

# The Constellation

*connecting local responses around the world*



## **AIDS Competence Development in Guyana**

Third report – January 2011

*Constellation Coaches*

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## Introduction

Guyana has been the first country in the Americas to have a competent national facilitation team skilled in the facilitation of local responses to HIV through the AIDS Competence Process. It has also been the first country in the world to have used the Blended Learning Programme at the centre of the transfer of the approach to new facilitators.

Since 2004, The Constellation transferred the approach to organizations in 28 countries. Guyana stood out by its excellent hosting by UNAIDS and the participation from a variety of sectors, religions, organizations and backgrounds. The facilitators integrated the approach in various ways and at various degrees. An interesting spin-off effect is the shift in collaboration between the various groups. They went from 'people that happen to work in the same sector' to 'sharing common values, expressing personal experiences and collaborating more closely'.

This final report summarizes the experiences with the AIDS Competence Process in Guyana from February 2010 until January 2011. In particular, it focuses on the learning in terms of the use of the Blended Learning Programme to support the training of local Guyanese facilitators.

## Activities

A first 10-day learning event took place in Feb.2010<sup>1</sup>. It includes practice of 35 participants in their own organization. 21 Guyanese facilitators<sup>2</sup> committed to go through the Blended Learning program. Facilitators practiced in their own contexts. Constellation coaches provided distant support through at least 10 skype conferences ranging from 1-3hrs, emails, interactions on Ning<sup>3</sup> and Facebook<sup>4</sup>.

A follow-up learning event took place in September 2010<sup>5</sup>. During the visit, facilitators re-connected for learning and sharing among themselves and with invitees in the Knowledge Fair. Seven facilitators<sup>6</sup> were certified after the certification process. Certification was done based on four criteria: Participation in Blended Learning, facilitators' self-assessment in teams, direct observation of practice in the field and consultation with team leaders.

From September onwards, the certified facilitators continued to support and mentor the others. They continued with Blended Learning and practiced in their own contexts. Constellation coaches continued their distant support through the various channels.

The country team – Guyana Community Life Competence –transferred the approach beyond their own organizations. As individuals or as a team, they responded to invitations by other organizations such as UNAIDS, UNDP and UNFPA. Transfer of AIDS Competence happened to other groups like Barbers and beauticians and Amerindian communities. The approach was applied to other topics such as gender justice, youth and livelihood.

The Constellation distant support ends at the end of January 2011. A next visit is planned from 7-12 March 2011. It will focus on certifying other facilitators and accredit the first Constellation coaches. In addition, coaches will provide support to the National team in terms of managing the facilitation and opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to *Report- Feb 10 Guyana AIDS Competence Development*

<sup>2</sup> **Group 1:** Autry Haynes, Lorna Harry, Abbas Mancy, Michael McGarrell, Paula Sampson, Ryan Rawlins, Colleen McEwan, Aleta Peterson, Lloyd Edun, Clezell Gray. **Group 2:** Nicole Cole, Ashanta Moses, Lyndon Welch, Allister Collins, Fatu Gbedema, Ras 'Ian, Zaheeda Hack, Korey Chisholm, Sanjay Pooran, Marilyn Waterman and Afeleta Cummings.

<sup>3</sup> <http://aidscompetence.ning.com/group/guyanacompetence>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group\\_158742147506483&ap=1](http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_158742147506483&ap=1)

<sup>5</sup> Refer to *Report- Sept Guyana AIDS Competence Development*

<sup>6</sup> Autry Haynes, Lorna Harry, Michael McGarrell, Nicole Cole, Ashanta Moses, Fatu Gbedema, Korey Chisholm.

## Key outcomes

- 1. A national capacity to facilitate local responses to HIV** across organizations networks and groups. The majority of facilitators went through BL. This resulted in better understanding and application of the approach as well as stronger bonding of the 2 teams.
- 2. 7 certified facilitators** capable of nurturing, supporting, mentoring and certifying their peers. Several facilitators have the potentials to be nominated as Constellation coaches in the future.
- 3. A set of knowledge assets** and accompanying video clips developed by the local facilitators. They are based on their own authentic Guyanese experiences in the field and can be shared with other HIV/AIDS workers in the country and with the rest of the world.
- 4. Collaboration between various actors in the response to HIV.** The Guyana Community Life Competence team represents various sectors, religions, organizations and backgrounds. The team has a strong bonding. Today, it can transfer as a team the approach to other groups, organizations and networks.
- 5. Ongoing initiatives to transfer and adapt the approach.** Examples are the Guyana Faith Coalition on HIV/AIDS introducing ACP to communities throughout the country, Ministry of Amerindian Affairs introducing ACP to the Amerindian Toshao councils and pilot communities.
- 6. Vibrant virtual learning and sharing** between facilitators in Guyana and with the rest of the Constellation through different channels. Examples are the Guyana Competence page on Ning and the Facebook page.
- 7. Opportunities to learn, share and transfer with other countries.** Examples are the International SALT visits in India, a project in Trinidad and Tobago with UNAIDS, an application to WASH with UNICEF in Suriname and the Thai Interfaith Network on AIDS in Thailand.
- 8. The potential of a becoming the regional hub** for promoting local HIV/AIDS response in the region and transferring the CLCP.

## Key success factors

We can conclude that one year after the introduction, the AIDS/ Community Life Competence Process is strongly rooted in Guyana. Several factors contributed to this success:

### 1. Support from UNAIDS

The outstanding hosting, advocacy and participation of UNAIDS was a key success factor. In particular:

- The logistical support during and in between visits and for visits of Guyana CLC.
- Networking opportunities provided by introduction of the ACP in the UNAIDS retreat
- Promotion of ACP by UNAIDS in organizing a special dinner + learning event at Cara Lodge for ministers, UN agencies and key NGOs
- Participation of representatives from the UN and other agencies in the Knowledge Fair, leading to invitations for training/transfer in other circles e.g. cosmetologists, Amerindian communities
- Financial support to the Guyana Faith Coalition on HIV/AIDS to apply ACP with communities

### 2. Team bonding and sense of belonging

Individuals and organizations that didn't collaborate before, now work together. Facilitators connected from a strong foundation due to three reasons: The basic appreciative and human values of the approach, the intensive first event and the participation in the Blended Learning Program as teams.

### 3. **Certification of facilitators**

The process of certifying facilitators energized and revitalized the team members. It also stimulated the facilitators to practice and feedback the learning on a global platform.

### 4. **Strong local leadership**

Several strong leaders participated in the process. Especially Autry Haynes made an exceptional contribution to stimulate local ownership and engagement of the facilitators.

### 5. **Continued technical and moral (distant) support from the coaches**

There is a big difference between one-off trainings with no after-care and this process. Constellation coaches used a variety of virtual channels to continue and deepen connections. The informal and human style of interactions contributed to continued interest. It helped to let facilitators not feel the process 'as another burden'.

## Lessons learned and challenges

### *General lessons learnt*

- **Practicing in each person's own organization** is an important part of the first learning event. It stimulates organization-wide ownership and direct practice in a community that the facilitator is comfortable with.
- **Periodical facilitators' personal assessments** help participants/facilitators reflect on their own capacities and focus on learning and self-improvement. Results can be shared with team members to promote team learning and team support.
- **Periodical knowledge fairs** help draw attention to learning from experience and document local experiences, progress, success, and lessons learned which otherwise may be lost. Inviting others to the fairs is a good way to introduce the way of thinking, way of working, and tools. They are good occasions to show off the members' applications, experiences, and progress; these are good motivators for the team, and good reference/learning points for the guests, hence useful referral and networking potentials
- **The Certification of facilitators** is a challenging process but is a good motivator and energizer. It needs to be done in a sensitive manner and in consultation with the local team leaders, in order to build up and not break the teams. Criteria need to be worked out carefully and clearly communicated.
- **Coaches and team leaders need to keep revitalizing and rejuvenating the teams** at intervals when energies are low and progress stalls. This can be caused by personal responsibilities, workplace demands or other reasons. Continuing to look for strengths and appreciating local achievements is critical in order not to fall back in 'top-down' orders from teacher to student.
- **Team leaders** need to be good facilitators, communicators, motivators, organizers, catalysts, nurturers. Good facilitators are not necessarily good team leaders!

### *General challenges*

- **The drop-out and new arrival of facilitators half-way the process.** Facilitators dropped out half way the process such as the NAPS facilitators. The national team lost both some excellent facilitators as well as a back-up on a political level. New facilitators during the 2<sup>nd</sup> event had to be coached up to speed.

- **The diversity of the facilitators and their different work schedules and availability.** The diversity in the group was both a strength and a weakness. Establishing a facilitation team in one organization is logistically much easier, but will not bring the spin-off effects of collaboration and learning between actors.
- **Continuity in community processes.** The process needs to be facilitated in communities over time. One-off sessions of dream-building or self-assessment do not bring desired results and can even be counter-productive. Facilitation teams need to commit their accompaniment over a period of time to the communities that they work with.

### *Lessons learnt on the Blended Learning Program*

This was the first process for the Constellation to use the Blended Learning Programme at the centre of the training process. We learned several things:

- The Blended Learning Programme is highly complementary to learning events. It promotes more learning/understanding/applying through combining concepts and practice, individual work and team work, action and reflection, face-to-face and virtual interaction;
- It is effective when introduced early in the process, as part of the overall roadmap, to help motivate participants from the beginning;
- It works better when teams read and reflect together on the content of the modules.
- The content, especially the quizzes and the stimulating questions, triggered reflection and discussion. Several facilitators also shared parts of the content with their colleagues.
- It needs to be accompanied regularly by distant technical and moral support. We cannot expect facilitators to use it properly without support.
- Coaches need to learn together with the facilitators as peers, not as teachers. Skype conversations need to be well prepared with questions that stimulate reflection on the way of working. Coaches must learn just as well as the facilitators.
- It needs to be accompanied by at least two local face-to-face meetings to learn and share among team members. The first face-to-face should be at least 6 days to set a foundation;
- It can take two to more than 12 months to complete, depending on availability and commitment of the participants;
- It requires regular reminders, energizers, motivators to keep participants focused and on track throughout the modules, and to prevent drop-outs;
- It needs local team leaders that need a variety of skills: planning, communication and leadership skills are crucial next to a good understanding of the approach.

### *Challenges on the Blended Learning Program*

- Facilitators and coaches worked across several time zones. This made the planning of skype conferences difficult.
- Availability of the CD-Rom based version of BL was limited. Defect copies during the first learning event caused some delays in the availability for some facilitators.

- Limited internet availability and connectivity reduced full participation of the facilitators and in some cases the coaches.
- Planning of joint skype conversations. Availability of facilitators to go through the process as individuals and in teams was limited. Facilitators had to combine the process commitments with other work load.
- Personal disruptions prevented continuity among participants: having a baby, change of role/responsibilities in the organization, study, financial problems, increased family responsibilities or changed family priorities, etc. The result was that members have difficulties finding time to practice in the field together and then reflecting together.
- Technical problems with passwords and gaining access to BL. Facilitators also need specific coaching, explanations on the use of forums and blogs. This is also important to overcome obstacles to share stories online. This coaching should be done in an interactive way during the face-to-face events.
- Some facilitators lacked self-discipline to write on the field experience and post to share with the coaches and other members.
- Loss of momentum during several periods. A group of facilitators still haven't fully completed all the six modules.

## Recommendations

### *Recommendations for coaches and facilitators of Blended Learning*

- An effective transfer of the approach requires 'cycles of events'. Each cycle consists of a face-to-face learning event with practice, continued practice in teams, distant technical support (BL, skype, email) and regular and continued contact. The focus lies on informal/casual contact with moral support, encouragement and friendship building through email, Facebook, skype and Ning.
- A transparent plan of the various phases must be communicated in advance. A roadmap should be introduced including the possibility of certifying as facilitators and nomination as coaches at the beginning to motivate participants. Coaches should introduce BL early in the first learning event.
- Coaches must be flexible, responsive, and respectful to local realities, resources, strengths, IT-levels and vulnerabilities;
- Combine a variety of channels to communicate. Use both formal and informal/ casual types of communication.
- Balance the looking for strengths and expressing confidence in people's capacity with the necessity of taking action and practice in the field;
- Promote not just local ownership but also local leadership, especially when Blended Learning is used;
- Develop a foundation of trust, friendship and respect. Go beyond the formal partnership and provide meaningful personal and professional accompaniment.
- Believe in the essence of the approach, but use different types of packaging and channels given the situation.

## *Recommendations for UNAIDS*

UNAIDS has been instrumental in the success of this learning process. However, the potential of the national team has not been fully revealed yet. UNAIDS can play a role in this through various efforts:

- Support the Guyana Community Life Competence (GCLC) team to liaise with potential partners in Guyana that could benefit from the approach;
- Stimulate Guyana Community Life Competence in applications of their capacity to other issues
- Provide managerial support to the Guyana CLC as the team is a 'start-up' in terms organizational phase;
- Provide logistical support to Guyana CLC for meetings and community visits;
- Connect the team to potential opportunities in the region and continent so they become the hub for capacity in facilitating local responses;
- Provide opportunities for the Guyana CLC to share their experiences in Guyana and in other countries. One opportunity is the international SALT visits in Guinee, West-Africa in Q4 2011.