

Strengthening research capacity at the International HIV/AIDS Alliance: the role of Evidence of Action

Summary

Over the past four years, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance (the Alliance) has contributed to the partnership established by the DFID funded research programme 'Evidence for Action'.

The Alliance is primarily an HIV programme implementation and HIV policy and advocacy organisation; Evidence for Action has contributed to developing and strengthening its research capacity both in the UK as well as in some of its southern partners in Zambia and Uganda.

The key advances that resulted from this partnership are the development of institutional structures which contribute to advancing the research agenda of the Alliance, the development of research capacity for individuals and organisations, and the set up of successful new collaborations between Evidence for Action partners in Zambia and Uganda.

Examples of this work include the development of a Research Steering Committee for the overall Alliance; the formulation of a set of research quality standards serving as a benchmark for the Alliance and its linking organisations; the organisation of regular training workshops in Zambia, Uganda and in the UK; the contribution of Alliance staff to peer-reviewed publications and presentation at key research conferences; and the set up of 'South-South' research collaborations for new research projects and proposal development.

Strengthening research capacity

The Alliance works mainly in the field of HIV-related programme implementation and policy/advocacy work. Research has always been important to the Alliance, and a number of key operations researches were conducted alongside programme implementation (for instance in India and Zambia). Local 'linking' organisations of the Alliance have also conducted numerous research studies linked to prevention, programmes and policy work.

Evidence for Action has contributed to further strengthen the role and quality of research alongside the implementation of the Alliance programmatic activities, at the UK Secretariat as well as in Zambia and Uganda (Evidence for Action countries). The main developments in research capacity which have benefited from the collaboration with Evidence for Action are:

- **Strengthening institutional structures to improve and coordinate research activities**

- * The Research Steering Committee was strengthened by the contribution of Evidence for Action researchers and Fabian Cataldo (Senior Researcher, Evidence for Action) as well as Ade Fakoya (Senior Advisor, Evidence for Action) contributed to developing and chairing this

committee. Key advances were made in the coordination of research activities across the Alliance, setting up a coordination process to ensure that researchers are aware of and adhere to guidelines on ethics and good research practices.

- * Quality standards for research were developed to help Alliance organisations to identify needs and strengthen their capacity to conduct research.
- **Strengthening the capacity of individuals to undertake and conduct research**
 - * Research trainings were set up as a core component of each research project supported by Evidence for Action at the Alliance. Drawing on the expertise from other Evidence for Action partners (ZAMBART in Zambia, MRC/UVRI in Uganda and LSHTM in the UK), the research teams benefited from extensive training in data collection, data analysis, writing skills and research design. It was important to include all researchers as well as other staff (Monitoring & Evaluation officers, treatment support workers, policy specialists) in these training measures so as to improve research skills across the Alliance network.

- * Some specific examples of this are the training measures (data collection, data analysis, ethics in research, writing skills) that took place in Zambia and Uganda within various studies, as well as other training in collaboration with Zambart, MRC/UVRI and the LSHTM.
- **Novel research collaborations between Alliance organisations and research partners in Evidence for Action countries**
 - * Evidence for Action has provided a strong platform for the Alliance Zambia and Alliance Uganda (mainly) to write new proposals, collaborate on research activities and set up joint projects that will continue to develop beyond the Evidence for Action project.
 - * Examples of these collaborations include the development of a stigma training toolkit between Zambart and the Alliance Zambia; the training of Alliance Zambia staff by the policy expert from Zambart; the participation of LSHTM staff to Alliance training, and joint proposals set up by MRC/UVRI in collaboration with Alliance Uganda.

What is the impact of this?

The impact can be described in terms of:

- enhanced capacity of researchers to collect and analyse data;
- greater awareness of the basic principles of research design and ethical challenges; and
- better support provided to researchers working in Zambia and Uganda (mainly).

The direct beneficiaries are:

- researchers and M&E officers based at the Alliance Zambia, Alliance Uganda and at the Alliance Secretariat; and
- other staff who took part in the training measures organised by Evidence for Action in Zambia and Uganda (treatment support workers, policy specialists).

The potential impact of these activities and collaborations resides in the long-term consequences of the Alliance partnership with Evidence for Action organisations; it is very likely that further collaborations and support will take place after the end of the Evidence for Action programme and that new research proposals and training will draw on the capacity and network that was further developed and strengthened during Evidence for Action.

Who has been involved?

The following researchers have contributed to strengthening research capacity at the Alliance through the partnership Evidence for Action:

- Fabian Cataldo – International HIV/AIDS Alliance
- Ade Fakoya – International HIV/AIDS Alliance
- Robert Haloba – Alliance Zambia
- David Bitira – Alliance Uganda
- Karina Kielmann – LSHTM
- Maurice Musheke – ZAMBART
- Ginny Bond – ZAMBART
- Janet Seeley – MRC/UVRI
- Benson Droti – MRC/UVRI



About Evidence for Action

Evidence for Action is an international research consortium with partners in India, Malawi, Uganda, UK and Zambia, examining issues surrounding HIV treatment and care systems.

The research is organised in four key themes:

1. What “package” of HIV treatment and care services should be provided in different settings?
2. What delivery systems should be used in different contexts?
3. How best should HIV treatment and care be integrated into existing health and social systems?
4. How can new knowledge related to the first three questions be rapidly translated into improved policy and programming?

Partners:

International HIV/AIDS Alliance, UK

Lighthouse Trust, Malawi

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK

Medical Research Council Uganda Research Unit on AIDS, Uganda

Medical Research Council Clinical Trials Unit / University College London, UK

National AIDS Research Institute, India

ZAMBART, Zambia

This document is an output from a project funded by DFID for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID.