma?f=102250622.html>

The Parliamentarians' Forum on HIV/AIDS
www.pfaindia.in

Suggestions for further reading:

HIV/AIDS Communication in selected African Countries – Interventions, responses and possibilities, CADRA and SIDA, 2007

HIV and AIDS and Municipalities, Education and Training Unit (ETU), 2007
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How to run prevention and education programs and campaigns, Education and Training Unit (ETU), 2007

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The Legislature and Constituency Relations, World Bank, 2004
(<http://info.worldbank.org/etools/library/latestversion.asp?108355>)