

Overcoming Barriers: Housing and HIV / AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa and Aboriginal Communities in Canada

Networking Session at the 3rd World Urban Forum
Vancouver, Canada
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Lu'ma Native Housing Society



Rooftops Canada
Abri International

This Networking Event was organized by:

Housing People of Zimbabwe (HPZ) was founded in 1992 to assist housing cooperatives with cooperative development, technical services, financial planning and management and legal services. During the last five years HPZ has launched initiatives to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS on cooperative members, including, impact studies, training and skills building, policy development and coalition building. Responses at the community level include feeding programs for orphans, loan programs for people living with AIDS, and training for members.

Lu'ma Native Housing Society, formally known as the Vancouver Indian Centre Housing Society, was incorporated in the Province of British Columbia on May 25, 1980. In 1987, the Society formally changed its name to Lu'ma Native Housing Society which means "New Beginnings" in Coast Salish. Lu'ma aims to ensure a continued supply of adequate housing at a modest cost to Aboriginal people with low and moderate incomes. It also works to educate the community about the housing problems of Aboriginal people in the urban community. Over the past 23 years Lu'ma has successfully developed and operates a social housing portfolio of over 250 units for people of Aboriginal ancestry in Vancouver, Canada.

Rooftops Canada / Abri International, founded in 1984, is the international development program of co-operative and social housing organizations in Canada. Rooftops works with partner organizations to improve housing conditions, build sustainable communities, and develop a shared vision of equitable global development. Rooftops Canada's current focus is on disadvantaged communities in Africa and Asia.

With support from our partners

- BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA), Vancouver, Canada
- Coalition des Organisations Non-Gouvernementales et Organisations Communautaires de Base du Cameroun Oeuvrant dans le Domaine des Etablissements Humains (CONGEH), Yaounde, Cameroon
- Cooperative Housing Federation of British Columbia (CHFC-BC), Vancouver, Canada
- Healing our Spirit BC Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Society, Vancouver, Canada
- Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD), Ottawa, Canada
- Johannesburg Housing Company, Johannesburg, South Africa
- Mazingira Institute/ Settlements Information Network Africa (SINA), Nairobi, Kenya
- National Aboriginal Housing Association (NAHA), Ottawa, Canada
- National Cooperative Housing Union (NACHU), Nairobi, Kenya
- Planact, Johannesburg, South Africa
- The Social Housing Company (SOCHO), East London, South Africa
- WAT Human Settlement Trust, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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This report was prepared by Rooftops Canada to reflect the views of the participants in the session, but we accept responsibility for the contents.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Barry Pinsky, Executive Director, Rooftops Canada, welcomed the participants and introduced the Networking Session. He made reference to a three day workshop held in Vancouver immediately prior to the World Urban Forum titled “Housing and HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa, Aboriginal Communities and Social Housing in Canada”. During the workshop, representatives of African, Aboriginal and Canadian housing organizations exchanged ideas and brainstormed strategies to build a shared perspective in the emerging field of multi-sectoral responses to HIV/AIDS.

Barry indicated that the objective of this WUF Networking Session was to provide a further opportunity to learn, share experiences and information, and get to know a wider number of people and groups working on HIV/AIDS and human settlements issues. The session was designed to focus discussions on how housing organisations can support people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. It was based on training sessions from South Africa which help participants examine the impact of HIV/AIDS on housing groups and clients, and draw on their experience to suggest how housing organizations can respond. All the session participants were given copies of these training materials on CDs for their use.

Sue Ann Phillips, an educator with Healing Our Spirit, then sang a song of welcome, which was written for the Sto:Lo Nation by Chief Dan George. This was followed by presentations from two organizations. Ken Clement, Executive Director of Healing Our Spirit, Vancouver, Canada and Barbra Kohlo from Housing People of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe, shared their stories which highlighted issues relating to HIV/AIDS and Human Settlements. Ken started his presentation by leading the workshop in a moment of silence to remember of those lost to and affected by HIV/AIDS. This reminder and the song of welcome helped create a “safe place” for the workshop participants to share their feelings on very difficult topics.



Participants then divided into three groups to discuss concerns and ways to mainstream responses around HIV/AIDS and Human Settlements. The three groups followed similar formats, but each had a slightly different focus.

The first part of this report summarizes the key points made in the two presentations. The second part of this report summarizes the group discussions. Highlights from each of the small groups were also presented to the whole workshop which ended after two very noisy, exciting and useful hours.

PRESENTATION 1: HEALING OUR SPIRIT

Healing Our Spirit: BC Aboriginal AIDS Society believes 'Everyone is part of our traditional healing circle, including people living with HIV/AIDS.' The society's goal is to keep the Circle strong by creating balanced communities with an environment of caring, support and healing.

A high prevalence of risk factors reflects the serious HIV/AIDS epidemic among the Aboriginal population. The key risk factors identified by Healing Our Spirit include: the filtering of drugs into small communities and increased drug use, mobility, the high percentage of sexually transmitted diseases in Aboriginal communities, increased infection among gay people and prison inmates, and the greater risk to street youth.

The risks to the Aboriginal population can be attributed to the ongoing effects of colonialism and assimilation. Poverty, unemployment, lack of education, poor medical services in remote areas, social problems, a lack of awareness about sexuality, language barriers, as well as stereotypes are all impacts of historical influences and contribute to the rise of HIV/AIDS among the Aboriginal population.

To address these issues, Healing Our Spirit is committed to increasing HIV/AIDS awareness and acceptance. The organization aims to achieve this through a number of support and education programs with the goal of providing health care professionals and front line workers with a basic understanding of Aboriginal culture and the historical influences which contribute to the high risk of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.

PRESENTATION 2: HOUSING PEOPLE OF ZIMBABWE

Housing People of Zimbabwe (HPZ) is committed to improving human settlement conditions for Zimbabweans, as well as addressing HIV/AIDS issues as they relate to housing through a multi-faceted intervention program.

An impact assessment conducted on 10 housing cooperatives in 2002 indicated that cooperatives were failing to deal with the impact of HIV/AIDS, in part because they did not understand the link between shelter provision and HIV/AIDS issues. The assessment revealed that there were no support structures for those infected with HIV/AIDS and there were no mechanisms to help cope with the demands on the cooperatives to deal with the legal social and economic impacts of HIV/AIDS. Also a general lack of education and awareness limited the types of responses to housing and HIV/AIDS.

HPZ's key objectives in addressing these issues are the promotion of a holistic approach, organisational development, the de-stigmatization of HIV/AIDS, provision of psycho-social support, awareness, and sustainable livelihood promotion.

Since 2002, HPZ's intervention program has reached 20 housing co-operatives but the organization is still faced with many challenges such as, lack of resources, a crumbling health system, high levels of unemployment in housing co-operatives, poverty, sustainability of both HPZ and housing cooperatives, and the limited capacity to influence policy.

II. SUMMARY OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS

This section summarizes the discussions from the three groups. The format below identifies the issues the group was discussing, the guide questions that they were provided (in italics) and a synopsis of their discussion.

GROUP 1: EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS AND RESPONSES

Task 1: Emotional supports

If you were very ill, worried about where your income would come from, and were scared of losing your housing, land or shelter...What is it that you would be most afraid of?...How would you hope your family and close friends would care for you emotionally or financially?...What could your neighbours do to support you?

Based on your experience, what are the emotional and financial impacts on people and communities living infected and affected by HIV and AIDS? (This applies not only to people who are HIV+, but also to their family, co-workers, neighbours and others who are also affected.) The group focused on developing a list of 10 or more specific concerns.

Synopsis of Concerns

Stigma and discrimination

- Stigma (children are also affected by this)- people are afraid of disclosure and fear of rejection
- Ostracized and having to leave home area
- Concerns about confidentiality

Fear and anxiety

- Afraid of being homeless (not being able to pay rent and losing homes)
- Afraid of not getting appropriate care
- Loss of confidence/power leads to self condemnation and blame
- Concern about security for family/Worried about children, no daycare at workplace
- Depression, Feeling like a burden/Your world changes and planning stops/Constant loss and attending funerals constantly
- Neglect, no support and money
- What will happen to my property?
- Worried that some of those infected will spread the syndrome even further
- Low Income, afraid of the impact of becoming poor



Other

- Not being able to work/decreased productivity
- Lack of resources for First Nations communities
- Role/Impact of religion
- Financial catastrophe, funerals and children dying

Task 2: Mainstreaming Housing responses to HIV and AIDS

Imagine you are a resident/member of a social housing institution, housing co-operative or other housing community organization for this exercise. Based on your experience and that of your organization, develop a list of responses to emotional and financial needs related to HIV and AIDS. These are for social housing institutions, co-operatives and other groups mainstreaming housing responses.

Synopsis of responses

Education

- Education on HIV/AIDS- staff members

Financial

- Loan programs to build decent homes, housing, microfinance and savings

Operational

- Co-ops can sit together and decide how to support affected families (housing charges)
- Legal advice
- Support for orphans through family environment
- Home based care for children
- Build organizations that address housing and HIV/AIDS together, maintaining confidentiality of use and clients, and partnerships with organizations that have capacity in HIV/AIDS

Policy

- Advocating for continued tenure for wife/children
- Develop strategies that include state information/resources
- Mainstream HIV/AIDS, every activity/institution addresses the issue
- Discuss the issue, mobilize communities, make governments prioritize housing for low income communities, have governments see what people can and do every day, don't let the issue go away, more funding from governments and political will
- Connect local, national and international in recognizing the right to housing and that housing equals health.

Other

- Integrated responses including emotional and spiritual support to strengthen community at all levels, communication
- Document and share experiences and information
- Work broadly for people to have decent affordable housing

GROUP 2: PHYSICAL SUPPORTS AND RESPONSES

Task 1: Physical Supports

If you were very ill, worried about where your income would come from, and were scared of losing your housing, land or shelter...What is it that you would be most afraid of?...What would you hope your family and close friends would care for you physically or financially?...What could your neighbours do to support you?

Based on your experience, what are the physical and financial impacts on people and communities living infected and affected by HIV and AIDS? (This applies not only to people who are HIV+, but also to their family, co-workers, neighbours and others who are also affected.) The group will focus on developing a list of 10 or more specific concerns.

Synopsis of concerns

Housing and infrastructure

- Stable and secure housing
- Access to health centres and service providers

Basic Needs

- Access to clothing and counselling
- Medication
- Food, community kitchens and social contact
- Caregivers in late stages

Education

- Social awareness



Counselling and specific support

- Support for families of a person living with HIV/AIDS
- Positive support to address fear and discrimination stigma
- Financial support to prepare for later stages
- Spiritual support, follow up counselling after diagnoses

Task 2: Mainstreaming Housing Responses to HIV and AIDS

Imagine you are a resident/member of a social housing institution, housing co-operative or other housing community organization for this exercise. Based on your experience and that of your organization, develop a list of responses to physical and financial needs related to HIV and AIDS. These are for social housing institutions, co-operatives and other groups mainstreaming housing responses.

Synopsis of responses

Education

- Open forums for people who work with HIV/AIDS as well as the general public (discussions about condoms)
- HIV/AIDS to be included in programs or teachings in areas where HIV/AIDS is highly prevalent
- HIV/AIDS training and discussion starting at the grassroots level



Financial

- People to take insurance (pre HIV)
- Developers to give percentage of units to People living with HIV and AIDS
- Housing subsidies or floating subsidies not attached to rental unit

Operations

- Peer support
- Links to other organizations with HIV/AIDS expertise
- Recreational activities to be implemented
- Follow up counselling

Policy

- Housing policy to include HIV/AIDS issues, written policies, make sure HIV/AIDS is a disability to be included in housing co-op policies
- De-centralised housing
- Overall challenges for children and families needs to be addressed, specifically housing for orphans
- Transitional housing

GROUP 3: SUPPORT AND RESPONSES FROM HOUSING ORGANIZATION

Task 1: Support from housing organization

If you were very ill, worried about where your income would come from, and were scared of losing your housing, land or shelter...what support would you hope for from health care, social or community service providers?...What kind of support from your housing organisation would most help to keep you in place? Who else might you call on to support you with the challenges you are facing?

Based on your experience, what are the necessary external support services for people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS that your social housing institution/housing co-operative or housing/community would get? The group will focus on developing a list of 10 or more specific needed services.

Synopsis of needed services

Education and Information

- Information on HIV/AIDS to influence decisions (different sources such as the internet)

Services

- Income support to help with diminished ability to earn an income and support in the form of income generating activities
- Medical support, ARV's, treatment for related illnesses, life extending help
- Access to shelter, security of tenure and rental support
- Support for end of life-help with drawing up a will, planning for ceremonies, planning for children's future and shelter and care
- Policy support. What role are leaders taking, is there a supportive policy environment, what is tax being used for?
- Food



Counselling and psycho-emotional support

- Extended family, a very valuable support in some societies. This would be encouraged in places where this kind of support has broken down. Groups of all kinds can provide this kind of support (Peers and other groupings for example)
- Someone to talk to confidentially- to build confidence to be tested or to confide/to provide advise
- Spiritual support and counselling. It is important that people don't lose hope, faith based organizations can also provide practical support

Task 2: Principles and Partnerships for a Social/Co-operative Housing Approach to HIV/AIDS.

Imagine you are a resident/member of a social housing institution, housing co-operative or other housing community organization for this exercise. Based on your experience and that of your organization, identify some of the pro-active arrangements successful partnerships and interventions that a housing/community organization can make to secure external support to respond to needs related to HIV and Aids. In the absence of these, what are other options?

These might consider that housing organisations cannot possibly take responsibility for addressing all the development issues emerging from the impacts of HIV and AIDS on their workplaces and on their residents/members. However, many housing organisations also feel the responsibility to ensure that the implications of these issues are reflected in the manner in they develop and/or manage the housing processes.

Synopsis of responses

Policy

- Housing organisations should be mainstreaming responses into day to day business of housing groups, work place policies etc...
- Lobby as a group for policy change and access to secure shelter
- Strategies to support AIDS orphans- lobby for inheritance policy which is supportive
- Lobby for transparency and accountability in any government or community program
- Housing organisations should be looking at housing more holistically than just shelter

Networking

- Build networks to lobby for support and to link with other organisations which can provide other support services
- Raise support from private sector and aid organisations to create opportunities for micro enterprises

Programs

- 'Gleaning' Program, sharing extra food with people in the group who don't have enough
- Urban agriculture, support for food production, encouragement, expertise and space
- Micro-credit to set up alternative income sources for infected and affected
- Diversify savings and credit products e.g. to help with burial expenses, to help with income generation

Engaging constituencies

- Involve youth in programs as they give energy and it's a good training opportunity
- Keep up programs which involve everyone. There is a tendency for people affected to retreat in isolation, so need to create opportunities to keep them involved in the community
- Group activities, provide support for stressed caregivers to give them a break

Education and Awareness

- Encourage positive habits and increase available information, reduce drinking, improve nutrition etc...
- Education and training programs, using network of members of housing groups and existing training programs



- Opportunity to use existing housing group to create collective income generating activities

CONCLUSION

One of the small groups stressed the need for psycho-social support for people affected by HIV and AIDS. In a small way, the networking session contributed to building an “extended family” of spiritual support for people and organizations struggling to respond to the impact of the AIDS pandemic on our communities. Participants also expressed their desire to work with UN Habitat both to acknowledge the direct link between HIV/AIDS and housing, and to find suitable and effective responses.



Annex 1
Excerpt: World Urban Forum Bulletin, Friday June 23, 2006
From IISD Reporting Services

HOUSING AND HIV/AIDS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES:

After a welcoming prayer to guide participants, Moderator Barry Pinsky, Executive Director, [Rooftops Canada](#), opened this networking event by noting the session's goal of better understanding the impact of HIV/AIDS on housing and vice versa. He noted the event's format was based on training methods to help community groups think about HIV/AIDS implications and would thus "train trainers."

Ken Clement, Executive Director, [Healing Our Spirit](#), began with a moment of silence to remember those who have died from HIV/AIDS. He explained how fragmentation of communities, lack of resources and prioritization, alarming infection rates and other issues affect Canada's aboriginal people.

Barbara Kohlo, Executive Director, Housing People of Zimbabwe, said it was difficult for housing cooperatives to manage the impact of HIV/AIDS and explained the importance of raising awareness, taking a holistic approach, and creating networks to help cooperatives face tough issues like inheritance and inability to provide home-based HIV/AIDS healthcare to the homeless.

Participants broke into small groups and reported back on the impacts of HIV/AIDS on their organizations and potential responses. On addressing emotional and financial impacts, participants recommended: developing a strategy to deal with basic needs at all levels of government; ensuring cultural and spiritual support; establishing property rights; providing blended housing; and educating the public about HIV/AIDS.

On addressing physical needs, participants recommended providing: stable and secure housing; food and social networks; and counseling for patients and caregivers. Delegates also recommended developing housing policy that includes HIV/AIDS and establishing links to organizations with appropriate expertise. They noted the importance of spiritual and extended family support and reducing isolation, and said [UN-HABITAT](#) should do more to acknowledge the direct link between HIV/AIDS and housing.