

# TECHNICAL SUPPORT FACILITIES: HELPING TO BUILD AN EFFICIENT AND SUSTAINABLE AIDS RESPONSE



## AN OVERVIEW



# Technical Support Facilities: Key achievements

## **Since TSFs have started operating, they have:**

- delivered 50 000 days of technical assistance and support for developing capacity;
- provided technical support to over 70 countries in Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, West and Central Africa, Southeast Asia and the Pacific and South Asia;
- supported countries in developing HIV proposals for grant Rounds 8–10 of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria that resulted in US\$ 1.7 billion being raised for the first two years of implementation;
- helped 59 countries to develop a national strategic plan or national operational plan;
- strengthened country coordinating mechanisms in 37 countries;
- provided support to 50 countries through 125 technical support assignments for implementing Global Fund grants;
- facilitated training and support for developing capacity for 2140 national and regional consultants and country partners in a range of technical areas;
- assisted in strengthening national monitoring and evaluation frameworks in 55 countries;
- used local and regional consultants in 85% of all assignments, building skills and lowering costs.

# Technical Support Facilities: An overview

Commitment and funding for scaling up the AIDS response increased significantly in the 2000s, but there were also frustrating obstacles and delays. Gains were made, but in many places inadequate infrastructure and governance and uneven skills and capacity still hindered access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services.

These experiences led to an upswing in demand for technical support, at first mostly to bridge “gaps”, but gradually also to strengthen longer-term capacity. Accordingly, the first independent evaluation of UNAIDS, in 2002, advised more strongly emphasizing the provision of technical support.

Starting in 2005, UNAIDS brokered and funded the establishment of Technical Support Facilities (TSFs) first in Southern Africa, then in West and Central Africa, Eastern Africa and Southeast Asia and the Pacific and, most recently, in South Asia. The TSFs were set up to strengthen countries’ capacity to fund, plan, manage and coordinate effective, larger-scale HIV programmes. The facilities soon distinguished themselves as vital assets in countries’ attempts to step up and sharpen their AIDS response.

Their work is aligned with the UNAIDS *Getting to zero: 2011–2015 strategy*, which calls for a renewed push towards achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support and advancing human rights and gender equality.

The core function of the TSFs is to meet requests for technical assistance and devel-

oping capacity in ways that are tailor-made for the context, are of high quality and contribute to meaningful results and outcomes. They help countries in bridging short-term technical and capacity gaps and in building the capacity they need to achieve and sustain an effective AIDS response, including skills, plans, systems and institutions.

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“THE TECHNICAL SUPPORT FACILITIES HAVE PROVED TO BE AN IMPORTANT INNOVATION. OPERATING ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF TECHNICAL SUPPORT, THEY HAVE HELPED STRENGTHEN SOUTH-BASED CAPACITIES AND SYSTEMS IN DELIVERING EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMING AGAINST AIDS.”

*Michel Sidibé, UNAIDS Executive Director*

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Each year, the TSFs provide competitively priced, regionally embedded, top-quality and timely technical assistance and capacity development to a wide range of partners in more than 70 countries.

The rapid response and outsourcing model of the technical support facilities enables UNAIDS to contribute profoundly to national AIDS programmes and health systems in highly responsive, flexible and cost-effective ways. They represent one of several approaches the United Nations uses to fulfil its mandate to provide technical support and to focus on demands other United Nations agencies are not able to meet.



UNAIDS / O. O'Hanlon

## WHERE DO THE TECHNICAL SUPPORT FACILITIES OPERATE?

The first TSF set up by UNAIDS, **TSF Southern Africa**, is operated by Health and Development Africa, a public health, development and HIV and AIDS consultancy group based in Johannesburg, South Africa with access to a wide network of consultants and organizations in the rest of Africa. This TSF covers 14 countries and provides about 3800 consultancy days of technical support per year. National or regional consultants perform more than 80% of the assignments.

**TSF Eastern Africa** was set up in 2006 and was initially operated by the African Medical and Research Foundation. Since May 2010, the Centre for African Family Studies in Nairobi, Kenya has operated it with the support of the International HIV/AIDS Alliance and the International Planned Parenthood Federation Africa Region. It covers six countries: Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. It provides about 2000 days of technical support a year, and more than 80% of the consultants used are from the Eastern Africa region.

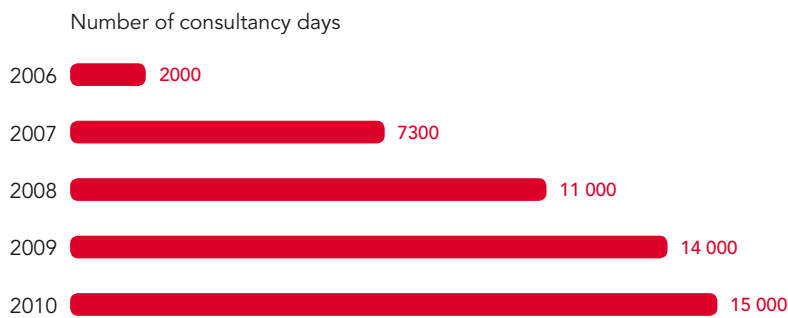
**TSF West and Central Africa** covers 25 French-, English- and Portuguese-speaking countries. It began operating in 2006 and is managed by the Bureau d'Appui en Santé Publique'96, a private consultancy firm, along with the Consultancy Group of the Center for International Cooperation in Health and Development. The Futures Group, which specializes in designing and implementing

public health and social programmes for low- and middle-income countries, joined the consortium in April 2010. The facility operates from Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso and is recognized as the prime provider of short-term, HIV-related technical support in the region. It provided more than 3700 days of support in 2010, and nearly 90% of the consultants it uses are from the region.

The **TSF Southeast Asia and the Pacific** started operating in late 2006 and is hosted by the regional office of the International Planned Parenthood Federation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It serves 26 countries, 8 of which are regarded as regional priority countries for strengthening AIDS responses. Key areas of focus include strengthening civil society engagement and ensuring that the key populations at higher risk of HIV exposure and infection are adequately involved in and covered by interventions. It provided more than 5000 days of technical support in 2010, and more than 90% of its consultants are based in the region.

Set up in 2009 and operated by ActionAid International Asia (in partnership with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in India and the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research in Bangladesh), the **TSF South Asia** is the youngest of the technical support facilities. The facility services eight countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) and almost exclusively uses consultants who are based in the region. In 2010, the TSF provided more than 1500 days of technical support and capacity development.

Technical support delivered by the TSFs per year, measured in consultancy days, 2006–2010



Who are the clients of the Technical Support Facilities?

- Government ministries and agencies
- National AIDS coordinating agencies
- Civil society organizations
- Global fund grant recipients
- Bilateral organizations
- United Nations agencies

WHAT MAKES THE TECHNICAL SUPPORT FACILITIES SPECIAL?

The technical support facilities have several special attributes that enhance their value and effectiveness.

- ▶ They provide **demand-driven** services at **reasonable cost**.
- ▶ Their streamlined administrative systems make them more **rapid, flexible** and **responsive** than most other providers.
- ▶ The TSFs **build local capacity** and facilitate the sharing of the expertise of government and civil society implementers across countries.
- ▶ Their activities are aligned with the **UNAIDS *Getting to zero: 2011–2015 strategy*** and with current United Nations knowledge and guidance. Collaboration between technical support facilities, UNAIDS country offices, regional support teams and UNAIDS Cosponsors creates a **powerful mix of capacity and resources** for responding to country needs.
- ▶ The TSFs are **regionally based** and are therefore more adaptable to local conditions, more familiar with local networks, better positioned to marshal quick responses and able to achieve continuity and follow-up support.
- ▶ They predominantly use **high-quality local and regional expertise**. The consultants they deploy are familiar with local contexts and are likely to command vital soft skills that are so important for



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“THE (TSF) CONSULTANT WAS HIGHLY QUALIFIED, ASSESSED OUR NEEDS AND DEVELOPED A SYSTEM THAT WAS ESTABLISHED WITHIN TWO WEEKS ... WITH THE SYSTEM IN PLACE, WE WERE ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH IN SIX WEEKS WHAT WOULD HAVE TAKEN US A YEAR. I HAVE BEEN APPROACHED BY OTHER REGIONAL CSOs EXPRESSING INTEREST TO ADAPT OUR FINANCIAL SYSTEM AND BORROW THE MANUAL.”

— Vince Crisostomo, Executive Director of Seven Sisters, on the networks' experience of working with the TSF Southeast Asia and Pacific.

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- effective technical assistance and capacity development.
- ▶ They emphasize **partnerships** (especially within and between countries of the global South) and **strengthen country ownership**.
- ▶ They are **adaptive** enough to **respond quickly to shifting needs** – such as providing support for developing Global Fund grant proposals and implementing the grants, governance systems, costing and budgeting and monitoring and evaluation as well as technical areas such as medical male circumcision and the mapping of key populations at higher risk of HIV exposure and infection.
- ▶ The diversity of the organizations hosting the technical support facilities and the close collaboration between them enables them to integrate **private- and public-sector approaches** into their work.
- ▶ They have **built strong links with key civil society organizations** and networks and are viewed as trustworthy, neutral players.
- ▶ They play vital roles in helping countries successfully **access and manage Global Fund grants**. Their support spans the entire Global Fund grant cycle, involves punctual short-term technical assistance and links that to capacity development activities that build systems, process and skills.

### PRIORITY AREAS OF TECHNICAL SUPPORT

#### Global Fund grant implementation support

Programme management and governance

#### Management

Programme Implementation

Procurement

Financial management

Organizational development

Partnership development

#### Monitoring and evaluation

Developing guidelines on monitoring and evaluation and designing frameworks

Evaluating programmes and projects

#### Planning

Strategic and operational planning

Costing and budgeting

Developing strategy and policy

Developing proposals

#### Resource mobilization and tracking

Global Fund proposals

Resource tracking

#### Thematic areas (examples)

Key populations at higher risk

Gender

Legal issues and human rights

### REDEFINING THE TECHNICAL SUPPORT MARKET

For decades, technical support was considered assistance dispensed from the global North to the global South. Consultants from donor countries would typically be “parachuted in” to perform certain technical tasks, conduct training and provide other support – and then depart.

The TSFs have changed that way of working. Most of the technical support resources they deploy are locally or regionally based, and the TSFs are constantly investing to upgrade the skills of the consultants. Increasingly, the skills of community-based practitioners are also being harnessed and enhanced. Increasing collaboration between the facilities (around capacity development programmes and sharing new tools and methods) also exemplifies the South–South links that have long been neglected in the technical support arena.

### GREATER COST-EFFECTIVENESS

As funding becomes more tightly rationed, boosting cost–effectiveness becomes even more important.

The TSFs support training and capacity development to help countries in mapping key populations at higher risk and enhancing their HIV surveillance systems and methods. These interventions all help focus resources where they can have the greatest effect, reduce waste and contribute to improving cost–effectiveness.

The TSFs work closely with a diverse range of partners and are introducing processes for improving the coordination of technical support activities. Strong coordination enables limited resources to be used more productively and enables the efforts of United Nations and other development partners, government systems and civil society groups to become mutually reinforcing.



“THE SUPPORT FROM TSF SOUTH ASIA TO THE CCM NEPAL HAS BEEN CRUCIAL ... IT HAS BEEN IMPORTANT FOR BUILDING IMPORTANT SYSTEMS WITHIN THE CCM, WHICH HAVE BEEN USEFUL FOR THE BETTER PERFORMANCE OF THE CCM, AS WELL AS OF GLOBAL FUND INITIATIVES OVERALL.”

— Gokarna Bhatta, CCM Nepal Coordinator

More accurate costing processes also contribute to greater efficiency. Some technical support facilities are collaborating with the Global Fund and WHO on tools for costing Global Fund proposals and for efforts to cost antiretroviral therapy in support of the Global Fund’s “value for money” initiative.

The facilities are also streamlining themselves. There is greater emphasis on reducing the direct costs of support and on co-funding the activities of the TSFs to supplement core resources. For example, some TSFs arrange cost sharing with international nongovernmental organizations around developing capacity that supports the development and implementation of Global Fund grant proposals. Trainers are being shared and training approaches harmonized, duplication is being avoided and economies of scale can now be achieved. Contracting mechanisms have also been made more efficient.

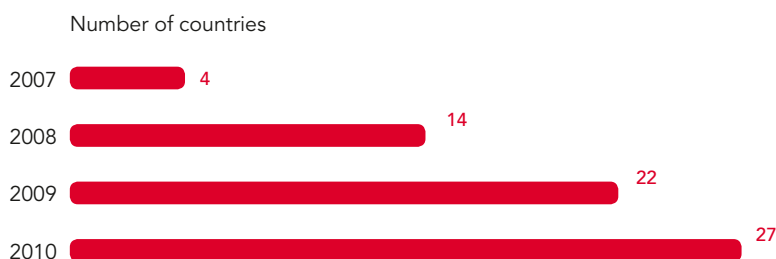
### ASSURING QUALITY

Technical support is not a magic wand. Its success depends on a range of factors, especially assuring quality reliably and clearly and efficiently managing the assistance.

The process of assuring the quality of TSFs spans vetting consultants, conceptualizing and designing assignments, clients and consultants reviewing completed assignments and training and developing the capacity of consultants on an ongoing basis to keep them up to date with current thinking, methods and tools. The TSFs help clients in strengthening the terms of reference, carrying out pre-scoping to clarify the needs of more complicated assignments and providing guidelines for managing the assignments.

Increasing attention is being focused on monitoring and evaluating the support provided by TSFs. This is vital for accountability and for ensuring consistently high quality and efficiency. A revised monitoring and evaluation framework will refine indicators and reporting so that they more accurately reflect progress in achieving project objectives.

### Number of countries receiving support for Global Fund Grant Implementation



## SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GLOBAL FUND GRANTS

The TSF provide vital technical assistance and capacity development support around developing Global Fund proposals and implementing grants.

The TSF also unblock stalled programmes, strengthen the capacity of key structures (notably country coordinating mechanisms and principal recipients), bolster partners' implementing capacity and help countries to understand Global Fund processes and craft successful grant proposals. Groundwork laid by the technical support facilities has led to more advanced planning of the development of Global Fund proposals in some countries.

## STRENGTHENING CAPACITY

The TSFs provide extensive and vital assistance to government ministries, national AIDS authorities, civil society organizations and networks and other key structures such as country coordinating mechanisms and principal recipients. The support includes crafting strong strategic and operational plans, strengthening financial management and other governance systems, overhauling monitoring and evaluation systems and mastering Global Fund processes.

The development of programmes and capacity is being integrated to leverage investment and to enrich the learning and sharing of experiences. Support for developing capacity is targeting both consultants and country partners, including civil society, with twinning and mentoring increasingly common approaches. The skills and expertise of local consultants (including community-based ones) are continually upgraded.

“WE HAD AN EXCELLENT ENGAGEMENT WITH THE TSF THROUGHOUT THE ASSIGNMENT. THE TSF CONTRIBUTED SIGNIFICANTLY TO MAKING THIS EXERCISE A SUCCESS. THE SUPPORT IS APPRECIATED AND WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO A STRONG WORKING RELATIONSHIP.”

— *NERCHA official on TSF assistance in the development of Swaziland's National Strategic Framework on HIV and AIDS, 2009-2014.*

Nevertheless, many government and civil society structures still require technical assistance to get urgent tasks done and unplug blockage that stalls programmes. The TSFs are realizing opportunities for integrating such short-term technical assistance with the longer-term development of capacity.

## SOLID PARTNERSHIPS

Each of the TSFs works with a wide range of partners in government, civil society, the United Nations community, multilateral and bilateral donors and agencies and other technical support initiatives. Emphasis is increasing on developing ongoing

IN THEIR ASSIGNMENT EVALUATIONS, MORE THAN 70% OF CLIENTS AND PARTNERS IN 2010 OF THE TSF WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA REPORTED THAT THE SKILLS AND CAPACITIES OF THEIR STAFF HAD BEEN STRENGTHENED.

relationships with key clients – such as national AIDS authorities, country coordinating mechanisms and principal recipients – which enables timely pre-scoping and planning of assignments. This also helps to foster country ownership.



UNAIDS / G. Pirozzi

The TSFs identify and develop networks of providers of technical support at the national and regional levels and strengthen their systems and capacity for delivering high-quality support.

There is also a special focus on coordinating work with UNAIDS and various interagency initiatives around HIV prevention, monitoring and evaluation and supporting civil society organizations. In the Southern Africa region, for instance, there is collaboration with the AIDS Strategy and Action Plan service on strategic and operational planning and with the Futures Group on costing and budgeting. These kinds of moves are creating stronger synergy between joint United Nations planning processes and the development of capacity.

### MANIFEST GAINS

Obstacles to effective action still hinder countries' HIV responses. No institution – private or public – ever reaches a point at which technical support becomes redundant. This is partly because the terrain and context keep shifting. Even when new systems and capacity take root, fresh challenges materialize. Accessing Global Fund funding, for example, has become more complicated, and reporting obligations have multiplied and grown in complexity. Improved HIV surveillance, diagnostic and treatment techniques bring new technical challenges. The need to demonstrate results and outcomes has imposed new obligations.

Against this background, the TSFs broker and facilitate the provision of high-quality, timely and cost-effective technical assistance and

development of capacity. They enable countries to raise the funds, meet the technical challenges and build and manage the systems that enable effective AIDS responses.

They do so in cost-effective and flexible ways, by cultivating and using local skills and capacity and by being able to adapt quickly and assuredly to new circumstances. Further, they facilitate South–South collaboration and the exchange of resources, tools and lessons within and between countries.

The facilities increasingly focus on developing capacity, are more closely aligning their provision of technical assistance with the development of capacity and are strengthening their partnerships with key national and regional players.

In consultation with UNAIDS country offices, the TSFs now provide more targeted and sustained support to selected organizations. The technical support facilities are providing such ongoing support in such areas as strengthening financial management, developing strategic plans and mobilizing resources. This intensified approach will help create stronger, more sustainable organizations.

In doing all this, the TSFs bring to the AIDS response a rare and potent mix of attributes and potential. The benefits are manifest. The facilities are helping to maximize value for money – by increasing absorptive capacity and by enabling countries to do more with less, bolster their systems and improve the quality and sustainability of their programming. In a short time, they have become vital elements in the HIV responses of dozens of countries.



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