



# 21271 SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT NOTES

ENVIRONMENTALLY AND SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

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## NGO Participation in HIV/AIDS Control Project in Brazil Achieves Results

According to the World Health Organization's Global Program on AIDS, Brazil remains among the four countries with the highest number of reported AIDS cases, although annual incidence rates rank the country somewhere between 40th and 50th on a world scale. The AIDS/STD Control Project demonstrates that Brazilian government/NGO partnerships can work well and benefit all parties involved, particularly project beneficiaries. The project contributed to efforts underway throughout the country to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and confirmed that stakeholder participation improves project performance and increases impact. NGOs provided the link to people at the local level and helped the government reach vulnerable populations, such as homosexuals, drug users, sex workers, and street children. A successor project (AIDS/STD II) is continuing to foster collaboration between government officials, NGO practitioners, and donors to reduce the incidence and transmission of HIV/AIDS throughout Brazil.

### Bringing Together Government and NGOs

NGOs working on AIDS issues in Brazil started to proliferate rapidly a decade ago.

They focused primarily on fighting social exclusion and pressuring the state to be more responsive to the unfolding crisis. It was NGO leadership, for example, that was instrumental in creating the legislation to mandate nationwide HIV testing of blood donations. They also created home-care programs, established HIV support groups, and launched preventive/educational efforts.

Enlightened leadership of the government's national program in the early 1990s led to the establishment of cooperative working relationships between NGOs and the government. An NGO Liaison Office was created within the national program to expand the participation of civil society in the struggle against the AIDS epidemic. At the time of preparation for the AIDS/STD Control Project in 1992, the World Bank provided draft terms of reference in which it stated that the active involvement of NGOs should become a key component of the loan agreement.

### Project Overview

The objective of the AIDS/STD project was to reduce the incidence and transmission of HIV and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)

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*The views expressed in this note are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the World Bank.*

**Box 1. Why the World Bank Wanted NGO Participation**

NGOs had played an important role in AIDS prevention and care from the onset of the epidemic in Brazil.

NGOs often complement government action by their flexible, innovative, and cost-effective approach.

NGOs can reach and work effectively with people at the community level, especially with vulnerable segments of society.

NGO involvement is in keeping with the World Bank's stakeholder participation policies geared to improving implementation performance and promoting project ownership.

by promoting prevention and treatment programs as well as strengthening the public and private institutions responsible for disease control. The active participation of civil society was sought to link the project to people at the local level and help the government reach people most at risk. NGO involvement, therefore, was included in three of the project's components: prevention efforts, treatment services, and institutional development.

**NGO Activities**

During the 1993-97 period, 427 NGO activities worth US\$18.1 million and involving 175 implementing organizations were financed by the AIDS/STD project. The majority of these activities (62 percent) were located in the Southeast, but 20 percent and 9 percent respectively, took place in the Northeast and South, regions with fewer government services. NGOs focused their efforts on behavior intervention (34 percent),

followed by information, education and communication initiatives (31 percent), support to persons living with AIDS (29 percent), and a small number of institutional strengthening activities (6 percent).

Organizations funded included traditional AIDS service NGOs, research centers, and social movement, such as an association of sex workers, indigenous tribal councils, and community groups. Preliminary findings show that during the four-year project period these organizations distributed more than a million condoms, disseminated educational material to more than 500,000 persons, provided specialized orientation to more than 200,000 individuals, and trained 2,000 community health agents.

**Project Results**

The AIDS/STD Control Project contributed to a significant decline in new AIDS cases over the past five years, as well as an estimated 30 percent decline in morbidity levels among leading risk groups. The widespread distribution of AZT and other anti-retroviral medication and the expanded national network of treatment centers are prolonging lives of AIDS patients. There has also been a decline in the reporting of new HIV cases among traditional risk groups such as homosexual males. This decline is apparently the result of well-targeted behavior change campaigns which resulted in a threefold increase in condom sales over the life of the project.

In light of these important results, the global United Nations AIDS Program (UNAIDS) selected the Brazilian AIDS program as one of the "best practice" examples in the world. The project also has had a considerable impact on NGOs working on AIDS issues in Brazil. Their ranks grew from 120 registered with the Ministry of Health in 1992 to more than 500 in 1998, in part due to the increased influx of Bank and government funds.

**Box 2. Beneficiary Populations Reached by NGOs**

Persons living with HIV/AIDS	30%
Adolescents	13%
Sex Workers	12%
Women	9%
Homosexuals	7%
General Public	5%
Drug Users	3%
Others (for example, students, street children)	21%

**Did NGOs Make a Difference in Project Outcomes?**

An Operations Evaluation Department (OED) study looked at the AIDS/STDs Control Project as part of an effort to understand what differences NGOs make to the performance of World Bank-supported projects. The study hypothesized that NGO effectiveness is the product of: (1) the existence of an enabling environment for their participation; (2) a positive relationship between NGOs, governments, and the World Bank; and (3) NGOs' local knowledge, flexibility, and innovation.

Despite the lack of hard impact evidence, one of the clearest messages from both World Bank staff and government officials is that this project's important prevention initiatives could not have succeeded without NGOs. These organizations demonstrated their ability to reach groups of at-risk individuals whose needs the government was less able to address. They also helped the government to increase the capacity and coverage of its AIDS prevention and treatment efforts. Staff in Rio de Janeiro, for example, described NGOs as "fundamental" to their work and pointed out that their office had only three people to cover the entire state. NGOs were also found to be less costly than government programs in most cases. These operational results fully bore out the original justification for working with NGOs. Furthermore, when the proposal to amend the original AIDS/STD project for a

second US\$300 million, four-year loan encountered resistance from some parts of the government, it was the commonality of interests between the national government's AIDS staff and NGO representatives that won out.

While the OED's assessment of the project was very positive, stated objectives were not met in the areas of surveillance and impact assessment. Evaluators found that data regarding the impact of the NGO work or – for that matter – the project as a whole were difficult to obtain. Few baselines or other types of systematized information were available. The problem was, in part, inherent in AIDS work since it is difficult to quantify how many lives are prolonged or saved through interventions.

**Box 3. Government/NGO Partnership Consolidated**

The Brazilian Ministry of Health and the World Bank have adopted several key participatory mechanisms to enable government/civil society collaboration to grow and solidify. They include:

- Five NGO representatives now serve on the National AIDS Council, which monitors Brazil's AIDS policies.
- NGO researchers were hired for such project-related tasks as designing the small-grants program; providing technical assistance to recipient organizations; monitoring project activities; and carrying out the social analysis of the new AIDS/STD loan.
- NGO leaders actively participated in a seminar with government officials and donors to evaluate the project's activities and plan a new project. The NGO delegation included representatives from groups increasingly exposed to HIV/AIDS, such as low-income women, rural workers, and indigenous populations.

## The NGO Perspective

The majority of NGOs welcomed the project. Their representatives reported that it undoubtedly had a significant and positive impact on the fight against AIDS in Brazil by providing a much-needed injection of funds for their efforts. Many NGOs, however, criticized technical aspects of the funding process. They objected to the extensive proposal forms, slow disbursements and difficult procurement norms. Other, more financially fragile groups had weak management/administrative skills and found it difficult to operate within a large project. They expressed a need for more technical assistance and capacity building in such areas as general administration, proposal writing and financial reporting.

Some NGOs also expressed concern about the dilution of their independent public policy advocacy role. Paradoxically, their shift in focus to prevention and service provision is a direct result of their successful efforts to influence policy. While this expansion of their role has indeed occurred, key policy-oriented NGOs seem to have maintained the independence needed to maintain their government watchdog function.

### Fostering Effective Government/NGO Collaboration

Although government/NGO relations can be difficult and characterized by misunderstandings and conflict, this project demonstrates that partnerships are indeed possible and that such cooperation benefits all

parties involved. Some specific lessons learned include:

- In the inherent conflict of systems and approaches between the two very different cultures of the World Bank/government on the one hand and NGOs on the other, NGOs are often at a disadvantage. To be successful partners in these collaborations, NGO funding mechanisms need to be flexible enough to accommodate their diversity and informality while meeting adequate reporting and accountability issues.
- A careful assessment of both absorptive and management capacity of NGOs is essential prior to channeling funds to them. They generally need technical assistance geared to institutional capacity-building skills, such as training for staff in computer skills, record keeping, and proposal preparation.
- Information disclosure and frank dialogue among donors, government officials, and NGO representatives yield results leading to increased trust and consensus building.
- There is a need to identify and disseminate best practice examples of government/NGO collaborations to encourage replication of successful methodologies.
- Initiatives need to be undertaken by the government, donors, and NGOs themselves to promote the financial sustainability of NGOs by diversifying their funding sources.

