

The AIDS Accountability Country Scorecard

AIDS Accountability International

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Country response to AIDS would improve if governments could effectively be held accountable for what they have promised to do in the response to AIDS. A lack of data and benchmarks for performance hinders demands for accountability and prevents non-government and government actors alike from being able to evaluate progress. The AIDS Accountability Country Scorecard is a new monitoring tool that is designed to respond to this need.

Scorecard methodology

The scorecard is based on the most comprehensive set of data available on country responses to AIDS across the world – the country reports to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on AIDS (UNGASS). In the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment from 2001, UN member states committed to respond to AIDS effectively, and to comply with a monitoring process through which non-performing governments could be held accountable. The most recent round of country reporting on UNGASS commitments was submitted in January 2008. The scorecard utilizes this most recent data.

Although UNGASS information is publically available on the UNAIDS website, it is contained in nearly two hundred individual country reports, and consists of hundreds of indicators. The AIDS Accountability Country Scorecard, for the first time, presents this information in an aggregated, transparent and analytical fashion that allows stakeholders to compare responses across countries and issues.

Scorecard elements

The scorecard is based on the questions that countries must respond to in their biannual UNGASS report. In the scorecard, key UNGASS indicators are clustered into eight important ‘elements’ of the response to AIDS so that broad trends on country performance can be distilled:

- Element 1 **Data**: the amount of data provided on key epidemiological and behavioral indicators;
- Element 2 **Focus**: the share of total funds for AIDS that was spent on most-at-risk populations;
- Element 3 **Treatment**: the coverage of anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment;
- Element 4 **Prevention**: the coverage of prevention programs;
- Element 5 **Coordination**: the extent to which the response is coordinated through the ‘Three Ones’;
- Element 6 **Civil society**: the extent to which civil society actors play an active role in the response;
- Element 7 **Financing**: the level of financial resources invested in the response, and;
- Element 8 **Human Rights**: the degree to which human rights are incorporated into AIDS response.

On each of these elements, countries are given a score on the basis of the quality of their response. Scores are translated into a percentage from 1% (very poor) to 100% (very good). Countries that fail to submit the necessary data as required under the UNGASS agreement get a zero score, which will affect their overall ranking on quality of performance.

Assessment of performance cannot occur unless the country provides data on all indicators. A widespread lack of transparency is one of the key factors hindering accountability for commitments made under UNGASS. Therefore a final element known as the AIDS Reporting Index was developed. It tallies up the number of zero scores (no data provided) received by each country and presents a ranking from best (many indicators reported) to worst (few indicators reported).

Scorecard results analysis

At quick glance the scorecard easily allows for comparative analysis of country performance across the eight elements and the AIDS Reporting Index so readers are able to draw their own conclusions. Overall findings are that countries generally score highest on the ‘coordination’ element, and lowest on the ‘focus’ element. This would suggest that most countries respond through the prescribed institutional framework but that they are poor at implementing effective policy where it matters the most; the emphasis is on form rather than substance. Another striking result is that rich countries (in terms of GNI per capita) are worse at reporting to UNGASS than other countries. The AIDS Reporting Index clearly shows they are not transparent in their response to AIDS despite their UNGASS commitments.

Scorecard utility

The scorecard will equip stakeholders calling for stronger government response to AIDS and help them pinpoint where more transparency is needed, or where action and commitments are lacking. Civil society stakeholders are able to generate versions of the scorecard that are particularly relevant for their country(ies) and issue(s) of interest through an interactive website (www.aidsaccountability.org). For example, countries earn higher scores if they report on the degree to which young women are reached by prevention messages. Therefore youth and gender advocates would be able to generate evidence for their campaigns that strengthen and inform their advocacy strategies.

Scorecard development process

The 2008 version of the scorecard is the result of a comprehensive consultative process involving civil society stakeholders from across the world. A number of key global experts on HIV/AIDS, monitoring and policy ratings have also been instrumental. The scorecard is a flexible monitoring tool that will be continuously improved year after year as more and better data becomes available, and as its users suggest ways of strengthening the methodology further.

Scorecard limitations

The main limitations to this initial version of the scorecard arise because it is based exclusively on the self-reported data that governments submit to UNGASS. Firstly, countries are not required to provide evidence that their data has been independently verified therefore it may hold some bias. Secondly, if countries do not report on some aspect of their response to AIDS, they receive a zero score even if they actually may perform well in reality. In this sense, the scorecard does not necessarily reflect the reality of the response in a country, but it does claim to reflect how the response is reported back to UNGASS by the countries themselves. While this is a limitation in one sense, it nevertheless truly reflects failures to live up to what was promised in the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment, i.e. that countries must ensure effective monitoring.

Continuous improvement and learning

The scorecard will be issued yearly, but in the interim periods the methodology will be continuously improved based on stakeholder feedback. During 2009, AIDS Accountability International will create a large panel of experts across the globe that will help improve the scorecard in various ways. Some include verifying the self-reported UNGASS data in order to avoid serious misrepresentations by countries, identifying gaps or issues not currently included in the scorecard such as gender and coverage of human rights indicators, and expanding the issues and elements included in the scorecard based on scorecard user needs. AAI will also develop explanatory analyses to test whether one or

more of the elements can help explain why some countries have better AIDS policy outcomes, such as lower HIV prevalence.

About AIDS Accountability International

AAI is an independent non-profit organization established to increase accountability and inspire bolder leadership in the response to the AIDS epidemic. It does this by rating and comparing the degree to which public, private and civil society actors are fulfilling the formal agreements they have made to respond to the epidemic. AAI aims to build bridges between actors and institutions that collect and analyze primary data in the field of HIV/AIDS and those who make use of this data in different contexts such as policymaking and advocacy actors. AAI provides such actors with a compass (the ratings) that may point to new policy and programmatic directions and serve to refocus the debate on the need for greater accountability and leadership.