



Stronger Together

A review of the SLF Peer Mentorship Initiative



"I see the mentorship project as a way of recognizing and building expertise at the local level. Mentorship gives an opportunity to harness that expertise, share it and see how [we] can be more responsive to HIV and AIDS in the community. It gives you the perspective of seeing more ways of thinking critically, applying the ideas from the other organization so that it can really make a difference. It is an open-ended question, this mentorship process."

—Kimara Peer Educators & Health Promoters Trust Fund, Tanzania

Executive Summary

Since 2003, the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) has been collaborating with community-level organizations that are turning the tide of HIV and AIDS in 15 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2009, the SLF launched a Peer Mentorship Initiative in direct response to the needs and priorities articulated by our grassroots partners. They spoke with a common voice in calling for capacity-building assistance to help them better adapt and respond to their context and take on an ever-evolving set of challenges presented by the global AIDS epidemic. More specifically, they prioritized peer-to-peer strategies that built stronger community-based organizations locally, and enhanced grassroots networks nationally and regionally.

The SLF Peer Mentorship Initiative was designed as an action-oriented strategy to respond to these needs and realities, generate new knowledge, and integrate African-developed methodologies that target the health and wellbeing of communities most affected by HIV. For the purposes of the programme, the SLF defined peer mentorship as a collaborative process in which two stable community-based organizations were matched in a partnership where each had skills to offer, and aspects to learn from the other. Successful relationships had to be mutual, trusting, open, flexible, and share concrete skills and expertise. The two organizations worked together for a minimum period of one year and were provided with a total of \$25,000 CAD to support their peer exchange on specific priorities that they had defined. The main objective of the programme was to harness grassroots expertise and channel it to support stronger, more vibrant, and better-networked community-based organizations in Africa. After a total of 18 organizations from ten different countries took part in the Peer Mentorship Initiative in three successive cohorts, the SLF paused the programme to carry out a detailed impact evaluation. This analysis consisted of a rigorous review of documentation submitted during the mentorship projects (narrative reports, proposals, contracts, field visit reports, and roundtable meeting minutes) along with a focus-group discussion and questionnaire sent out at least two years after the projects had come to an end.

The evaluation revealed that the Peer Mentorship Initiative was very successful in igniting creativity and imagination—encouraging organizations to step back from their day-to-day work, acknowledge the innovation in their own work and in that of their partners, and embrace bold new ideas. They used the initiative to strengthen their existing programmes and internal structures, and to think creatively in developing new solutions to the emerging challenges presented by the AIDS epidemic in their communities. Organizations were able to leverage their partnerships to diversify their funding base, a particularly remarkable outcome considering that these projects were implemented during the height of the global financial crisis, when funding for the AIDS response was in decline. Crucially, the relationships that were formed as a part of the Peer Mentorship Initiative have remained, with participants describing deep feelings of connection with their peer partners and other colleagues in their mentorship cohort. In this respect, the initiative created a process to build organizational capacity through critical thinking, deep reflection, and solidarity. The evaluation also highlighted the tremendous skill and technical capacity that is driving the grassroots response to HIV in Africa. Without this level of sophistication and expertise, the impact generated through this initiative would not have been possible.

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Part One – Overview

INTRODUCTION

The Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) has been working with community-based organizations to help turn the tide of HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa since 2003. During this period, we have spent more than \$88 million to support over 1100 distinct initiatives with 300 community-based organizations in 15 countries. In partnership with the SLF, grassroots organizations have been resurrecting the lives of the people and communities hardest hit by the global AIDS epidemic—especially women, children orphaned by AIDS and their grandmothers, and people living with HIV. These community-based organizations provide education and counselling about HIV prevention, care and treatment; distribute food, medication and other necessities; reach into the homes of the sick and vulnerable with home-based care; help children gain access to education and cope with their grief; and support grandmothers, who are overwhelmingly the caregivers for their orphaned grandchildren.

In June 2009, with generous seed funding from the MAC AIDS Fund, the Stephen Lewis Foundation launched the Peer Mentorship Initiative, a programme designed to pair community-based organizations for a minimum period of one year. The paired organizations received a total of \$25,000 CAD to divide between them in support of their peer exchange and learning on specific priorities that they had defined. The main objective of the programme was to harness grassroots expertise and channel it to support stronger, more vibrant, and better-networked community-based organizations in Africa. Investments from a private UK foundation alongside SLF general resources helped refine a process that involved in-person roundtable meetings, direct funding for individual and joint activities, ongoing correspondence and reporting with the SLF and regular SLF field visits. A total of 18 organizations from ten African countries¹, organized in three successive cohorts, took part in the Peer Mentorship Initiative.

After the completion of the third cohort in 2013, the SLF paused the initiative in order to take a critical look at the impact of the programme. The environment had radically changed since the birth of the initiative in early 2009 with the catastrophic global economic recession. In 2011, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria (the largest funder of AIDS responses globally) made the unprecedented decision to cancel Round 11 of their funding grants—a disastrous decision for the struggle against AIDS in Africa. To make matters worse, countries around the world failed to honour their commitments to international aid. The continued global economic instability eroded the value of many currencies and sent the cost of basic necessities beyond the reach of everyday Africans. On top of all of this, AIDS continued to fall off the international radar. The resource tracking report released by Funders Concerned About AIDS² found

1 **Cohort 1:** TKMOAMS (Namibia) and Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust (South Africa); Kiambu People Living With HIV/AIDS (Kenya) and Reach Out Mbuya (Uganda); **Cohort 2:** MusicWorks (South Africa) and Idlanathi (South Africa); WEM Integrated Health Services (Kenya) and Ripples International (Kenya); Hope for the Elderly (Malawi) and Midlands AIDS Service Organization (Zimbabwe); The AIDS Information and Support Centre (Swaziland) and Touch Roots Africa (Lesotho); **Cohort 3:** Kimara Peer Educators & Health Promoters Trust Fund (Tanzania) and Catholic Diocese of Moshi Rainbow Centre (Tanzania); Hope Tariro Trust (Zimbabwe) and Mavambo Trust (Zimbabwe); Third World Images Project (Zambia) and Community Based Care Foundation (Zambia).

2 Funders Concerned About AIDS, *Philanthropic Support to Address HIV/AIDS in 2013*
http://www.fcaids.org/Portals/o/Uploads/Documents/Public/2014/RT/FINALFCAA_2013TrackingReport_web.pdf

“Communities affected by HIV are key to the targeted action and long-term strategies needed to achieve epidemic control. Interventions and strategies designed elsewhere and parachuted into communities, however well-intentioned, are not effective or efficient ways to roll out tailored HIV programmes. Efforts to raise awareness of how to prevent HIV infection, encourage behaviour change, increase testing, improve access to care and ART adherence, and optimise clinical outcomes must be strongly rooted in the community context.”

—UNAIDS-Lancet Commission

“Reproducing the same old strategies or documents is not likely to transform society and excite staff. Injecting fresh energy by getting staff out of the most-travelled ways of thinking so as to stimulate them to be more curious and explicit about seeing things differently is important.”

—Strategies for Building an Organization with a Soul

that private philanthropic support for HIV in 2013 was at its lowest level in six years. Grassroots organizations faced mounting financial pressure and escalating need for their services. Given these tumultuous years, the SLF knew that every action we took must make a difference in the lives of those on the frontlines of the AIDS epidemic in Africa. We had to ask: was mentorship a priority?

NOW MORE THAN EVER

Since the SLF sprang into existence in 2003, we have seen the tremendous complexity, skill and innovation that is driving the community-based response to HIV in Africa. Increasingly, and encouragingly, grassroots organizations and civil society are being recognized internationally as an essential partner in the fight against AIDS; however there continues to be a troubling lack of financial and political commitment to their work and expertise. A landmark report, *Defeating AIDS—Advancing Global Health*³, released by the UNAIDS-Lancet Commission in July 2015, offers an alarming view—the potential resurgence of HIV infection rates, mounting AIDS-related loss of life, and ballooning financial costs—if sufficient investments are not made in the next five years in effective, holistic approaches. The report confirms what SLF partners have been articulating over the past decade of our work: that community-level responses must be recognized as a critical component of the health and development continuum and provided with adequate financial and technical support. Only then will systemic strategies have a meaningful and sustained impact.

As the global AIDS movement seeks to accelerate the onset of the first AIDS-free generation, investments must also be made to strengthen the capacity of community-based organizations. In its April 2014 report, *Engage! Practical tips to ensure the new funding model delivers the impact communities need*⁴, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria recommended countries “strengthen internal governance systems among civil society as part of the process.” The report went on to say that building the capacity of local organizations was essential in creating national mechanisms that were transparent, inclusive, and effective. These investments are not only essential to advance the quality and reach of services provided to vulnerable people and families but also to strengthen the voice of civil society to participate in and advocate for systemic change at local, national, and international levels.

Beyond rhetoric, new approaches are needed in the field of organizational development in order to contend with the complex and urgent challenges presented by the global AIDS epidemic, and to highlight and replicate the unique contributions of grassroots organizations. In their 2015 guide,

³ Peter Piot, Salim S Abdool Karim, Robert Hecht, Helena Legido-Quigley, Kent Buse, John Stover, Stephen Resch, Theresa Ryckman, Sigrun Møgedal, Mark Dybul, Eric Goosby, Charlotte Watts, Nduku Kilonzo, Joanne McManus, Michel Sidibé, UNAIDS-Lancet Commission, *Defeating AIDS—advancing global health*, <http://www.thelancet.com/commissions/defeating-aids-advancing-global-health>

⁴ Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, *Engage! Practical tips to ensure the new funding model delivers the impact communities need* http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/publications/2014-04-24_Engage_Civil_Society/

*Strategies for Building an Organization with a Soul*⁵, renowned activists and organizational development experts Hope and Rudo Chigudu offer a powerful reflection on the necessity of engaging in vibrant, creative strategies in order to sustain individuals, organizations and movements that can inspire profound social change.

It is within this context that the SLF Peer Mentorship Initiative was shaped: as a strategy to both recognize the expertise of the community-based response to HIV, and to offer a practical, evidence-based model of meaningful capacity-building support that ignites creativity and deepens the innovative, grassroots work that is having such a powerful impact in the lives of those most affected by HIV and AIDS.

THE GOAL: CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR IMPACT AND INNOVATION

Over the past decade, and across the 15 countries in sub-Saharan Africa in which the SLF operates, we have observed grassroots organizations contending with increasing demand for their services amidst diminishing financial and human resources and an absence of state-led support. Our partners spoke with a common voice in calling for capacity-building assistance to help them better adapt and respond to their context and take on an ever-evolving set of challenges presented by the global AIDS epidemic. More specifically, they prioritized peer-to-peer strategies that built stronger community-based organizations locally, and enhanced grassroots networks nationally and regionally. They emphasized mentorship, not only as a way to bolster their organizational development, but to strengthen, motivate, and inspire their staff and volunteers. They also acknowledged that although their frontline expertise is often the most relevant in responding to the quickly shifting community context, grassroots knowledge is often intuitive and undocumented, and cannot be easily shared across regions.

The SLF Mentorship Initiative was designed as an action-oriented strategy to respond to these needs and realities, generate new knowledge, and integrate African-developed methodologies that are targeting the health and wellbeing of communities most affected by HIV. For the purposes of the programme, the SLF defined peer mentorship as a collaborative process in which two stable organizations were matched in a partnership where each had skills to offer, and aspects to learn from the other. Successful relationships had to be mutual, trusting, open, flexible, and share concrete skills and expertise.

The SLF set out to establish a methodology that encouraged innovation, creativity, and critical thinking. Essential to the programme was that the organizations themselves needed to drive the process. They needed to

“What struck me most was the wealth: the wealth of experience and commitment in this room. It’s such a privilege to be involved in the work that we’re involved in. It’s healing work and it’s building work. It was a very beautiful and affirming workshop to meet everyone and to know that Africa has all of these islands of hope everywhere. And I feel very privileged that we have been asked to be a part of this mentorship pilot.”

—Anonymous feedback from a roundtable participant

⁵ Hope Chigudu and Rudo Chigudu, *Strategies for Building an Organization with a Soul*, <http://airforafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Strategies-for-Building-an-Organisation-with-Soul-WEB.pdf>

Overview of the SLF Mentorship Initiative

- 1. Selection of participants and needs assessment:** The SLF began each round of the mentorship programme by selecting three to five organizations (based on the resources available) that had identified their own capacity-building needs, which had been confirmed by our internal monitoring and evaluation assessments. We gave priority to organizations that expressed a desire to work collaboratively with other organizations as a way to learn new strategies and strengthen their programmatic and organizational development. Each organization was free to decline the invitation to participate, with absolutely no concern about compromising their relationship with the SLF. Once we selected the organizations, they were invited to participate in the initiative and identify their top three capacity building needs and what skills and strengths they could offer in the process.
- 2. Matching organizations:** Based on the priorities articulated by each organization, the SLF selected partners who were strong in the identified areas. The SLF took the following factors into consideration when matching pairs: country, organizational culture, leadership style, size of organization, organizational structure, and urban/rural settings. This ensured that we facilitated partnerships that were mutually beneficial and would serve to strengthen both organizations.
- 3. Introductions and initial project planning:** Once the matching process was completed, the SLF introduced the two partner organizations to each other via email. We provided detailed information on the background of each organization, and what both organizations wanted to learn from and offer to the partnership. The organizations then worked together to develop a draft concept paper outlining the activities and objectives of their work together. Some organizations chose to meet in person at this initial stage.
- 4. Submission of draft Joint Concept Paper:** Each mentorship pair submitted their draft concept paper a week before an in-person roundtable meeting. This gave the SLF an opportunity to tailor the roundtable agenda as closely as possible to the needs and priorities of the participants.
- 5. First Mentorship Roundtable:** The roundtable was a dynamic session that zeroed in on the opportunities and challenges of peer-to-peer capacity-building. It provided a chance for participants to share their work, their struggles, and the innovative ways in which they are providing care in the face of complex challenges. The roundtable included the new mentorship teams as well as the previous cohort who had just completed their year-long work together. Participants drew upon the depths of their varied experiences and their shared hopes for the future to create an action plan together. They worked openly to discuss concerns, address the expected difficulties, and brainstorm contingencies to deal with unanticipated challenges.
- 6. Concept papers finalized:** Participants had approximately three weeks following the roundtable to finalize their concept papers, giving them time to reflect on and integrate the strategies and insights they had acquired during the roundtable.
- 7. Mentorship projects start:** Projects began based on the agreed-upon timelines in the concept papers. Each organization managed and reported on its own budget and project plan. The SLF maintained regular communication with each organization and received semi-annual financial and narrative reports. Organizations also received regular in-person SLF field visits where they could share their feedback on the initiative, and where the impact and lessons learned from the project could be documented.
- 8. Follow-up roundtable:** The final roundtable created a space where the current cohort could reflect on their work and share their experiences and plans for the future, and share insights with a new cohort just beginning the mentorship project.

define their priorities, objectives, and what their shared vision of success looked like. They were encouraged to think about their boldest aspirations and how working with a peer organization could be a powerful tool in helping each organization reach their own goals. The Mentorship Initiative endeavoured to provide enough structure to support the forward momentum of the peer partnerships, but remain highly flexible so that the process could be tailored to the unique local context and keep pace as circumstances changed along the way. As is central to SLF's general funding approach, organizations had to feel confident that potential missteps would not be met with punitive action or loss of project funding. Overall, the initiative was established to provide a means to address practical areas of their service delivery, organizational systems, and governance structures in a way that prioritized critical thinking, deep reflection, and human connection.

MEASURING IMPACT WITH AN EYE FOR NUANCE

In order to understand, document and track the success of the Mentorship Initiative against the intended goals, the SLF used our internal Impact Assessment Framework (IAF) tool. The IAF was developed in close collaboration with our partners and is based on the belief that what is fundamentally at stake in the response to the global AIDS epidemic is resilience: people's ability to cope with crisis, to regroup and rebuild, and to continue with their lives. This trajectory from calamity to self-determination forms the basis for the robust IAF tool. With a comprehensive set of indicators developed over a decade of working with grassroots organizations, the IAF charts the complex and powerful relationship between short-term interventions and longer-term benefits; the provision of basic needs and deeper human transformation; and the importance of immediate responses alongside systemic change for people and their communities. Particular attention is paid to psychological and emotional wellbeing, and the bonds that connect people—nurturing relationships within families, social networks, and community organizations.

"SLF invested in helping us build a learning partnership. They value the relationship. It is a very powerful and productive way to work... the relationship being the focus, not only the deliverables. This is such an awesome gift: funding a process that creates space for people and the organization."

—dlalanathi, South Africa

"One very critical [aspect] was autonomy. Yes, we are coming together in the mentorship, but at the end of the day Mavambo shouldn't pretend to be like Hope Tariro Trust and same with Hope Tariro. It was very clear from the outset that we could learn a great deal from each other and improve the process, but we needed to remain different organizations."

—Mavambo Trust, Zimbabwe

The Progress of Resilience:

COPING WITH CRISIS

- ▶ Immediate survival needs are met
- ▶ Physical and emotional suffering is reduced

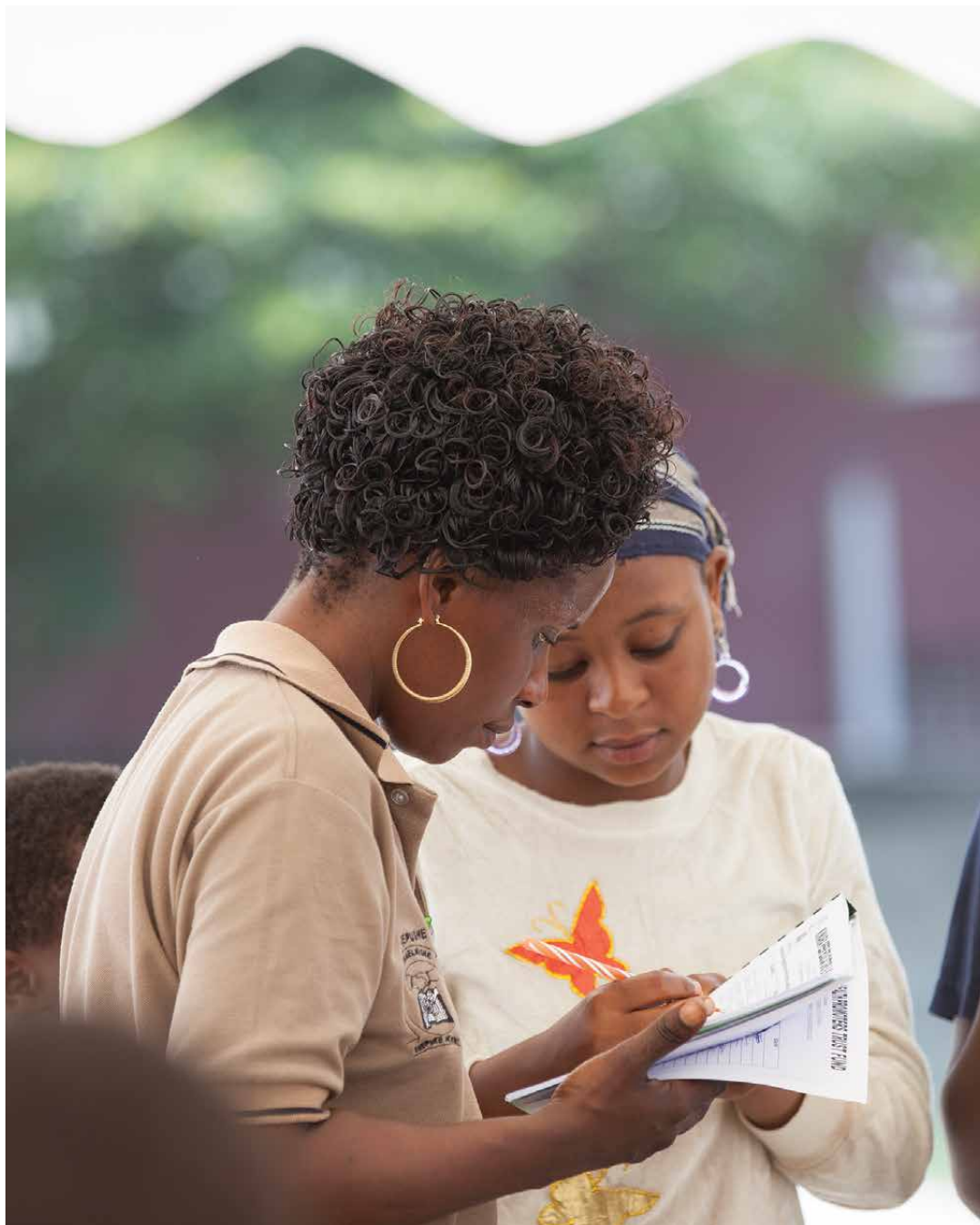
REGROUPING & REBUILDING

- ▶ Individuals' capacity to manage their lives is enhanced
- ▶ Grief and trauma are managed
- ▶ Relationships and community organizations are strengthened

SELF-DETERMINATION

- ▶ Life "milestones" are reached
- ▶ Individuals take on leadership roles
- ▶ Community structures and services expand
- ▶ Advocacy and engagement with government

Using the IAF, the SLF undertook a rigorous review to code and analyze all programme documentation, including narrative reports, concept papers, proposals, Agency Agreements (the contracts which form the basis of SLF partnerships), field visit reports, and roundtable meeting minutes. In addition, a follow-up focus group discussion was held, and participating organizations completed a survey after the formal aspects of their mentorship projects had come to an end for a period of a year or more.



Kimara Peer Educators & Health Promoters Trust Fund, Tanzania

Part Two – Mentorship in Action: Impact and Lessons Learned

The critical analysis of the SLF Peer Mentorship Initiative revealed, with striking clarity, that the programme was extremely successful at strengthening organizations in ways that were simultaneously concrete, nuanced and human. Partners reported that they were able to share and receive practical solutions to deeply complex issues such as the intersection of HIV and gender-based violence, and the challenge of bringing physical, emotional and economic stability to vulnerable households and volunteers. Fascinatingly, they shared how mentorship was also a mechanism to support the deeply human core of the work, providing an outlet for mutual support and solidarity, and making space for innovation, creativity and professional affirmation.

The analysis demonstrated that mentorship was most effective in supporting organizations to:

- ▶ **expand capacity and reach.** This is defined as the development of new programmes, services, or tools. **15 of the 18 organizations set out to expand capacity and reach, and 16 organizations were successful** in reaching this goal. For one organization, this expanded capacity was an unexpected outcome.
- ▶ **become more responsive to their community.** This is defined by the strengthening of existing programmes and services and enhancing internal systems for improved transparency and accountability. **12 of 18 organizations set out to become more responsive** to their community, and **11 reported specific successes.**
- ▶ **diversify their funding base.** This captures organizations that were able to access additional resources, either through the development/strengthening of income-generating activities or through sourcing donor funds. **Only 2 of the 18 organizations identified this as a goal** at the outset of their projects, yet **9 organizations achieved this.**

EXPAND CAPACITY AND REACH

Of the 16 organizations that reported expanded capacity and reach, most achieved this by developing new services, producing new training programmes for staff, volunteers and community stakeholders, and creating new documentation. Expanded capacity and reach means that the Mentorship Initiative helped organizations to meet a broader range of community needs in ways that were new to them, yet tested rigorously in another context. Interestingly, organizations that adapted existing programmes also found the process valuable. They necessarily had to reflect critically on the nuances of their work and how to adapt it to a new context, while maintaining an unwavering focus on quality. Examples include:

- ▶ Third World Images Project (TWIP, Zambia) trained Community Based Care Foundation (CBCF, Zambia) in SASA!⁶ (a methodology in the prevention of gender-based violence) and CBCF has now integrated SASA! into their strategic plan.

⁶ Raising Voices, *Sasa!* <http://raisingvoices.org/sasa/>

"[We had to learn] how to simplify musical techniques and tools that usually require a good level of musicianship so that the facilitators who do not have a background in music are able to use them. Some of the tools and activities cannot be simplified and our learning curve revolved around our team being sensitive to which skills can be transferred, which skills can be simplified and which skills are reserved only for professional musicians and registered music therapists."

—MusicWorks, South Africa

"We learned from Kimara Peers about HISA [Household Income and Savings Association] groups. Now we have formed HISA groups for PLHIV [People Living with HIV] and some volunteers have also formed credit and savings groups."

—Rainbow Centre, Tanzania

"After attachment [job shadowing] with Mavambo, the volunteers now have a form translated into local languages that is entered in our database, and staff now have a more updated monitoring tool. At HTT we knew this area was a gap. We had improved tools for staff, but the tools for volunteers were not improved and we had failed to find a solution to this problem. Mavambo had simple data collection forms for volunteers to track the families they visit."

—Hope Tariro Trust, Zimbabwe

- ▶ Hope Tariro Trust (HTT, Zimbabwe) was inspired by Mavambo Trust's (Zimbabwe) accelerated learning programme for out-of-school youth and has adapted this approach in their community.
- ▶ MusicWorks (South Africa) gained insight into the content and running of dlalanathi's (South Africa) youth empowerment methodology, and has incorporated this youth training into their ongoing programme.
- ▶ With the support of MusicWorks, dlalanathi has completed the development of the Young Child Programme, where caregivers and early childhood educators who work with infants are trained to have an understanding of psychosocial support and responsive care for infants and children.
- ▶ Touch Roots Africa (TRA, Lesotho) worked with the AIDS Information and Support Centre (TASC, Swaziland) to strengthen its training on the disclosure of HIV status to children. All of the 45 local groups with whom TRA works now have this material integrated into their work and awareness campaigns.
- ▶ Kimara Peers (Tanzania) was inspired by Rainbow Centre's (Tanzania) work to improve household nutrition and income-generation in a rural context, and adapted the approach with kitchen gardens and local chickens in the urban area where Kimara Peers works.

BECOME MORE RESPONSIVE

Of the 11 organizations that reported more responsiveness to the community, the majority achieved this through strengthening existing programmes, enhancing existing training, and building up internal organizational structures such as financial, monitoring and evaluation systems. Mentorship was able to support organizations to become sharper at what they do and more agile in responding to the challenges they face. Importantly, organizations were strengthened in a way that enhanced community-level accountability, while also ensuring staff had the necessary training and support. Examples include:

- ▶ The home-based care training unit at Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust (HACT, South Africa) reported that their experience with the caregivers at their partner organization encouraged them to do the same baseline survey for themselves that they conducted with their peer. As a result, in-service training has been formalized (not ad hoc as it was before) and they have integrated the different formats that they developed to use during their peer work with caregivers who could not speak or understand English. HACT's post-training exam scores went from between 58% and 72% before the mentorship project to between 78% and 90% after.
- ▶ HTT volunteers have been trained on how to identify, document and follow up on their home-based care visits, leading to better targeting

of HTT's programmes at the community level, and better reporting by HTT care facilitators. They have also been able to adapt a data collection tool for their volunteers from Mavambo Trust.

- ▶ Mavambo Trust has adapted aspects of HTT's detailed vehicle policy, and financial and human resources manuals.
- ▶ Ripples International reviewed and analyzed their existing monitoring and evaluation procedures. They have since trained 15 project staff on revised M&E guidelines, more reflective of a growing organization. The new guidelines include activities like field reports and the use of a designated computer (acquired through this funding). Staff report that this focused effort on strengthening M&E has reinforced the importance of data collection.
- ▶ In February 2015, the former programme coordinator at the Rainbow Centre transferred out after 12 years of service at the organization. Her replacement participated in the Mentorship Initiative and reports that it helped greatly in the transition into a leadership position.

DIVERSIFIED FUNDING BASE

Though only two organizations initially incorporated specific objectives related to diversifying their funding sources, ultimately nine organizations reported success in accessing new revenue (either through donor funding or income-generation) as a result of their mentorship partnerships. This is particularly remarkable given that accessing this new revenue was carried out during the height of the global financial crisis, when funding for AIDS-related work was in decline. Examples include:

- ▶ In October 2013, TRA received funding from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, leveraging the skills they received from their mentorship with TASC. This funding supported TRA to focus on HIV prevention among young people. Since its inception, 58 volunteers have been recruited and trained as trainers, and 9,700 young people have received training. The second phase of this project started in April 2015.
- ▶ CBCF, as advised by TWIP, made a successful application to the Zambia Revenue Authority to be recognized as a Public Benefit Organization, which has qualified them for tax benefits.
- ▶ Mavambo Trust and HTT, CBCF and TWIP, and Kimara Peers and the Rainbow Centre have worked on joint funding proposals to a wide variety of partners to continue their work together.
- ▶ CBCF introduced TWIP to a US-based funding agency that is now providing financial support to TWIP for a period of three years, with the expectation that this will be extended.
- ▶ Immediately upon completing the mentorship project, Kiambu People Living with HIV/AIDS (KIPEWA, Kenya) was able to secure funding

"Since coming from the workshop conducted by TASC, we have managed to share the information with a lot of caregivers because we had realized that people can die simply because of a lack of information."

—Touch Roots Africa, Lesotho

"CBCF has learned to document at the household, in addition to the individual level. We adapted monitoring forms to capture not just the beneficiary, but also the family members in the household that benefit from support."

—Community Based Care Foundation, Zambia

"In 2013 we entered into a new community in Lavender Hill and we started with the 'Music for Life' programme. Again, the lessons we've learned of transferring skills to people in the community through the mentorship program was really implemented here for us. In the past, we would also always go in and do direct work—but for the first time in Lavender Hill, we actually trained young people in the community to run that programme."

—MusicWorks, South Africa

"The relationship—the experience of the mentorship—changes you. You evolve into something new, even if your core work stays the same. You can see the threads of change and transformation that exist, whether you're conscious of it or not. You're different because you've been in partnership and you've had the experience of a meaningful mentorship relationship—it changes the questions that you ask, how you look at things, the way we interact with new relationships... it's organic and moves through other work that you do just because you've been together in a meaningful way."

—dlalanathi, South Africa

"We have been doing the work for a long time, and you can start to doubt if you are doing the right thing. But when you have someone else look inside you and they say to you, 'You are doing this really well, can I learn from you?', it affirms your work."

—Kimara Peers, Tanzania

"What made this work possible was the support—financial, time, and the willing partner."

—Mavambo Trust, Zimbabwe

"Every individual and organization is a learning being. When the process is completed it is about growing. We are interdependent".

—Midlands AIDS Service Organization, Zimbabwe

from a Kenyan-based foundation to support their work with vulnerable children.

- ▶ In 2013, TWIP acquired skills and implemented a Savings and Internal Lending in Communities (SILC) programme for community income-generation activities as a result of the mentorship with CBCF.

IMPACT FUELED BY COLLABORATION AND REFLECTION

While the results of the Peer Mentorship Initiative clearly demonstrate that peer learning is an effective approach, it was essential to explore the nuances of *why*. This deeper review revealed the importance of the ideological underpinnings and good practices that play critical roles in achieving such significant impact.

- ▶ **Affirming grassroots expertise:** Participants reported that working with other community-based organizations was an experience that was incredibly effective and affirming. They felt that the insights of their peers were more constructive, relevant, and imaginative than those of external technical consultants. It was also intensely affirming for grassroots practitioners to be placed at the centre of the capacity-building process as experts.
- ▶ **Self-reflection and critical thinking:** Through peer mentorship, community-based organizations were able to take a step back from their day-to-day work and look at their activities with a new perspective. Grassroots work is always urgent and pressing and it can often be challenging for organizations to see what is innovative or impressive about their own programmes. Mentorship provided the resources and formalized approach to enable them to understand and appreciate their work and organizational capacity through the eyes of their peers. It also created the space needed to chart a new course or creatively problem-solve.
- ▶ **Collaborative learning:** Effective peer mentorship provides rich opportunities for both organizations to learn and think about their own work. In cross-cultural settings, peer work can provide meaningful insights into other cultural, linguistic or religious contexts. While this can be a challenge (e.g., language barriers, distances, etc.), it represents powerful opportunities for both organizational growth and personal development.
- ▶ **Seeing specific programmes in action:** The Mentorship Initiative provided an in-depth opportunity to see programmes "up close" at another organization and consider their effectiveness. This type of first-hand experience is useful for organizations aiming to develop new programmes and provides a deeper understanding of what makes practices effective and transferable.

- ▶ **Solidarity:** Participants spoke of how peer work has the power to energize organizations by connecting them to a broader network of groups fighting HIV across the continent. This was especially true for organizations operating in rural areas that often feel isolated from other efforts against the pandemic.
- ▶ **Cost-effective way to access highly relevant expertise:** Participants emphasized how mentorship represented a cost-effective mechanism — when compared to high-priced consultants — to provide extremely relevant insights in addressing community-level challenges. In addition, peer mentorship also helps organizations form strong links to a wider range of expertise that can be called upon in the future.
- ▶ **Increased visibility and credibility:** Mentorship provided an opportunity to expand an organization's network and raise their profile both in the community and with external stakeholders such as government and donors. Participants found that others in the community took notice of their peer learning activities and noted instances where greater government support arrived as a result of the increased profile.
- ▶ **Professional development, motivation and recognition for staff/volunteers:** Engaging in mentorship activities can also provide immense motivation and professional development opportunities for staff and volunteers. This is even more significant given the challenges grassroots organizations articulate around attracting, retaining, and motivating skilled personnel.

"It is a school without walls. It is not difficult. You don't need passwords, or qualifications. We are together in the same vehicle working together."

—Third World Images Project, Zambia

"The fact that we see each other's burden as our own is powerful."

—Ripples International, Kenya

"It would have been very expensive to have a consultant come in and do what Reach Out did."

—Kiambu People Living with HIV/AIDS, Kenya

THE LIMITS AND CHALLENGES OF MENTORSHIP

The evaluation of the SLF Peer Mentorship Initiative also shed some light on the limits of peer work, and elements which made the programme challenging. It confirmed that mentorship is not the magic solution in all circumstances, and requires careful attention to a number of dynamics.

- ▶ **Managing the workload:** Mentorship activities generate an additional workload and this, by far, was the most frequent challenge articulated by participants. Individual staff members often had to make personal sacrifices by giving up time outside of the regular work day, travelling for extended periods of time, increased stress levels, etc. Staff turnover was a related challenge that made balancing the additional workload of mentorship activities even more difficult since the remaining staff team had to deal with increased pressures on their time and abilities. Participants stressed that it was important to go through an honest reflection about whether their existing workload would allow for participation in an intensive peer process, and to feel confident in declining the invitation if necessary. As a possible solution to the work overload, participants recommended that any

"If you talk about my personal journey as a young manager, this mentorship process is where I gained a lot. I have been managing the human resources and the way I started is not the way I finished. My managerial skills have grown throughout the process."

—Reach Out Mbuya, Uganda

"Some of our volunteers travelled outside their community for the first time and they have seen that they are not alone in the challenges that they face. Those 10 hours to Moshi is a real adventure. You can tell that they came home different, they talk differently, they were more motivated. This is not like spending money on a workshop."

—Kimara Peers, Tanzania

"We want to thank Mavambo, in terms of their concern for us. We don't have as much as Mavambo, but they didn't make us feel small. They were concerned about our welfare."

—Hope Tariro Trust, Zimbabwe

additional duties be spread across the entire organization, that activities be aligned with existing plans, that volunteers be engaged thoughtfully, and that staff be continually appreciated and motivated.

- ▶ **Stability and time:** It was evident that mentorship was not the appropriate strategy for organizations in need of urgent support. None of the indicators tracked in any of the 18 organizations spoke to urgent, short-term needs. Rather, the Peer Mentorship Initiative was very effective in addressing mid- and long-term indicators. Mentorship is not a quick, linear process. It demands a certain degree of stability. The timeframe must also be flexible, with a great deal of time dedicated to the initial planning and relationship-building phase.
- ▶ **Fear of being vulnerable:** Participants acknowledged that they had some reluctance in sharing the innermost details of their work for fear of being perceived negatively by their peers. This was particularly intimidating for smaller organizations. Furthermore, this level of openness could potentially be a liability in a political and economic environment where community-based organizations are forced to compete for scarce funding or limited advocacy platforms. Participants stressed that in order to overcome this, there needed to be sufficient time and resources invested in getting to know one another and creating a trusting relationship. It was also essential to speak directly about issues of confidentiality and privacy.
- ▶ **Resistance to change:** Organizations/staff might be reluctant to reflect critically on their work and identify where improvements could be made, and might be unwilling to receive feedback from their partner organization. Participants recommended that the staff and organizations engage in a process of reflection in order to identify if peer mentorship was appropriate for the organization at the current time, and to ensure that all staff, especially senior leadership, felt ownership of the peer project.



Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust, South Africa

Part Three – A Grassroots-Developed Peer Mentorship Process

“There is just so much information that came out and really this is an indication that people really do know what they need to do, it’s just that we need to find a way to bring people together to make something work. All of us are doing the work, but how do we move forward and consolidate and make sure that we provide quality services to the communities?”

—Anonymous feedback from a roundtable participant

“We had to work with the same understanding. We had to agree on what we would be learning together.”

—WEM Integrated Health Services, Kenya

“We need to remember that we are people, not just activities.”

—Kiambu People Living with HIV/AIDS, Kenya

The analysis of the documentation revealed a clear mentorship methodology, born from the experiences and lessons learned of the 18 participating organizations in implementing their specific projects. The following continuum of stages is not meant to be a rigid set of rules. Rather it is the consolidation of grassroots experiences and insights that gave life to the Peer Mentorship Initiative and created a roadmap for a process that balanced structure and flexibility for maximum impact. It provides a “how-to” primer for how the organizations infused each step with thoughtfulness and attention to detail.

STEP ONE: GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Peer work requires organizations to get to know each other in a deep and meaningful way. It demands vulnerability, openness, and a high degree of trust. Partners needed to understand both clearly stated organizational characteristics such as mandate, mission, and vision, as well as the unspoken organizational nuances such as internal culture, values, decision-making procedures, and interpersonal dynamics. Participants recommended that organizations consider the following:

- ▶ **What does mentorship mean to us?** Participants reflected on their own experiences of being a mentor and being mentored as a way to explore the question of what mentorship meant to them. Articulating this understanding helped mentorship pairs move forward with their project planning based on a common understanding and with clear expectations. It also created the space for partners to truly evaluate if mentorship was the appropriate strategy for them to address their capacity-building and learning priorities.
- ▶ **Mentorship is about people and organizations.** Mentorship is not just an abstract organizational development concept; it is a process that relies on the practitioners who make an organization’s vision real. It was essential for mentorship projects to create opportunities for the participants to develop collaborative, collegial, friendly relationships. Since peer work often comes in addition to existing organizational programmes and activities, positive relationships are critical for the ongoing buy-in of key staff throughout the duration of the project. These professional relationships are also an important component in sustaining the knowledge and skills after the formal project period has been completed.
- ▶ **Defining and clarifying roles:** Participants were clear in emphasizing that mentorship is not about creating a supervisor/subordinate relationship. Mentorship is a collaboration: working as peers around specific, mutually-determined capacity-building and learning priorities. Each

partner will have specific skills or knowledge that they will contribute to the project. They may also play a different role in facilitating the mentorship process, such as managing a portion of the budget, documenting activities, identifying service providers, etc. A fundamental part of the process is that peer organizations deeply understand each other, define and clarify what role each partner will play, and outline what each will learn and contribute. Establishing these expectations ensures that both organizations are invested in, and gain from the mentorship process. Peers can support this process by sharing key organizational documents (annual reports, strategic plans, brochures, maps, demographic information, etc.) with each other before project planning begins.

STEP TWO: PLANNING MENTORSHIP PROJECTS

The biggest lesson highlighted from the participants was the importance of carefully and realistically planning mentorship projects. “Don’t be afraid to delve into the nitty gritty details” the participants stressed. They spoke of painstakingly going through each activity, clarifying assumptions, allocating resources, assigning responsibilities, and verifying the relevance to the overall objectives.

- ▶ **It is essential to understand each partner’s situation.** Peers engaging in a collaborative project must understand each other’s local context, including what resources are locally available. Participants all recommended visiting each other as early as possible within the process. Effective mentorship is not just about an organization being good at what they do; it’s about having the ability to adapt and respond to the unique challenges that are presented by the local context. This includes gaining insight into the political, cultural, economic, and regulatory environment. It is this understanding that will allow an organization to make recommendations that are relevant to their peer’s context and not simply recreate the same programmes in another location.
- ▶ **Plan activities that strengthen the core mandate of each organization.** Mentorship projects are intended to support organizations in building their capacity to better implement their core vision long into the future. Participants emphasized focusing on the mandate and vision of the organization as the *drivers* of mentorship goals. Retaining this focus throughout the project, they said, is an essential strategy to prioritize activities and ensure they strengthen the organization, versus stretching it beyond its capacity and scope.
- ▶ **Set realistic, relevant and achievable expectations and goals.** Many organizations reported a feeling of building excitement and purpose the more they heard about the work of other grassroots organizations. Peer work exposed participants to creative new programming, innovative approaches, and inspiring peer leaders. Often

“Both organizations need to really understand each other in the context of their capacities so that it can be infused in the work plans. We don’t want to over-stretch each other’s capacities over the course of implementation.”

—The AIDS Information and Support Centre, Swaziland

“The first thing we did was mapping: going to Nairobi, knowing what is Kiambu People Living with HIV/AIDS (KIPEWA). We found that KIPEWA is 10 kilometres from the main town. We had to move in the communities where we were implementing the activities. IGA [income-generating activities] will be done in which site? After doing the baseline survey we had to see where KIPEWA was. After that we had exchange visits. For KIPEWA to have confidence in us, KIPEWA had to see what we were talking about. When we talk about IGA, this is what Reach Out does. These are the clients we serve and how we serve them. Now we have known each other, we have identified both of our gaps.”

—Reach Out Mbuya, Uganda

"The area that [MusicWorks] has asked for capacity-building is 100% of what we do, but 5% of what they do. How does that express itself in the project? What does it mean for the vision of the project and our expectations for what can be accomplished?"

—dlalanathi, South Africa

this resulted in very ambitious mentorship plans. When asked at the end of their projects what they would do differently, many reported wishing they had spent more time in the planning process, and paring down the scope of their planned activities. Focusing on fewer activities more intensively, they said, would solidify the impact.

- ▶ **Define outcomes, indicators, and documentation strategies relevant to the mentorship process.** Peer work requires a unique approach to monitoring and evaluation. Participants reflected on the fact that capacity-building is a long-term process, and on the importance of building a monitoring and evaluation framework that does not sacrifice long-term impact for short-term results. They emphasized the need to plan and budget for documentation activities in order to capture the learning and contribute to the sustainability of their new knowledge and skills within the organization.

Documenting Mentorship Work

Participants were united in highlighting the importance of continuous documentation. As staff struggle to keep up with the burgeoning need for their services, documentation can easily slide down the priority list and the organization loses the value of capturing innovations and lessons learned. When documentation is done on a continuous basis, it can act as a tool for internal learning, enhance planning and monitoring and evaluation, promote accountability to the community, be shared with other colleagues in the field, strengthen advocacy and supplement funding applications.

Effective systems for documentation and learning also speed the learning curve of new staff by ensuring that the wealth of information possessed by individual employees is captured on an organizational level. Advocacy is also transformed by documentation, ensuring that frontline experiences are informing key advocacy messages and strategies. Critically, participants stressed that documentation must be geared to supporting enhanced programming and accountability to the most important stakeholder—the community. Too often documentation becomes about reporting to donors or external agencies at the expense of organizational learning or community transparency.

Documentation does not have to be academic or complicated. There is no single format or template that is relevant for every mentorship project. Rather, each team must decide what documentation tools are meaningful for their work. Teams have to ask themselves: Who is the audience? What do we wish to communicate? What do we want to learn? What do we want to achieve? Participants also reflected on how to design documentation strategies that captured unexpected outcomes of their mentorship work.

Participants generated the following list of documentation tools they would use to capture their peer learning:

- Oral methods
- Narrative/storytelling
- Needs-assessment reports
- Logical frameworks
- Memorandums of understanding
- Financial reports
- Pictures
- Videos
- Journals
- Concept papers
- Implementation plans
- Mapping
- Baseline surveys
- Documentation of learning from exchange visits
- Training tools/training materials
- Action plans
- Minutes of meetings
- Policy development
- Monitoring and evaluation tools
- Shared and individual activity reports
- Email

- ▶ **Engage all staff in the formative project stage.** During the planning process, it is important to allocate time for the key staff involved with the Peer Mentorship Initiative to engage their colleagues. Participants dedicated time in their implementation plans to organize staff briefings and planning sessions. This participatory approach maximizes buy-in and creates the most supportive environment for mentorship activities to take place in the face of many competing priorities.
- ▶ **Consider a wide variety of activities.** Participants designed their mentorship projects with carefully selected activities that would leverage the skills and contributions of each partner and be relevant to their unique community and organizational contexts. These activities included:
 - baseline surveys;
 - community mapping;
 - exchange visits/study tours for staff and key volunteers;
 - training (including training of trainers, competency-based training, training of key staff members, professional development);
 - joint-learning events for both peer organizations to attend;
 - job shadowing/attachment;
 - on-site coaching;
 - joint design—where both organizations design, adapt, and write new techniques and programmes for each other; and
 - reflection meetings.
- ▶ **Address issues of confidentiality within project planning.** Peer work involves sharing sensitive information regarding the people served and internal organizational affairs. Participants felt it was a priority to proactively address the issue of confidentiality by reaching a common understanding at the project's outset.

"We need to monitor against certain benchmarks. It's one thing to be involved in a process; it's another to ensure that you are monitoring that process."

—WEM Integrated Health Services, Kenya

"I remember thinking 'Where are we going to fit this in?' But having enough time—[the project] being spread out over two years—made it manageable. Timing, I think, is very important as it is something that's added on top of core work."

—MusicWorks, South Africa

"[Documentation] is not a technical, academic process; it's a map that allows you to have understanding of the context. It's not a big scientific thing, and I thought to myself 'I can do that!'"

—dlalanathi, South Africa

Exchange Visits and Job Shadowing/Attachments

Exchange visits and job shadowing proved to be incredibly important components of the Peer Mentorship Initiative. Exchange visits provided an opportunity to have a deeper understanding of the partner organization's work. For example, when Ripples visited WEM Integrated Health Services they were able to observe their work with grandmothers and develop an understanding of their goal-setting model, which they then adapted to use with their own granny groups. Kimara Peers used exchange visits to engage the peer educators who are such an important part of their work, yet who often do not get included in traditional institutional capacity-building programmes.

Similarly, attachments, or job shadowing, encouraged organizations to be bold enough to open up to each other for extended periods of time. This kind of intensive experiential learning profoundly builds organizational capacity and on-the-job skills. Many participants used job shadowing to strengthen financial management skills, home-based care capacity, and peer education.

Exchange visits and job shadowing allow organizations to show how they approach similar activities in different contexts, giving partner organizations the ability to draw strength from each other and strategize on the best methods for sharing knowledge and practical skills.

STEP THREE: IMPLEMENTING MENTORSHIP PROJECTS

Participants reflected on strategies for implementing their mentorship projects. Given the nature of grassroots work and the unpredictability that arises from the global AIDS epidemic itself, yearly planning can be a challenge. Organizations had to continually balance the need for focused action while retaining the ability to be responsive to emerging priorities. Some helpful strategies included:

- ▶ **Keep focused on priority areas, but be flexible and responsive to ongoing learning.** Participants reported that over the course of their peer work, many new ideas were generated. It would have been easy, they said, to get pulled away from the original project plan and follow up on each new approach. They cautioned that, while it is essential for mentorship to retain flexibility and responsiveness, it must also focus on priority areas that strengthen the organization's ability to carry out its vision.
- ▶ **Continuously communicate and monitor activities and budget.** Working collaboratively with another organization requires that both partners continuously communicate with each other and monitor activities and finances against the original project plan. They must commit to being open with one another and informing each other of challenges, concerns, or modifications to the agreed-upon implementation plan. Participants also indicated that part of this communication is sharing all reports, baseline surveys, assessments, etc. with their partner before finalizing/submitting them. This was seen as an extremely effective practice both to nurture collaboration and to provide organizations with useful documentation that can be referred to on an ongoing basis.

Managing the Workload

Participants were eager to share strategies on how they managed the additional workload of mentorship, given that this was such a common barrier.

- ▶ **Develop a feasible shared work plan and stick to the activities planned.** This clear guideline helps organizations plan and schedule activities, and thus assists balancing the workload as much as possible over the course of the project year. Wherever possible, align mentorship activities with existing plans.
- ▶ **Delegate tasks to other staff.** Delegation serves as a motivating factor for staff who are not directly participating in the mentorship project by providing opportunities for added responsibilities and professional growth. Participants also reported that this process allowed them to learn the strengths of others on the staff team, which not only helped to balance the workload throughout the organization but also created a more meaningful engagement among staff.
- ▶ **Engage volunteers thoughtfully.** Using volunteers to manage the additional workload can be a meaningful strategy; however participants urged thoughtfulness. They pointed out that it is helpful to have a volunteer policy that is in line with labour laws and their organizational mandate. Many impoverished women engage in full-time work yet are wrongfully called "volunteers" because they receive little or no compensation. Participants also cautioned that volunteers take time and resources to be trained and can be less reliable than paid staff.
- ▶ **Consider ways to motivate staff.** Participants suggested continually reinforcing the overall objectives and the reasons why the organization is engaging in the mentorship work. Another method of motivation is to provide staff with manageable professional development opportunities, such as representing the organization at a conference or a meeting.

- ▶ **Documentation is key.** Ongoing documentation is a critical component of peer projects. Participants highlighted that mentorship projects must integrate documentation into each activity in order for the learning to be captured on an organizational level. This documentation is also useful so that new ideas and approaches that cannot be followed up on during the project can be retained for future use.

STEP FOUR: SUSTAINING THE NEW KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

The Peer Mentorship Initiative clearly led to a sustained impact long after the formal projects had come to an end. In reflecting back, participants had clear recommendations about how to set up their projects in a way that encouraged these long-term results.

- ▶ **Sustainability begins at the planning stage.** The process of sustaining new knowledge and skills begins long before the project comes to an end; it must be built in from the very beginning. This includes establishing systems for institutional memory (manuals, photos, videos, etc.) and designing activity plans that are feasible.
- ▶ **Focus on needs that each organization has identified.** Participants agreed that the needs in their communities far exceed their ability to respond. There are many competing priorities. In order for mentorship to truly be institutionalized over the long term, it must be centred on the priority needs that the organization itself has identified.
- ▶ **Integrate mentorship at all levels.** It is difficult to sustain new knowledge when it is centralized to a limited number of staff members. When people throughout the organization are involved in mentorship activities, newly developed skills are less likely to be lost through turnover, and are more likely to strengthen the organization as a whole.
- ▶ **Transition the priorities identified through peer work into yearly organizational budgets.** Mentorship provided the resources necessary for organizations to try new approaches, and learn and build their internal capacity above and beyond their existing operational plans and budgets. This opportunity to refine new ideas was incredibly valuable in understanding the most important activities that could transition into their core yearly budgets.
- ▶ **The relationship continues.** Mentorship relationships did not end when the SLF-funded project came to an end; the majority of mentorship pairs took concrete steps to continue their relationship well into the future. This strengthened the integration and expansion of new knowledge as peers continued to support each other in developing their organizational capacity. Interestingly, the continuation of the relationship did not always mean that contact was consistent or regular. Yet even in instances where this was the case, participants reported feeling as if the relationship was ongoing and that their partner was just a phone call or email away.

"When you use a consultant it is a trainer and trainee relationship and it is finite. In mentorship it is not like that. You are part and parcel [of another organization]. You can use the opportunity to explore more. You learn by doing, seeing. With a consultant, you are with a laptop and get advice. [With mentorship] there are no boundaries where you can learn and explore."

—Third World Images Project, Zambia

"As simple as it seemed to be when we were starting, it has come out very phenomenal. The change itself is so huge. I just imagine if SLF told us 'you need to do a goal-setting [process] for your groups,' it would be so different from us actually going to learn from our peers. It is so experiential and real as opposed to learning it from a book."

—Ripples International, Kenya

"[Kimara Peers] was so generous. They told us everything; they wrote everything so that we can learn all that they do. When they came to us, we were open to everything also. They saw what we are not doing well, and what we are doing well. Then we became a family working together."

—Rainbow Centre, Tanzania

"Hope Tariro and Mavambo are now married. We do joint capacity-building and resource mobilization. We are sharing information on the calls for proposals and opportunities for funding."

—Mavambo Trust, Zimbabwe



Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust, South Africa

Part Four – Lessons from Facilitating the Peer Mentorship Initiative

This section documents what the SLF has learned in implementing the Peer Mentorship Initiative. We worked to create a methodology that was focused on people as well as organizations; one that was rooted in building relationships while leaving room for independence. The goal of the Mentorship Initiative was to mold itself comfortably to the needs of each partnership—whether that meant being flexible with start/end dates, or accounting for different community development approaches. For this to happen, the SLF needed to listen carefully to the feedback of our partners at every moment and respond quickly to ensure that the process remained supportive and constructive.

We paid special attention to the following areas:

- ▶ **The art of pairing partner organizations.** All organizations that participated in the Mentorship Initiative collaborate with the SLF and receive regular, ongoing project funding. We did not select an organization to take part in the programme unless we had developed a long-standing and deep relationship and an equally deep understanding of an organization's needs, strengths and gaps. We also looked for characteristics related to organizational culture, leadership style, and decision-making approach in order to make the best match possible. This understanding—based on in-person visits, telephone and email communication, along with more formal elements of the funding relationship—is critical in setting up the partnerships for success.

"It does [away] with the 'wise person syndrome.' The way an expert comes and looks at your things and says, 'You're weak here, you're not doing the proper work...' He's giving you pieces, pieces, pieces which, at the end, you might not even absorb. When you engage yourselves as two organizations ... you end up asking the smallest questions that make sense to you and your organization. This really makes you feel proud, because you brought up the roots into the stem, into the branches, and now you're reaping the fruits."

—Kimara Peers, Tanzania

Selection Criteria

In order to select partners to take part in the SLF Peer Mentorship Initiative, we look for an organization that:

- has a well-established relationship with the SLF;
- has shared specific capacity-building priorities with the SLF that have also been confirmed by SLF monitoring and evaluation processes;
- has shown openness to peer work and an ability to acknowledge strengths and challenges;
- has shown interest in direct capacity-building; and
- is not simultaneously receiving another form of dedicated capacity-building support from the SLF.

Other factors we consider for peer work:

- Political/country dynamics
- Language
- Geography (urban/rural, etc.)
- Organizational cultures
- Leadership style
- Gender analysis
- Size of organization
- Organizational structure
- Faith-based/ Non-faith-based
- Accessibility of communications technology (internet, phone, computer, etc.) and transportation
- Track record of receiving/integrating feedback from past SLF field visits
- Balance of geographic and thematic spread

"Most community programmes are started by individuals whose hearts are in the right place but lack the structures for growth as they continue work in an ad hoc manner. Any organization that has a vision and is clearly dedicated to that vision... would be best suited for mentorship."

—Kiambu People Living with HIV/AIDS, Kenya

"We all went into the mentorship with an open mind."

—Mavambo Trust, Zimbabwe

"There were questions we were afraid to ask because they were uncomfortable, but thankfully we had such a brave group where all the fears went straight on the table. It was awesome."

—dlalanathi, South Africa

We have connected organizations within the same country and across borders, and have seen both scenarios work equally well. Participants found it extremely valuable to travel outside of their hometown, whether that was to another city in their own country or outside. It is important to note that organizations always have the option to decline the offer to participate, without fear that it will have any adverse affect on the relationship with the SLF.

- ▶ **Dedicated funding for capacity-building in addition to regular funding.** The SLF dedicated funds for mentorship work in addition to the regular, yearly project funding that the SLF provides. This means that mentorship does not come at the expense of each organization's ongoing work, and that the participating organizations retain the overall ability to implement their work into the future. In this sense, we are able to work with our partners to tailor the mix of capacity-building and operational support that they need to deliver the best possible quality of care to their communities over the longer term. This comprehensive and complementary support means greater stability for grassroots organizations and enhanced opportunities for innovation and educated risk-taking.
- ▶ **Funding needs to be at an adequate and flexible level.** While more resources are always beneficial, the evaluation revealed that \$25,000 CAD for each partnership was effective in facilitating meaningful impact. Participants noted that it was helpful that the funding could be used for items such as institutional equipment (computers, hard drives, etc.). The evaluation also discovered that participants appreciated being able to modify activities during the course of the project in response to learning and circumstances.
- ▶ **Roundtables are excellent mechanisms for nurturing new ideas, building vibrant relationships, encouraging exchange, and documenting effective practices.** Roundtables were particularly valuable in the Mentorship Initiative process; they came to represent action-oriented spaces connected to concrete follow-up. Participants reported that it was particularly helpful that partners were introduced via email and required to submit a draft concept note prior to the first roundtable. This made the roundtable very productive and strategic since they had already put a significant amount of time and thought into their plans of action.
- ▶ **Cohorts are invaluable.** Natural solidarity emerges among organizations that are going through a developmental process at the same time. In the context of mentorship, bringing several organizations together created a safer space to discuss complex and potentially sensitive issues that may be difficult to bring up directly with a partner organization one-on-one.
- ▶ **Needs of the organizations must drive the framework of the process.** The structure of each mentorship project (start dates,

project length, etc.) needs to be driven by the real-time needs of organizations. Participants found this flexibility essential in making mentorship something that could realistically be integrated within intense and already established workloads. Maintaining the balance between structure and flexibility was a critical guiding principle for the SLF in ensuring that participating organizations could bring forward their most imaginative and creative plans, and have the constructive support to bring them to life.

IF WE COULD DO IT OVER AGAIN...

- ▶ **Clarity with the terms:** The pilot phase of the Mentorship Initiative began with a more traditional mentor/mentee model, where very established organizations were matched with emerging groups who were at an earlier stage in organizational development. This was successful for the initial group, however the second cohort of partners felt uncomfortable with the mentor/mentee terminology. They did not feel this language represented their capacities and they shared their feelings openly with the SLF in the initial stages. Although our intentions all along were to recognize the strengths of each participant, we learned that we needed to be even more vigilant with our language and how the initiative was framed. This critical learning was integrated in the second and third cohorts, with much success.
- ▶ **The more detailed the information, the better:** With each successive cohort, the SLF provided participants with more and more information about their partner organization and the context for the match. They wanted to understand as much as possible about their partner as they began their relationship, and having detailed information on needs and strengths and the contexts in which they both operated was helpful in promoting trusting, mutual relationships between peers.



Kimara Peer Educators & Health Promoters Trust Fund, Tanzania

Midlands AIDS Service Organization, Zimbabwe



MENTORSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY, A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Grassroots organizations often work without the financial resources they require. The causes for, and implications of, this financial shortfall are far-reaching. Because the majority of grassroots organizations are under-resourced, their natural tendency is to respond to the needs of the community. This often means that they are not able to invest sufficiently in the human resources, capital equipment, documentation, staff training, and infrastructure that they need to grow and learn. In the face of difficult trade-offs between delivering critical services to vulnerable communities and organizational capacity-building, participants were compelled to focus their scarce resources on supporting the community. This is often the root cause of many other capacity issues that organizations identify. However, providing sufficient and dedicated financial resources is only one component of holistic capacity support.

Participants were clear in stating that mentorship was a key strategy for strengthening organizational sustainability, not just financially, but programmatically as well. Strengthening the programmes that organizations deliver, they said, meant that more households could be empowered, and organizational resources could be freed up to support the increasing numbers of community members in need.

The evaluation confirmed that peer mentorship provided highly relevant, sophisticated expertise to achieve this precise mix of organizational and programmatic capacity strengthening. Participants reported that when grassroots organizations are supported in investing in their own capacity, they become more adaptable, more stable, more innovative, and more effective in carrying out their community-level work. When staff received stronger administrative support, they were more skilled, more satisfied, and more connected to the organization. As capacity grew, organizations could more efficiently use their existing resources and were in a stronger position to attract more funding.

Mentorship had the added benefit of expanding networks of grassroots organizations locally, nationally and regionally. This has the potential to strengthen long-term organizational sustainability as grassroots groups advocate for more state-led support, progressive legislation and enforcement, and push for the wide spectrum of rights and responsibilities that governments have the duty to respect, protect, and provide.

Conclusion

The SLF Peer Mentorship Initiative was incredibly successful in reaching its goal of harnessing the wealth of grassroots expertise and channeling it to support stronger, more vibrant, and better-networked community-based organizations in Africa. The mentorship process was so successful because it paired organizations that shared the will and interest to learn and reflect. They brought the methodology to life with their boldness in piloting new initiatives, refining their ways of doing, and engaging in a deeply human process of collaboration.

The SLF Peer Mentorship Initiative represents a contribution to the field, where practical, tested approaches are needed in order to counter the complex challenges that HIV continues to wreak across Africa. Grassroots organizations are at the forefront of the response. They are creating lifelines of hope for vulnerable communities across the continent. They are advocating for access to life-prolonging treatment, healthcare, education, emotional wellbeing, material support, and the rights of all people to the best possible quality of life. Strengthening these networks of African grassroots organizations to adapt, grow, and broaden their work will turn the tide of AIDS at the community level. It is now more important than ever to share and replicate effective models of grassroots support.

The community-level organizations with which the SLF has collaborated over the past decade have expressed a clear understanding of, and a vision for, a holistic response to HIV. Funders, policymakers and those on the ground who want to know what works, and what it takes to scale up valuable interventions, need only listen to these hands-on practitioners.



“For a long, long time in Africa we have had our issues regarding the impact of poverty and disease, to the point where it was overwhelming. We have not had a chance to learn from each other the very beautiful experiences that we are actually putting into place because we have been so busy trying to cope. To me, this Mentorship Initiative gives us a very beautiful opportunity for south-to-south learning which is not just linear, but we can learn from each other. I think this is a unique opportunity and as far as I’m concerned, I hope this is the beginning of self-sustainability from borrowing from each other. I’m excited about this responsive African capacity-building movement.”

—WEM Integrated Health Services, Kenya



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