

Maintaining epidemic control in Namibia: designing the optimal package. Lessons from ACS support to the Namibian Government.

Submission to the International AIDS Conference 2020

Authors: Claire Jones, Edward Owino

Background

In Namibia, 94% of people living with HIV know their status, 96% are on ART and 95% have achieved viral suppression (by 2019). The Namibian Government sought to develop a priority package of services for epidemic control, a process driven by reduction international assistance and competing demand for public funding.

Description

From August to December 2019, the USAID/PEPFAR-supported [African Collaborative for Health Financing Solutions' \(ACS\)](#) provided support to the Namibian Ministry of Health and Social Services to devise a service package for HIV/AIDS epidemic control based on the 10-step process suggested by Glassman et al (2016). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 stakeholders critical to the HIV/AIDS response to map existing HIV/AIDS-related interventions and identify services needed to maintain epidemic control. Through a consultation process, ACS facilitated the agreement of the goal of the package of services, the definition of selection criteria, the shaping of package options based on the country epidemiological profile, and the determination of priority services.

Lessons learned

- 1) A political economy analysis is critical to understanding the role of all stakeholders involved in HIV/AIDS interventions to ensure a balanced consensus on the priority services.
- 2) Openness and regular communication among civil society, academia, government agencies and development partners were the critical catalyzers of the process.
- 3) Clarification and country-specific adaptation of the terminologies (such as epidemic control, fast-track, critical vs noncritical) is essential at the outset of the process given the sensitivity of the Namibian context.
- 4) Engagement of local political networks and technical stakeholders at the beginning of the process was instrumental in mobilizing necessary resources to sustain the prioritization process.

Conclusions

Inclusive stakeholder engagement not only provides sound knowledge, critical thinking and hands-on-experience, but serves as a vital ingredient to secure country ownership, which leads to sustainability. As Namibia is one of the pioneers in developing an HIV epidemic-maintenance package, the lessons learned, especially those related to the drivers of an effective process, can serve as inspiration to countries with similar needs who would like to mirror this approach.