

Regional Call to Participate in Strengthening Civil Society Voices to Influence Policies in the Context of HIV and AIDS

At the start of 2007 SARN, COMBOCO and LANFE entered into a partnership supported by the Southern Africa Trust to ***“Strengthen Civil Society Voices to Influence Policies through REFLECT in the context of HIV and AIDS”***. Through this project, community members in 5 Districts of KwaZulu Natal and 4 Districts of Lesotho have been discussing, analysing and taking locally relevant actions to address priority issues within their respective communities. As part of the process these REFLECT circles are preparing for a campaign to influence their responses to HIV and AIDS.

A priority concern and issue across the 20 REFLECT circles in all these districts in both countries is to address the high stigmatisation that continues to prevail for people living with HIV and AIDS. In addition, the treatment, care and support of people infected and affected by the virus remains either non-existent, inappropriate, or poorly managed or mismanaged. It was through this problem statement that the partners developed a learning unit designed to guide a structured learning and action process. The unit is titled ***“Influencing Responses to HIV and AIDS”***.

Through the months of October and November, 20 REFLECT circles, each with between 15-30 participants, across Lesotho and Kwa-Zulu Natal will be working on this unit to analyse and discuss gender, power and locally specific contextual issues particularly relevant to HIV and AIDS leadership. Further, they aim to discuss, negotiate and agree how communities can take action in influencing policies and policy-making processes related to HIV and AIDS. REFLECT circles in both countries will be working simultaneously on the unit during this period.

The discussions and analysis of the REFLECT circles is timeous. It falls during the period of the 16 days of Activism Against Gender Violence as well as over the 1st of December, which has long been ear-marked as World AIDS Day. The 2007 World AIDS Day theme, “leadership”, highlights the need for innovation, vision and perseverance in the face of the AIDS challenge. The campaign calls on all sectors of society such as families, communities and civil society organisations - rather than just governments - to take the initiative and provide leadership on AIDS. Based on analyses emerging from the REFLECT circles, participants will prepare to step up to this challenge and to take the initiative to influence leadership on AIDS during a week long campaign in the first week of December 2007.

⚡ How to get involved and strengthen civil society voices? ⚡

⚡ Join a local Reflect circle during October and November

⚡ Encourage your organisation to discuss and analyse the issues around Government Policies and Leadership in relation to HIV and AIDS

⚡ Support and Join the REFLECT circles during the action campaign week which will be held during the first week of December 2007

⚡ Request the learning unit from SARN and adapt it to your context/needs

⚡ Distribute this notice widely and encourage active participation

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