

Civil Society transition and sustainability assessment of trans communities in the HIV response in Nicaragua



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Location: Managua, Nicaragua

Activity: 2-day training/workshop

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Participants: 14 local trans activists

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INTRODUCTION

United Nations assembly determines Sustainable Development Goals, that include as one of its objectives “Eradicate AIDS as a Public Health issue”. At the same time, international funds directed to AIDS, TB and Malaria are shirking, as the global context is witnessing emerging issues. Due to the eligibility policies of the Global Fund response to Tuberculosis, AIDS and Malaria, some countries are beginning to transition to the phase in which they will have to embrace the responses against the three diseases as a domestic responsibility.

In 1990, the Latin America and the Caribbean region endorsed the 90-90-90 goals to step toward in the global common goals for the AIDS response. In this scenario, Nicaragua, located in Central America, continues to be eligible as a Low-Income country to receive GF support. In the whole region, key populations remain the most affected, particularly MSM and trans women. In this regard, Nicaragua is no exception as it has a concentrated epidemic.

With the objective to support trans communities to actively participate in the response, *Global Action for Trans Equality* (GATE) are implementing a Civil Society transition and sustainability assessment with emphasis on trans communities, to develop a joint methodology to support trans communities in Asia Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean regions.

The findings of this process will serve to inform key decision-makers and other stakeholders who have an active role in transition from Global Fund support to national funding in the HIV and TB Sector, including: National AIDS Programs and Commissions; key governmental ministries; civil society organizations and informal community-based groups of transgender people; technical partners including multilateral ones, such as UN agencies and donor agencies such as the Global Fund; and other multilateral and bilateral donors.

This consultancy was carried out with the intention of privileging the meaningful participation of the trans communities, based on a human rights framework and with the purpose of reflecting their felt and real needs in relation to the projects that the Global Fund has implemented in their country. Likewise, their capacity for development will be developed so that they can participate in their national HIV response, starting from the fact that the trans communities have capacities and abilities, but above all, the right to be a part of that response. This project coordinated and defined by GATE, based on the terms of reference to achieve the objectives and goals proposed. It will be carried out based on the capacities of the consultant working with the community and through the facilitation of the workshop as well as the development of the anticipated deliverables.

METHODOLOGY

A specific methodology was designed to ensure that the project goals are achieved. It includes the development of a tool specially designed to meet the challenges of the target population, using the information about the local epidemics, and based on the GIPA principle: “to ensure meaningful participation of affected communities in the response against the diseases”.

Objective

To improve understanding and ensure meaningful engagement of transgender persons in Global Fund activities at the national level; strengthen capacity of national transgender organizations and build peer-to-peer knowledge sharing; encourage evidence-based programmatic interventions and policies based on needs of the transgender community; and inform funding transition preserving investments made in strengthening transgender communities.

Specific objectives:

1. Strengthening HIV key population networks with global reach, to support their country level constituencies to effectively engage in Global Fund-related processes during the whole grant cycle;
2. Developing the capacity of marginalized and criminalized networks and communities to effectively and safely engage in all Global Fund-related processes;
3. Strengthening of key and vulnerable populations for HIV capacity to advocate for increased investment in rights-based and community responsive programs, as well as effective community led. Human right and gender related programming within Global Fund grants

Under these areas, the project focuses on strengthening local capacity; especially in support of trans people in their regional and country-based constituencies to more effectively engage in, and contribute to, the development, implementation and oversight of Global Fund supported programs.

Target Audience

Transgender people in Nicaragua, including organizations that work with and for transgender communities.

Key components of the process

The specific abilities and skill that were developed by the end of the project are listed as follows:

1. Increase awareness of the national situation of transgender persons and HIV/TB; Global Fund Processes and in-country and regional grants which include transgender persons

2. Discuss and identify, from the perspective of the trans community, the overall impact of the interventions on the situation of transgender persons; sustainability of these interventions beyond the Global Fund including risks and opportunities; lessons learnt from GF supported programs for transgender persons;
3. Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats among the transgender communities to play a meaningful role in the HIV and TB response in their countries; impact of the GF transition on the transgender communities;
4. Identify needs and recommendations for a smooth transition from GF to ensure sustainability of interventions for transgender communities; development of a plan of action
5. Identification of key intervention/interventions to develop a technical assistance request to support effective implementation of plan of action;

Participatory tools were used during the workshop to facilitate the process of identifying milestones resulting from GF interventions, both positive and negative, that have an impact on the personal lives of the trans communities.¹

The process was highly interactive and participant-centered; including opportunities for learning through sharing of relevant national information, strategic planning, and large and small group discussions.

Final products and evidences of the workshop

1. Assessment of the situation of transgender people and the Global Fund processes
2. Prioritized list of challenges and opportunities
3. Action plan with strategies to address the barriers and challenges to effective transition and sustainability for the target populations
4. Technical assistance request format completed

¹ https://www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/000/370/229-Tools-together-now_original.pdf?1405520036

ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSIONS

DAY 1

The workshop started with a brief introduction by the facilitator and the welcome message from Erika Castellano, Director of Programs for GATE, who presented the organization and the priority areas they focus on; and Ludwika Vega, president of the Nicaraguan Trans Association, who acknowledged the value of the workshop, and encourage the participants to share the information received with their peers.

Next, a memorial ceremony took place, in which candles were lit as a symbol of the struggle for the human rights of trans people, and as a reminder of those who have died due to the political situation in Nicaragua, as well as for trans people who died as a result of hate crimes and AIDS. Carlos García then gave an historic revision of the fight of trans people for their rights, where he mentioned that the life expectancy of this group is only 35 years. He acknowledged the leadership of the group, and the role of the team as merely facilitators.

The objectives of the workshop were revised, as well as the concept for the technical assistance to create a common background of knowledge. The agenda was discussed.

As an icebreaker, each participant was invited to tell us something about themselves, about their profession, and something they liked about eroticism as a form of introduction. Most of them had a profile of human rights protection and trans activism.

After the icebreaker, general behavioral guidelines were established. These included: respect; only talking about their own experience; having cellphones in vibrating mode; participating actively; active listening; punctuality; respecting everyone's belongings; and not sharing elsewhere personal information that was discussed in the workshop. The expectations of the group were listed as following: learning about, and creating, new strategies; gaining knowledge by learning from other participants; learning about others experience of being transgender; strengthening their knowledge by gaining access to quality information; and building new alliances.

Analysis of the national response to HIV and TB

During the analysis, the information obtained was as follows:

1. In all health centers, you can get tested for HIV. If the result is positive, you are sent to the "Conchita Palacio."
2. In the northern and rural communities, you are referred to the hospitals. In VICIT, you can be tested for all STIs.
3. CEPRESI is an organization that performs HIV and syphilis tests, because they work with the Global Fund budget. If complementary studies are needed, they are charged.
4. According to the most recent information from the Health Ministry, the number of new infections among the trans population is increasing. Condoms are being distributed.
5. Sex workers have high-risk practices, such as getting paid higher to not use condoms or drug exchange (marijuana, crack, and cocaine).
6. "In my days, when I was a sex worker, young girls did coke and drank liquor because they had money."
7. "This is a small country, but the incidence is increasing"
8. "They are a lot of colleagues that are HIV positive, and they are not receiving treatment. Where I live, in Nandaime, it is said that people who are infected still have sexual relations."

Analysis of the national context for transgender people

"Typical Character" Activity

The group was divided into small groups, and white sheets/cards and crayons were distributed. The exercise consisted of the participants discussing for a few minutes what a "typical character" of their community would be, so they could define a person from their community, with a name, age, main characteristics, and defining to what they dedicate their time. They discussed briefly the possible life story of this person and draw it as a storyline on their piece of white card.

The results for each group were as follows:

Group 1

- Name: Anabel, also known as "she-wolf."
- Characteristics: Honest, direct, active sex worker, relapsed member of Alcoholics Anonymous, artist, trans female, she has no body issues despite being chubby, sociable and well-known in the gay world, especially in the area of sex work. She's 40 and adapts easily.

Group 2

- Name: Jeفرانيا

- Characteristics: She is a salesperson in the oriental market, identifies herself as a transgender woman. She is married, and her husband takes care of the business when she is out doing activities related to sexual diversity. She makes “chilero” and is a candidate for “Miss Nicaragua”. She is well-known in her work.

Group 3:

- Name: Martha
- Characteristics: She is a 33-year-old transgender woman. She is tall, medium complexion, from low economic status. She dedicates herself to the sex work. She likes to consume large amounts of alcohol and does not mind using bad words when she speaks. She is a leader in her community. Considered funny, she likes to use make-up and to dress nicely. She likes to spend money when possible and likes to be alone. Her mother is her main support and she never stops visiting her.

Timeline, milestones and timeline analysis

This exercise aimed to provide an understanding of how situations can change over time, in this case as the result of the Global Fund interventions. The groups remained divided according to their characters and were asked to start their timeline before the existence of Global Fund interventions and end in the present. Participants were asked to mark the milestones, both positive and negative, thinking about their character, how they might be affected by the interventions that were within reach of their character.

Group 1: Anabel

Positive Milestones	Negative Milestones
She had family acceptance since little	Anabel dropped out of school due to discrimination
Being trans made her open-minded, empowered, independent and responsible: she went to continuous medical checkups.	She was victim of aggressions, both in her family and on the street as a sex worker.
She became interested in being trained to become a stylist, and received support from other stylists who were also trans.	The depression made her consume drugs, and she eventually became an alcoholic
Anabel became well-known and liked in the trans community	Anabel was imprisoned for doing sex work on the street
She moved to Costa Rica, where she began to live her life more fully	She was shot and stabbed by a co-worker (who was considered as the leader in sex work)
Had one short, but stable relationship	

She is well-known for everything she has done for the trans community	
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Group 2: Jefraina

Positive Milestones	Negative Milestones
In junior high school she established her first business	Is a victim of discrimination from her husband's family for being trans
She graduated from college	The discrimination makes her depressed
She got married and moves in with her husband	Jefraina is victim of violence from her partner
Separates from her husband and moved to Panama to live on her own	
In Panama, she gets remarried	She is murdered by her new husband in Panama

Group 3: Martha

Positive Milestones	Negative Milestones
Martha started doing sex work on a friend's recommendation	She was abandoned by her family for being transgender
She started studying while she worked, because of a desire to improve her quality of life	She experienced discrimination in school because of her identity
She met her partner	His partner cheated on her with her best friend
She became the owner of her own business and helped other people	She was diagnosed with HIV by the time her mother died

The group conclusions of this exercise were that there is great stigma for the population living with HIV. With gay and trans people, it is assumed that they all died of AIDS, regardless of the real causes of death. People have no information and act disrespectfully, which makes it impossible to talk openly about HIV. Discrimination forces trans people to make difficult decisions, like traveling long distances to receive treatment where people do not know them.

Regional and national Global Fund projects which include transgender communities

After engaging the large group in a discussion on the global fund grants which include transgender communities, participants were asked to discuss and list challenges and accomplishments for transgender persons and communities.

The information obtained was as follows:

- The first approach to the Global Fund was through CEPRESI. Participants claimed that they experienced exclusion from the gay community for not being male, resulting in resignation of some members from CEPRESI.
- The current organizations that are sub-receptors of the Global Fund are OVI, CEPRESI, GAO, Centro de Mujeres de Masaya que Trabajan con Positivos, HSH y Trans.
- The process of founding transgender networks in Nicaragua was carried out by some of the participants in the group with an academic background. One of the transgender activists present founded the organization REDTRANS, represented in Nicaragua by the organization *REDLACTRANS* (regional trans network) and fought for the inclusion of a trans chair in the CCM (Coordinating Country Mechanism) for the Global Fund.
- The participants identified conflicts of interest in the process of selecting the beneficiaries of the funds and with the staff that works in collaboration with these organizations, as leaders usually work with their close friends, relatives and supporters.
- The perception of CAMENA trans towards the role of the Global Fund and their sub-recipient organizations and agencies is of having a lack of transparency and being inefficient. This perception is based on the limited services offered and poor coverage of the region, the resale of condoms by these organization, their lack of interest in representing all the transgender community, and the high levels of specialization required to participate (which is highly incompatible with the profile of trans women with little or no studies as activists).

SWOT Analysis: Needs of the transgender community and key barriers which must be addressed to ensure transition and sustainability

Information was given to the participants about the SWOT analysis: what is, when is it used, and its constitutive elements. Participants were asked to write their SWOT analysis on the transgender community and organizations.

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political participation of members of trans community, and participation in various spaces • Knowledge about Law 820 and Ministerial Resolution 6 • Strength of the community in assuming their gender identity • Empowered group, united, willing to improve their quality of life • Increase of their identity recognition 	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low education levels • Risk practices like not using condom • Not very resilient
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance from the Global Fund • Strategic alliances • Education, in the formal school scheme and in technical careers • Access to public services • Organized community • Proactivity and positivism • Knowledge about their rights 	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of job opportunities • Low education level • Lack of funding and financing due to prejudices • Deficiency in public services and religious sector • Familial, political and social rejection • Impunity, especially in killings • Illegal detentions • Lack of freedom of expression • Discrimination • Lack of legal frameworks, such as a gender identity law

The key areas identified, according to the participants needs, were: the need for the creation of a gender identity law; anti-retroviral treatment for HIV positive members of the community; ensuring that job opportunities given by the Global Fund are distributed to the trans community; legal counseling for trans people, especially for those of low-economic status that cannot afford it; the need to transition towards a more healthy lifestyle (including integral attention from healthcare professionals); training to oversee the creation of a gender identity law to ensure it offers protection; as well as campaigns to prevent new cases of HIV.

DAY 2

Identification of mitigating actions to address gaps and needs

Strategic mitigating actions were designed to address the risks identified. These are activities are based on the SMART objectives: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound

Empowerment in anti-retroviral treatment: In coordination with ANIT and their allies, give peer to peer training to reinforce knowledge in HIV and ART, and follow up on new cases of HIV and cases in which ART is abandoned.

Gaps	Strategies and actions
Social and family context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raise awareness about HIV• Continuous monitoring of family and social context• Social and psychological assistance• Accessibility to anti-retroviral therapy in places that have NGO presence• Study on abandonment of anti-retroviral therapy
Low economic situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Technical and financial training for personal sustainability• Opportunities for community members, according to their knowledge of and skills in HIV and ART related activities• Peer to peer training
Lack of skills and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provision of efficient and updated information about HIV to key populations• Promote technical skills in health-related areas to key populations• Information for access to PrEP and PEP

Laws and legal resolutions recognition and enforcement: In coordination with ANIT, increase awareness of existing laws that empower and strengthen the trans community to achieve greater human rights vigilance during 2019.

Gaps	Strategies and actions
Lack of knowledge and enforcement of Law 820 and Ministerial Resolution 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Training and political empowerment for the trans community beneficiaries of the Global Fund.
Exclusion of trans population in public and private spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Request to take part in public discussions as the trans community in trans, gay and Sandinista Youth topics.

Lack of representation of trans community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To enforce equitable representation of the trans community in the CCM, with transparency about the proposals and budgets discussed.
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Citizen observance and vigilance: To improve participation in the CCM to enable the active surveillance and evaluation of the activities from the Global Fund project

Gaps	Strategies and actions
Citizen auditing and social vigilance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visits to and training of public health staff about the trans community needs
Transparency regarding internal management in the CCM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing information about MCC and CONSIDA meetings
Improve the role of involvement and consideration that the trans community has in HIV-related meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To invite trans organizations to meetings where decisions are being discussed and taken
Lack of information sharing regarding the trans population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish such studies

Increase in the level of participation in the decision-making process

Gaps	Strategies and actions
Lack of information and knowledge within the trans community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowerment of the trans community in activity monitoring
Lack of community member in the CCM, as well as channels of communication and decision-making power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To promote a representative that fights for trans human rights, with voting power in the CCM
The transgender community in Nicaragua does not feel represented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish information delivery mechanisms every six months to inform the progress made in the CCM, as well as the proper mechanisms for its distribution
There is a lack of transparency from MINSA, causing the trans community to feel ousted from the internal decision-making process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To raise awareness in MINSA about the leading role it needs to portray in the CCM and other spaces related to the Global Fund

Technical Assistance

Participants received training on how to fill in the technical assistance forms.

ANNEXES

Workshop Timetable

DAY 1		
Time	Schedule	Activity
8:00 – 8:15	ARRIVAL AND SIGN-IN	
8:15 – 8:30	Welcome Overview of session: Agenda, Goals and Objectives of the GATE Project	Erika Castellanos, GATE, Director of Programs
8:30 – 9:30	The National Situation and Response to HIV and TB and Transgender persons	Presentation
9:30 – 10:30	Regional and National Global Fund projects which include transgender communities	Large Group Discussions
10:30 – 10:45	BREAK	
10:45 – 11:45	Regional and National Global Fund projects which include transgender communities: Accomplishments and Challenges	Small Group Discussions
11:45 – 12:30	Group Presentations	Plenary – Group Presentations and discussions
12:30 – 1:30	LUNCH	
1:30 – 1:45	TEAM-BUILDING ACTIVITY	Energizer
1:45 - 3:45	SWOT analysis; Needs of the transgender community and key barriers which must be addressed to ensure transition and sustainability	Small Group Discussions
3:45 – 4:45	Identification of key priority areas based on needs and barriers	Plenary – Group Presentations and discussions
4:45 – 5:30	SUMMARY AND CLOSING	

DAY 2		
Time	Schedule	Activity
8:00 – 8:15	ARRIVAL AND SIGN-IN	
8:15 – 8:30	Review of Day 1: Participants	Icebreaker Activity
8:30 – 9:00	Key Findings of Day 1: Needs, Barriers, Priority Areas	Presentation
9:00 – 10:15	Identification of Strategies and actions to address gaps and needs	Small Group Discussion
10:15 – 10:30	BREAK	
10:30 – 11:15	Identification of Strategies and actions to address gaps and needs	Plenary – Presentation and Discussion
11:15 – 12:15	Identification of Timeframes, Persons Responsible and Inputs	Small Group Discussion
12:15 – 1:15	LUNCH	
1:15 – 2:30	Presentation of Technical Assistance Request Template	Plenary – Presentation and Discussion
2:30 - 4:00	Development of Technical Assistance Request	Small Groups Discussion
4:00 – 4:30	Review and Consensus-Building	
4:30 –	SUMMARY AND CLOSING	