

Civil Society Activists in the Middle East & North Africa Call for Action

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Civil society advocates declare that national plans to fight HIV, tuberculosis and malaria must involve people who live with the diseases



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Delegates at a meeting of civil society organizations from throughout the Middle East and North Africa discuss ways to better implement their nations' grants from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Leaders from 15 countries in the Middle East and North Africa fight stigma by calling on donors and their governments to develop programs with evidence-based, epidemiologically relevant interventions.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is the largest single source of funding of programs to combat the world's three most devastating diseases. The hallmark of the Global Fund grants is that any nation awarded a grant can implement its programs according to its own goals and needs. But program design *must* involve people who live with the diseases. A weak link in the grant architecture is the paucity of civil society organizations (CSOs) that serve as grant trustees and participate in program design and implementation. Although CSOs often execute prevention, care, and treatment programs, their ideas are often considered secondary or unimportant by national leaders.

Encouraging CSOs to play a stronger role in Global Fund issues is a primary goal of the PEPFAR-sponsored Grant Management Solutions (GMS) project, which exists to ensure that Global Fund grant activities are effectively and efficiently carried out. Working with the Morocco-based Association de Lutte Contre le SIDA and the Civil Society Action Team (CSAT) in April 2009, GMS brought together 55 CSO leaders from 15 countries in the Middle East and North Africa—a region not typically known for civil society engagement. As a result of workshop discussions and activities, civil society leaders were spurred to become more engaged to oversee how their nations' grant money is spent.

A major outcome of the workshop was a declaration that participants sent to the Global Fund Board of Directors and their national governments outlining several obstacles CSOs face as grant implementers. To overcome these obstacles, the declaration recommended that each country establish a legal framework to safeguard human rights while CSOs carry out their duty to deliver HIV prevention and care services. Participants who signed the declaration committed themselves to integrating CSOs into each country's national plans to fight the three diseases. The proclamation (available at http://www.msmandhiv.org/documents/ME_NGO_marrakech.pdf) calls upon donor countries to uphold their commitment to fully fund the Global Fund, and governments throughout the region to develop programs with evidence-based, epidemiologically relevant interventions.

After years of working in the background—to ensure that people living with a devastating disease receive care and treatment—and in countries where stigma and discrimination are strong, civil society leaders throughout the Middle East and North Africa have found a common voice to present to the world.

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