

# Leadership in action



A case study  
of the "Observatoire",  
a group of NGOs  
in Senegal



Report prepared for the International  
HIV/AIDS Alliance  
Ralf Jürgens and Dr Fatim Louise Dia

Alliance internationale  
contre le VIH/SIDA

**Alliance**

soutenant l'action des communautés contre le Sida dans les pays en voie de développement



## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	3
NEED AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE-STUDY .....	5
BACKGROUND .....	7
<i>The epidemic in Senegal: The so-called “Senegalese success story”</i> .....	7
NEW CHALLENGE .....	8
THE OBSERVATOIRE .....	9
Origins .....	9
Founding members .....	9
Aims .....	10
Common characteristics and philosophy .....	10
Structure and approach .....	11
Activities .....	11
Funding .....	13
SUCCESSES .....	14
CHALLENGES .....	17
LESSONS LEARNED .....	21

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>ACI</b>	Africa Consultants International
<b>Alliance</b>	The International HIV/AIDS Alliance
<b>ANCS</b>	Alliance Nationale Contre le Sida (The Senegalese National HIV/AIDS Alliance)
<b>CBO</b>	Community-Based Organisation
<b>CCM</b>	Country Coordinating Mechanism
<b>CNLS</b>	Conseil National de Lutte contre le Sida (National AIDS Council)
<b>ENDA</b>	Environnement et Développement du Tiers-Monde (Environmental Development Action in the Third World)
<b>Global Fund</b>	Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria
<b>ICASO</b>	International Council of AIDS Service Organisations
<b>MAP</b>	Multi-Country HIV/AIDS Programme for Africa
<b>MSM</b>	Men who have sex with men
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>Observatoire</b>	Observatoire de la réponse au VIH/sida au Sénégal Watchdog of the response to HIV/AIDS in Senegal
<b>PEPFAR</b>	President’s Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief
<b>PLHA</b>	People Living with HIV/AIDS
<b>PR</b>	Principle Recipient
<b>UNAIDS</b>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

# A CASE STUDY OF THE “OBSERVATOIRE”, A GROUP OF NGOS IN SENEGAL

## INTRODUCTION

Together with Thailand and Uganda, Senegal has received wide attention and praise as one of the countries in the developing world that has been most successful in fighting HIV/AIDS. Indeed, there have been several positive steps in the response to HIV/AIDS in Senegal, including early political engagement, a strong civil society response, one of the earliest national initiatives for access to anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment, and significant new funds from the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (Global Fund) and the World Bank's Multi-Country HIV/AIDS Programme for Africa (MAP), added to an already existing strong national programmatic and financial commitment.

Nevertheless, in the recent past, Senegal experienced significant problems as it scaled up its response to HIV/AIDS. There was a widespread sense that

- the scale up was taking place without a clear strategy and vision
- vulnerable populations and particularly orphans and vulnerable children were not being targeted with interventions
- respect for the rights and dignity of people living with HIV/AIDS continued to be missing
- access to HIV testing and to ARV treatment remained too limited.

In addition, civil society felt that it had been pushed to the side and that it had no real impact on government decision making.

In April 2005, the Board of the Global Fund gave Senegal three months to address its issues or face the withdrawal of its HIV/AIDS grant. Similarly, the World Bank, after an evaluation, also asked Senegal to make changes to how programmes were implemented and monies disbursed.

This case study describes how during these difficult times a group of five NGOs came together and decided that it had a responsibility to not only denounce the problems that Senegal was facing in its response to HIV/AIDS, but also provide constructive solutions to overcoming these problems and play an active role in implementing the necessary changes. The NGOs formed an informal network, the Observatoire de la reponse au VIH/sida au Sénégal (Watchdog of the response to HIV/AIDS in Senegal), which has made a significant contribution to Senegal's response to HIV/AIDS over the last two years, playing a central role in the efforts made to improve the response.

The case study outlines the background in Senegal, explains how the Observatoire was formed, what its main activities have been, what challenges it has faced, what successes it has achieved, and what lessons can be learned from its experience.

Some of the successes the Observatoire and its members have achieved include:

- Today, civil society is more, and more meaningfully, involved in all key aspects of Senegal's response to HIV/AIDS.
- Many of the problems in Senegal's response to HIV/AIDS noted by the Observatoire are being addressed. In particular, the needs of vulnerable populations are increasingly being met, orphans and vulnerable children are receiving more attention, the quality and accessibility of services for people living with HIV/AIDS is improving, and there is better access to HIV testing and treatments.



- An NGO has become Principal Recipient of the Global Fund, taking responsibility for disbursing international resources to other NGOs.

Some of the challenges the Observatoire currently faces include:

- expanding its membership, in particular to include people living with HIV/AIDS and representatives of vulnerable communities;
- formalising its structure without losing its flexibility and reducing the quality of its interventions;
- ensuring its longer-term sustainability and continuing to critically examine all aspects of the response to HIV/AIDS in Senegal and to regularly formulate constructive proposals and recommendations to improve the response (while recognising that the Observatoire receives no funding and all those involved in it are very busy with the work of their own organisations);
- improving communications so that all those involved in the response to HIV/AIDS in Senegal and the general public are regularly kept informed of what the Observatoire does.

Some of the main **lessons learned** include:

- Strong civil society engagement with government can improve the response to HIV/AIDS.
- Civil society organisations can more effectively influence government policy if they build coalitions and work together.
- Civil society should be as critical of its own actions as it is of government action.
- NGOs can help overcome barriers to disbursing international HIV/AIDS funding to civil society by acting as “intermediaries.”

# A CASE STUDY OF THE “OBSERVATOIRE”, A GROUP OF NGOS IN SENEGAL

## NEED AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE-STUDY

As the HIV/AIDS pandemic escalates, there is international agreement that responses to HIV/AIDS must be scaled up and that civil society has a vital role to play. Nevertheless, governments often do not involve civil society enough in their response to HIV/AIDS, seeing civil society organisations merely as implementers of projects and programmes, rather than as experts that have an essential role to play in assisting governments plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate all aspects of the response to HIV/AIDS. When civil society is involved, it is often done to fulfill donor requirements or the commitments made under international declarations, rather than because governments understand the benefits of involving civil society, and respect the role civil society must play in order to be most effective.

**Civil society’s “full involvement and participation in the design, planning implementation and evaluation of programmes is crucial to the development of effective responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.” (UNGASS Declaration, Para 33).**

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the amount of funding available for HIV/AIDS, largely due to the World Bank’s MAP, the US government’s President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund. In addition to significantly greater resources to civil society, this has brought greater formal acknowledgement of the sector’s role. For example, MAP insists that 50% of its resources target civil society, and the Global Fund requires that its Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs) be multi-sectoral, with democratically elected representatives of civil society and people living with HIV/AIDS.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, participation in national HIV/AIDS responses has been a varied experience for civil society, as experience has shown that civil society representatives are often not treated as full partners and some countries lack the willingness to increase their engagement.<sup>2</sup>

As countries are scaling up their response to HIV/AIDS, it will be essential to increase the meaningful involvement of civil society organisations. Efforts are needed to strengthen them so that they can scale up their own programmes. This aspect of the challenge of expanding the impact of NGO’s HIV/AIDS efforts has been addressed elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> But civil society organisations need to be strengthened also so that they can influence policy and be fully and meaningfully involved in all key aspects of planning and managing national responses to HIV/AIDS.

<sup>1</sup> For more details, see: International HIV/AIDS Alliance and International Council of AIDS Service Organisations (2005). *Discussion paper: Civil Society and the ‘Three Ones’*. Available via <http://www.aidsalliance.org/sw20857.asp>.

<sup>2</sup> UNAIDS. *The ‘Three Ones’: Driving Concerted Action on AIDS at Country Level*; ICASO (June 2004). *NGO Perspectives on the Global Fund*. Available via <http://www.icaso.org>.

<sup>3</sup> International HIV/AIDS Alliance (2001). *Expanding community action on HIV/AIDS – NGO/CBO strategies for scaling up*. Available via <http://www.aidsalliance.org/sw8366.asp>; International HIV/AIDS Alliance (2001). *A Question of Scale? The challenge of expanding the impact of non-governmental organisations’ HIV/AIDS efforts in developing countries*. Available via <http://www.aidsalliance.org/sw7442.asp>.



<sup>4</sup>Evaluations by the World Bank (*The Effectiveness of the World Bank HIV/AIDS Assistance: Preliminary Findings from an Independent Evaluation*, OED Presentations at the XV International AIDS Conference, Bangkok, 2004) and case studies of the Global Fund (*CCM Case Studies from 20 Countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe*, Global Fund Secretariat, 2004) in over 20 countries have confirmed that there are significant barriers to disbursing. In particular, the studies have identified three main challenges to scaling up civil society action: low rates of disbursement; weak NGO/CBO capacity; and lack of meaningful participation and representation of civil society in national planning and decision-making. Other studies have highlighted that these issues are particularly problematic for marginalised groups, including PLHAs, which are seeking funding via governments (K Daly (2004). *Meeting the Challenges of Providing Financial and Technical Support to NGOs and CBOs in the Context of Increased Funding*, International HIV/AIDS Alliance, Oral Presentation for XV International AIDS Conference, Bangkok).

In addition, it will be important to overcome barriers to disbursing international HIV/AIDS funding to civil society.<sup>4</sup> Experience has shown that the recipients of international funding often lack the capacity and infrastructure to effectively disburse funds to NGOs/CBOs. An apparent solution to this situation, recently adopted in Senegal, is for NGOs to themselves act as 'intermediaries'. While increasing, this option remains relatively rare and has seldom been analysed since the creation of the Global Fund.

***What is civil society?***  
Broadly speaking, the term civil society can refer to any non-governmental individuals, groups or sectors involved in responses to HIV/AIDS. In this paper, the term is used to particularly refer to people living with HIV/AIDS and their groups and networks, AIDS service organisations, community based organisations, nongovernmental organisations and faith based organisations.

Given the need to foster strong civil society engagement with governments and to overcome bottlenecks in the disbursement of funds, the Alliance commissioned this case study to document how the Observatoire in Senegal has impacted Senegal's response to HIV/AIDS, the successes it has had (including its impact on the decision to appoint an NGO as Principal Recipient of the Global Fund), the challenges it has faced, and the lessons that can be learnt from its experience. In the context of growing global interest in how civil society can be strengthened so that it can play a larger role in scale up efforts, it is anticipated that this case study will be used to inspire civil society organisations in other countries to claim what is due to them – more meaningful involvement. At the same time, the case study will be used to influence policy makers globally by the Alliance secretariat, and nationally by other Linking Organisations and intermediary/NGO support organisations.

The members of the Observatoire who participated in the study are keen to share their experience, hoping that it will help civil society in other countries – as well as governments and funders – in their efforts to scale up the response to HIV/AIDS.

The case study was carried out in March 2006 by an independent consultant, based in Canada, who worked in close collaboration with one of the founding members of the Observatoire. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants from the Observatoire, NGOs/CBOs (including groups of PLHA, the national umbrella organization of AIDS-service organisations, Family Health International, organizations of men having sex with men (MSM) and of people who use drugs, etc), bilateral and multilateral organizations (including WHO, UNDP, USAID, and the Coopération Française), researchers, and journalists. Despite numerous attempts, the consultant was not able to meet with representatives of the Conseil National de Lutte contre le Sida (CNLS).

The case study:

- briefly describes the background and context in Senegal;
- explains how the Observatoire was set up, who is involved in it, how it is structured and what are its aims and activities;
- identifies the successes the Observatoire has had, as well as the challenges it has faced; and
- identifies lessons learned.

# A CASE STUDY OF THE “OBSERVATOIRE”, A GROUP OF NGOS IN SENEGAL

## BACKGROUND

### *The epidemic in Senegal: The so-called “Senegalese success story”*

Senegal is a politically stable, predominantly Muslim country, with one of the lowest rates of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. According to UNAIDS, there were an estimated 41,000 people living with HIV/AIDS (0.8% of adults) in Senegal in 2003.<sup>5</sup>

The epidemic has disproportionately affected specific segments of the population, particularly those involved in sex work or migrant labour. In Dakar, less than 1% of sex workers were affected in 1986, but this figure had increased to 14% by 2002 – rising to 30% in certain regions outside of Dakar during the same period. By 2002, 4% of male sexually transmitted infection clinic patients in Dakar had tested positive for HIV.

Together with Thailand and Uganda, Senegal has received wide attention and praise as one of the countries in the developing world that has been most successful in fighting HIV/AIDS.<sup>6</sup> Thailand and Uganda undertook prevention efforts that have succeeded in reducing already rampant rates of HIV infection. In contrast, Senegal is one of the few countries in the developing world that intervened early to stop HIV ever taking off in the general population. It is difficult to say with scientific confidence that the low rates of HIV in Senegal are definitely the consequence of the interventions taken in the country. However, a review by UNAIDS of Senegal’s response to HIV/AIDS identified three major factors directly determining exposure to HIV infection and resulting in the low levels recorded in Senegal. First, sexual activity begins relatively late and extramarital sex is relatively limited. Secondly, condom use during extramarital sex, and especially during commercial sex, is high. Thirdly, STI control programmes are quite effective.<sup>7</sup> According to the review, the second and third of these factors are certainly linked to the country’s HIV/AIDS prevention efforts. Late first sex and limited extramarital sex are probably determined more by social and religious values than by HIV/AIDS prevention messages, but is it plausible to imagine that these values are being reinforced and maintained by an HIV/AIDS prevention programme in which religious, community and political leaders are all actively engaged. The review concluded that “it appears that Senegal’s early and comprehensive prevention efforts have made a major contribution to keeping HIV infection rates low.” It attributes the fact that Senegal was able to mount a swift response, on a massive scale, to its political leadership and the country’s social organization:

Political leadership laid the groundwork for a productive dialogue with religious and other community leaders. A long and active tradition of community participation in health and development was mobilized around AIDS prevention activities. Maximum use was made of existing structures to provide information and services to communities at high risk, especially sex workers. A pragmatic approach to public health – emphasizing prevention and the provision of essential services – provided the foundation for strengthened efforts at STD control and the widespread promotion of condoms.<sup>8</sup>

Another, more recent review of Senegal’s response to HIV/AIDS also concludes that the presence of certain socio-cultural factors – such as the generalization of male circumcision and the important social control of sexuality – are not the only explanation for the low prevalence of HIV in Senegal.<sup>9</sup> The review highlights the quality of the response to the epidemic developed by public authorities and the civil society and the existence of dense and active networks of youths, women, and religious leader groups supporting social mobilization.

<sup>5</sup> Senegal – Epidemiological Fact Sheets on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (2004 Update). Geneva: UNAIDS, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Elisabeth Pisani. Acting early to prevent AIDS: The case of Senegal. Geneva: UNAIDS, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, at 23.

<sup>8</sup> Id.

<sup>9</sup> Delphine Fanget, Ndèye Sokhna Mboup, Daouda Diouf. A case study on HIV/AIDS in Senegal. Lead International Session – Cohort 11. Available at [fa.lead.org/its\\_pdf/Ddoc\\_its\\_wb.pdf](http://fa.lead.org/its_pdf/Ddoc_its_wb.pdf).



<sup>10</sup> Cornu C, Mbodj S, Kanouté S. The Care and Support Cellule : An Integrated and Decentralised Approach to Care and Support for People Living with HIV/AIDS in Senegal. International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2003, at 10.  
<sup>11</sup> Fanget, Mboup, Diouf, supra, note 9.

In 1998, Senegal became one of the first African countries to develop and implement a programme for the distribution of ARVs, the Senegalese initiative for access to ARV (ISAARV).<sup>10</sup> This was followed up, in late 2003 and 2004 respectively, by announcements that ARVs and HIV testing would be provided free of charge.

Since 2002, significant new funds from the Global Fund and the World Bank's MAP became available, allowing Senegal to vastly scale up its HIV/AIDS activities.

## NEW CHALLENGES

The so-called "Senegalese success story" has received a lot of attention. However, in recent years serious concerns have been raised about Senegal's response. In particular, at a press conference in January 2005, members of the Observatoire suggested that a series of strategic errors had been made since increased funding had become available, that HIV/AIDS funds were being disbursed without any concrete plans, and that the opportunities created by the increased funds were not being taken advantage of. Many new programmes and projects were being funded, but there were doubts about their quality. The Observatoire highlighted a number of weaknesses in the prevention and care policies and actions, and made recommendations about how to bring the response back on track.<sup>11</sup>

In April 2005, the Board of the Global Fund gave Senegal three months to address a number of problems in the administration and implementation of its HIV/AIDS grant or face the withdrawal of the grant. At the same time, a review and evaluation undertaken by the World Bank also identified several problems.

Since then, thanks at least in part to the efforts of the Observatoire, Senegal has embarked on a review of its strategies and mechanisms to fight HIV/AIDS, and has started making significant changes that could ensure that, despite the recent challenges and problems, its response to HIV/AIDS will remain a success story.

**At least in part, the problems that Senegal was facing were due to the new funders, who seem to be more interested in numbers than in quality. You have to show numbers, not demonstrate quality. In addition, they sometimes seem to want to impose their own vision and principles, without really knowing the country and its needs.**  
– Key informant, March 2006

# A CASE STUDY OF THE “OBSERVATOIRE”, A GROUP OF NGOs IN SENEGAL

## THE OBSERVATOIRE

### Origins

In June 2003, during a UNDP seminar on transformational leadership, a number of NGO representatives spontaneously got together and talked about what they perceived as serious problems with how Senegal's response to HIV/AIDS was evolving. They soon realized that they shared the same frustrations, views, and fears. In particular, they felt that new Global Fund and MAP funds were being used without a coherent strategy, leading to duplication of efforts while other important areas were receiving little if any attention; and that decisions were being taken without consultation with civil society.

Ultimately, the Observatoire will have allowed Senegal to continue being a success story – because it has allowed us to deal with existing problems rather than covering them up, and to make changes that are making our response more effective. Recognizing that our response is not perfect is a component of a good response.  
– Key informant, March 2006

<sup>12</sup> However, discontent with the lack of involvement of civil society in the implementation of the Global Fund grant had already been voiced earlier, at a meeting that took place in the offices of the ANCS only a few days after the Global Fund grant was first discussed at another meeting organised by the Secrétariat Exécutif National of the CNLS.

It took a while before the people involved in the meeting came together again, decided to ask a few other people to join their deliberations, and eventually decided to continue meeting and to work together and propose solutions to the problems they had identified. The idea to create what later became known as the Observatoire, a national watchdog, was born during those meetings.<sup>12</sup>

We decided we needed to shake things up.  
– Key informant, March 2006

### Founding members

The Observatoire is comprised of five major NGOs:

- **ACI** (Africa Consultants International) is an NGO created in 1984 specializing in communication and training in Africa. Through its Health Department, ACI has focused its efforts since the early 1990s on the reinforcement of NGOs, CBOs, communicators and opinion leaders, as well as on networking, the promotion of solidarity and the exchange of information, particularly in the area of HIV/AIDS.

The Observatoire intervened when it looked like the public sector had lost its enthusiasm and HIV/AIDS was no longer made a priority. There were more funds, but less vision and commitment.  
– Key informant, March 2006

- **ANCS** (Alliance Nationale Contre le Sida, the Senegalese National HIV/AIDS Alliance) supports and strengthens community action involved or wanting to be involved in HIV/AIDS work in Senegal. Since the onset of its activities in 1995, it has provided assistance to hundreds of organisations, with or without experience of HIV/AIDS, in developing innovative STI/AIDS prevention programmes and care and support programmes for PLHA. ANCS receives technical and financial support from the International HIV/AIDS Alliance and is the Linking Organisation for Alliance projects in Senegal. Most recently, it has become a Principal Recipient of the Global Fund



- **Enda** (Environnement et Développement du Tiers-Monde, Environmental Development Action in the Third World) is an international organization that has worked for over twenty years on environmental and development projects. The goals of ENDA are to enable underprivileged rural and urban groups to evaluate their needs and natural resources, and utilize these resources better; support research into alternative paths of development; and encourage professionals and academics to work in these fields. The ENDA-Santé (health) programme is concerned with information and education about HIV/AIDS, medical and social assistance to PLHA, prevention of HIV, particularly among vulnerable populations, and advocacy.
- **SIDA Service** (AIDS Services), founded in 1992, is a Catholic health care organization specializing in HIV/AIDS prevention and care. Its activities include pre- and post-test counselling; voluntary, anonymous and free HIV testing; care of PLHA; home or hospital visits; care of infected and affected children; income generating projects; development of local centres and awareness raising in schools, prisons and among other NGOs on STI /AIDS.
- **Synergie pour l'Enfance** (Synergy for childhood) was founded in 1996 to advocate for all aspects of the response to HIV/AIDS among orphans and children vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, including prevention of mother-to-child transmission, holistic care for orphans and vulnerable children, and services for children in rural areas. It is actively involved in promoting access to HIV testing among young people and in providing care and support to PLHA.

## Aims

The Observatoire aims to:

- act as a national watchdog by critically examining the response to HIV/AIDS in Senegal; and
- formulate constructive proposals and recommendations to improve the response.

It [the Observatoire] is there so that people fight for the best possible response to HIV/AIDS, respecting justice and other values.  
– Key informant, March 2006

## Common characteristics and philosophy

While they have different aims and provide different services, these NGOs share a number of common features: they have been in existence for 10 years or longer, are fairly large and well-established, have made important contributions to Senegal's response to HIV/AIDS, have gained a lot of experience and are well-respected for their work at the community, national, and international levels. They are also relatively independent of government funding. In addition, they share an activist philosophy and a vision of NGOs as actors that must remain independent of government and, if necessary, be critical of government action. They are driven by a commitment to making a difference and feel that they have a responsibility to contribute to all aspects of the response to HIV/AIDS and can be held accountable if they

We have a right and a responsibility to act. What we cannot afford to do is close our eyes. We must be at the center of the action. In order to do that, we need to be well informed and close to those affected by the epidemic.  
– Key informant, March 2006

# A CASE STUDY OF THE “OBSERVATOIRE”, A GROUP OF NGOS IN SENEGAL

don't take action to improve the response. Finally, they feel that they have to be as critical of their own action and that of other civil society organisations as they are of government action.

<sup>13</sup> ACI, ANCS, ENDA, SIDA Service, Synergie pour l'Enfance. *Observatoire de la reponse au VIH/sida au Sénégal. Document de position.* March 2004.

## Structure and approach

The Observatoire has remained an informal, ad-hoc group and prefers to highlight the importance of what it does, rather than how it organizes itself. Most communication takes place via e-mail or phone and meetings are called as the need arises. Decisions are made by consensus and documented.

Meetings are used to exchange information, but also to obtain feedback and learn from each other and to reflect together on the most difficult and pressing issues raised by HIV/AIDS. Members benefit from their different and complementary perspectives, and see the Observatoire as a dynamic group that facilitates individual and collective questioning and as a space for creative thinking and finding of solutions.

## Activities

The Observatoire is best known for a press conference it organised in January 2005 and the well-researched position paper it released to the public that day, highlighting the group's collective reflections and recommendations on how to improve Senegal's response to HIV/AIDS.<sup>13</sup> During the press conference, the Observatoire warned that Senegal could see a rise in infection rates if Senegal's response to HIV/AIDS was not reviewed and adjusted to better respond to current needs. In particular, it noted that:

**Senegal isn't safe from an explosion of the epidemic ... We need to quickly set up programmes targeted at orphans, sex workers and vulnerable groups.**  
– Key informant, March 2006

- The 2003 sentinel survey of pregnant women, released in December 2004, showed that the epidemic had stabilised. However, infection rates were 2% or higher in eight of Senegal's 12 regions, and in some regions, rates of infection have increased significantly. For example, 2.6% of pregnant women in the market city of Tambacounda were recorded to be living with HIV, compared to only 0.8% a year earlier.
- Senegal was failing to provide programmes for orphans and vulnerable children and for vulnerable populations, in particular non-registered sex workers and men who have sex with men.
- Access to HIV testing and to ARVs remained limited.
- PLHA continued to be stigmatized and discriminated in all sectors of society, particularly at the workplace and in health services, but also in their families. Many of their needs remained neglected.

**It looked like nobody was really interested in addressing the problems of orphans, and that they were receiving some attention only because the funders required it. We lost a lot of time pretending that Senegal does not have an orphan problem.**  
– Key informant, March 2006



<sup>13</sup> ACI, ANCS, ENDA, SIDA Service et Synergie pour l'Enfance, *Observatoire de la réponse au VIH/sida au Sénégal* – Document de position, mars 2004.

It further noted that:

- The National AIDS Council (CNLS: Conseil National de Lutte Contre le Sida) did not have guiding principles or an effective framework for dialogue between government, civil society and other sectors.
- There were no clear, transparent mechanisms for using and managing funding from the Global Fund and the World Bank.
- The community sector was in danger of becoming a subsidiary of government and losing its freedom.
- Community-level organisations were under-represented at the Global Fund's CCM level and on the regional and departmental committees.
- Initiatives remained isolated and needed greater coordination.

It stated there was a need for:

- clear definitions of the roles, missions and functions of all the institutional structures in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Senegal;
- guiding principles for a multi-sectoral response to HIV/AIDS in Senegal;
- identification of programme priorities in the short and medium term.

It concluded that, in the face of increased availability of funds allowing Senegal to vastly scale up its HIV/AIDS activities, those involved in the response to HIV/AIDS “do not have the right to make mistakes”<sup>14</sup> and must act quickly to optimize the response.

The press conference had the effect of a bomb. All major newspapers reported on it, many on the first page. But rather than reporting on the substance of the Observatoire's message, most papers interpreted it as a personal attack on Dr Ndoye, the Head of the CNLS, and suggested he may be guilty of mismanagement. A very difficult time followed, during which Dr Ndoye responded publicly by denouncing the Observatoire's findings and denying that it had any legitimacy, since it was not a proper, incorporated organisation. A few civil society organisations that were close to the CNLS also attacked the Observatoire and its analysis, and claimed that the members of the Observatoire were pursuing their own interests and wanted to have “a bigger piece of the funding cake”, rather than acting for the common good. Some expressed a fear that the Observatoire was making shortcomings in Senegal's response to HIV/AIDS apparent to the world, and that this would undermine Senegal's reputation and the prospects for future funding. But after a while, and with the help of outside observers and a couple of meetings facilitated by mediators, the relationship between the Observatoire and Dr. Ndoye improved.

What changed immediately, however, was the way in which civil society was involved in the response to HIV/AIDS. The proposals made by the Observatoire were taken seriously, and civil society was listened to and taken more seriously than before.

The press conference was certainly the defining moment in the history of the Observatoire, but most of the work and most of the Observatoire's activities happened before and after the conference. In fact, the Observatoire had waited a long time and tried to influence policy makers using other, less confrontational mechanisms. before finally calling

**We had a responsibility to raise these issues. Had we not done it, people would later have asked: where was civil society and what was it doing when Senegal was facing these problems?**  
– Key informant, March 2006

# A CASE STUDY OF THE “OBSERVATOIRE”, A GROUP OF NGOS IN SENEGAL

the press conference. Among the long list of activities, the following are most noteworthy:

<sup>14</sup> Ibid (“ils n’ont pas le droit à l’erreur”).

- The writing, over many months and involving many drafts, of the position paper that highlights the group’s collective reflections and recommendations on how to improve Senegal’s response to HIV/AIDS. Without this well-researched and persuasive paper the Observatoire could not have had the impact it has had. In many ways, it encapsulates the Observatoire’s philosophy and approach, based on a thorough analysis of the facts, and focusing on proposing solutions rather than simply denouncing problems.
- A meeting in April 2004 with Dr Ndoye, at which members of the Observatoire shared their concerns with, and presented their proposed solutions to, the head of the CNLS, and asked for his feedback. After the meeting, some changes were made to the draft of the position paper to reflect Dr Ndoye’s input.
- After the meeting with Dr Ndoye, the members of the Observatoire met with other individuals and organisations, including USAID, Family Health International, the World Bank, the Coopération Française, and a delegation of the European Union, to obtain additional feedback.
- In late 2004, preparation of a national consultation meeting to reflect further on the strengths and weaknesses of the national response. For a variety of reasons, including lack of funds, but also urgency to move from talk to action after many months of deliberations, this consultation did not take place.
- In early 2005, after the press conference, taking an active role in the negotiations with the Global Fund that succeeded in getting the funds back to Senegal and ultimately led to the appointment of an NGO as Principal Recipient of the civil society component of the grant.
- Since the press conference, active involvement in the processes and mechanisms set up to deal with the problems pointed out by the Observatoire, the Global Fund, and the World Bank MAP (including active participation in all aspects of the development of the national framework for consultation with civil society).

However, while the Observatoire has continued meeting and has contributed to other activities in many ways, it has not made any public statements since the time of the press conference, and some of the key informants interviewed for this case study wondered what the Observatoire was doing today and asked whether it was still active at all.

## **Funding**

The Observatoire has never received any funding, and the members have undertaken all activities as volunteers. Individual members have covered the costs of meetings and communication activities and donated their time or that of

**Our goal was not to attack anybody, but to help and propose solutions.**  
– Key informant, March 2006

colleagues within their organisations. At one point the Observatoire did discuss whether it should apply for funding so that it could enhance its activities, but a decision was taken at the time to not seek funding. Members were afraid that accepting funds could create a conflict of interest or the perception that the Observatoire was pursuing the interests of a particular funder.



<sup>14</sup>Ibid. ("ils n'ont pas le droit à l'erreur").

## SUCSESSES

### *Civil society in Senegal is now fully and meaningfully involved in all key aspects of planning and management of the national response to HIV/AIDS.*

The Observatoire's greatest success is its positive reception from the government. The National AIDS Council has invited the Observatoire to work as a partner to find solutions. Development agencies and partners have also welcomed the initiative. The Observatoire has demonstrated that civil society organisations can be strong and united and successfully claim what is due to them: participating in all aspects of a country's response to HIV/AIDS.

Before the Observatoire went public in January 2005 with its press conference, civil society organisations in Senegal felt that they had been pushed aside and had little voice and influence. Today, all informants interviewed for this case study agreed, things have changed dramatically. Civil society is actively involved in all aspects of the response, and works in closer collaboration with the public sector. After the initial difficulties and misunderstandings, the CNLS invited the Observatoire to work as a partner to find solutions. Development agencies and partners have also welcomed the initiative.

**There has been a complete shift. Today, nothing can be done without them [civil society organisations]. They are key to the response, and are seen as valued partners that have important things to contribute.**  
– Key informant, March 2006

### *Many of the Observatoire's recommendations have been adopted.*

Informants interviewed for this case study generally felt that the analysis provided by the Observatoire in its position paper adequately reflected the problems with Senegal's response to HIV/AIDS, and that the solutions presented were realistic and would allow Senegal to better deal with the epidemic and plan for a strategic, scaled up response. They said that many of the recommendations are now in fact being implemented, and credited this, at least in part, to the Observatoire – although they acknowledged that other factors had also played a role, such as the Global Fund and World Bank MAP evaluations, or prior work by the CNLS and other actors. For example, people said that access to HIV testing and treatment had improved, that programmes for vulnerable populations – in particular, MSM and non-registered, clandestine, sex workers – had been developed and were being implemented, and that a framework and strategy for addressing the problems faced by orphans and vulnerable children had finally been developed.

**Their contribution has been very important, and very positive. They made us understand that we needed a common vision and needed to work together.**  
– Key informant, March 2006

But people also agreed that much remains to be done, and that the Observatoire needs to remain vigilant and continue to assess progress and, if necessary, make recommendations for change. They felt that the Observatoire is uniquely positioned to raise some of the issues that continue to receive little, if any, attention, such as the need for adequate prevention and care and treatment among prisoners, and the urgent need for action to prevent an HIV epidemic among the growing number of people who inject drugs, which ultimately would have serious consequences for the general population as well.

# A CASE STUDY OF THE “OBSERVATOIRE”, A GROUP OF NGOS IN SENEGAL

## *The Observatoire helped Senegal secure the Global Fund grant*

As mentioned earlier, in April 2005 the Board of the Global Fund gave Senegal three months to address a number of problems in the administration and implementation of its HIV/AIDS grant or face the withdrawal of the grant. Many actors intervened to assist Senegal so that the grant would not be withdrawn, and ultimately Senegal was successful. Some say that this would not have been possible unless the members of the Observatoire and, more broadly, Senegalese civil society, had defended the CNLS and advocated so strongly for the grant. One of the roles played by civil society was to facilitate the appointment of an NGO as Principal Recipient for the civil society component of the grant.

There has been a huge change over the last two years in how the issue of the particular vulnerability of MSM is being addressed. In part, this happened independently of the Observatoire, but the Observatoire assisted by emphasizing the importance of programmes for vulnerable populations, and thus reinforcing the change.  
– Key informant, March 2006

## *ANCS: A civil society organization as Principal Recipient for the Global Fund*

As mentioned above, experience has shown that the recipients of international funding often lack the capacity and infrastructure to effectively disburse funds to NGOs/CBOs. The challenges faced by these ‘intermediaries’, which tend to be governmental, include that they often:

- are unable to process many small-scale proposals;
- have little experience of working with civil society;
- lack relationships with groups that are key to the epidemic (such as sex workers and men who have sex with men);
- have difficulty disbursing small amounts to a range of groups with differing capacity; and fail to understand, and/or lack the capacity to provide, the technical support needed to ensure that civil society groups can use funds effectively.

In all, these factors contribute to a scenario whereby people living with and/or affected by HIV/AIDS do not have access to the full range of scaled up prevention, care, support and treatment interventions they need. Faced with these problems, and with the threatened withdrawal of the grant, Senegal decided to divide the Global Fund proposal into two parts, with civil society taking responsibility for work among its sector and the government taking responsibility for work related to treatment. In May 2005, the CCM in Senegal sent a letter to four international agencies (the Alliance, ICASO, AIDSPAN and UNAIDS) asking for their support for the civil society component, particularly in relation to consortium building, proposal development, selecting a Principal Recipient (PR), and integrating the public/civil society components. In response, the agencies rapidly developed a plan of action. However, simultaneously, local civil society in Senegal was able to mobilise itself and respond to the situation. A number of meetings were held between the CNLS and civil society organisations, as well as among civil society organisations. During these meetings, which were facilitated by a neutral third party, selection criteria for a civil society PR were developed, and a list of seven potential candidates drawn up. Of these, two declared that they were interested in taking on the responsibility, and ultimately ANCS – one of the founding members of the Observatoire – was selected by a committee composed of national and international networks and organisations. The organisation receives 3 billion CFA (US\$6 million) over 2.5 years. with a 7.5% fee to cover its related costs.



Key informants interviewed for this case study agreed that the Observatoire played an important part in an NGO becoming the PR for the civil society component. But it was not only thanks to the Observatoire – the Global Fund itself was very interested in this model of civil society taking on greater responsibility, recognizing that if we want community action to be responsive and flexible, funding mechanisms that work are needed. The fact that ANCS is a member of the Observatoire led to renewed allegations that the Observatoire is promoting the interests of its members rather than Senegal's interests. However, the key informants interviewed for this case study all acknowledged that ANCS was the most skilled and experienced organisation to take on this role, was the obvious choice for a civil society PR, and has been selected through an open and transparent process.

It is important to note that the idea at the beginning had been to propose a consortium of organisations as PR, with one organisation taking the lead. Only when it became clear that such a consortium could not be established, a decision was taken to propose one organisation as PR. ANCS then was selected using a collective decision-making process.

# A CASE STUDY OF THE “OBSERVATOIRE”, A GROUP OF NGOS IN SENEGAL

## CHALLENGES

### *Maintaining the momentum*

Nearly all of the key informants expressed a hope that the Observatoire will continue acting as a national watchdog by critically examining the response to HIV/AIDS in Senegal and will continue formulating constructive proposals and recommendations to improve the response. Some suggested that mechanisms need to be put in place to allow the Observatoire to take decisions and act quickly if problems emerge; but also that the Observatoire should try to be proactive and anticipate problems and alert the public to them. They also suggested that the Observatoire issue reports on a regular basis (such as every six months), assessing the progress that has been made, as well as highlighting where the response is failing to have the impact needed, and making proposals for changes. In particular, they said that the Observatoire needs to monitor the treatment scale up effort and participate actively in the development of Senegal's next HIV/AIDS strategy.

**They have been able to bring things into the open that some would have liked to hide, but there is a lot more work for them to do.**  
– Key informant, March 2006

Since all persons involved in the Observatoire are very busy working for their own organisations and have volunteered their time for the Observatoire, it will be difficult for them to fulfill the high expectations they have created.

### *Seeking funding while maintaining independence and avoiding the perception of conflict of interest*

If the Observatoire is to maintain the momentum and undertake regular activities, it may ultimately need to seek some funding to allow it to cover the costs of those activities. However, few sources of funding will be available, since the Observatoire is committed to excluding any source of funding that may lead to a perception that it is pursuing a particular funder's interest.

### *Dealing with “difficult” issues*

The Observatoire has demonstrated that it does not refrain from tackling “unpopular issues” such as the needs of MSM and non-registered sex workers, and has used public health and human rights arguments to advance prevention and care and treatment needs of vulnerable populations. It will be a challenge for the Observatoire, but it is uniquely positioned and has the authority (and one may argue, the responsibility) to also highlight issues that may be even less popular and more difficult to put on the public agenda, such as the needs of prisoners and people who inject drugs.

**It will be difficult to convince government that prisoners need access to condoms, and that drug users need needle exchange programmes. These issues are taboo in the African context, and we would rather deny that sex and drug use happen, including in prisons, than deal with them pragmatically. But if anyone can raise them authoritatively and persuade government and the public that such measures are required for everyone's benefit, it is the Observatoire.**  
– Key informant, March 2006



### ***Working well with government***

After an initial difficult period, the reaction of the CNLS and more broadly, the Senegalese government, towards the work of the Observatoire has been positive. In the longer term, it will be challenging to work constructively with the government, while maintaining the distance needed to be able to critically assess the actions taken. This will require a clear understanding on both sides that while civil society can and should work “in partnership” with government on all aspects of the response, it needs to remain independent and has a responsibility to be critical of government action, if necessary.

### ***Making a success of the civil society Principal Recipient model***

Those interviewed thought that the fact that the ANCS has been appointed PR for the civil society component of the Global Fund grant is a success and should lead to an improved response. But they also felt that it represents a great challenge for ANCS and for civil society in Senegal in general. ANCS representatives interviewed for this case study were fully aware of this, and expressed that they wanted everyone to analyse ANCS’ performance as critically as they had analysed the government’s performance.

All eyes are on us now.  
Some people may even  
want to see us fail.  
– Key informant, March 2006

### ***Increasing the involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS***

A key challenge for the Observatoire will be to increase meaningful involvement of PLHA. The five NGOs comprising the Observatoire all share a strong commitment to involvement of PLHA and have put it in practice in their respective organizations and worked closely with PLHA. But the Observatoire itself has not included a group of PLHA or individual PLHA. There are various reasons for this. When the Observatoire came out publicly criticising the government’s response to HIV/AIDS, it was taking a big risk. Members felt that their own, large organizations, all of which were relatively independent of government funding could afford to take such a risk, but that the new and still relatively weak organizations of PLHA would be too vulnerable. In addition, one of the groups of PLHA was very close to the PNLs and key informants interviewed for this case study felt that it would not have been possible to include it at the time of the release of the Observatoire’s position paper. People also felt that the Observatoire has defended the rights of PLHA and consistently advocated for them and represented their interests. Nevertheless, people (including the members of the Observatoire) generally agreed that things had changed since the release of the position paper and that it is now high time for greater involvement of PLHA within the Observatoire. They further agreed that, while involvement of PLHA is important, creating the conditions for their meaningful involvement is even more important. This means a longer-term commitment to providing support to and increasing the capacity of independent organisations of PLHA.

### ***Institutionalising the Observatoire and expanding its membership***

Another challenge is to formalize the structure of the Observatoire and expand its membership. Initially, the fact that the Observatoire was informal and met on an ad hoc basis and operated with great flexibility was an asset and a determinant of its success. Participants agreed that it was not the structure that was important, but the message that the Observatoire wanted to convey. Instead of worrying about formalities and spending time on developing a structure, participants focused on how the Observatoire could best influence Senegal’s response to HIV/AIDS. Its legitimacy derived from the soundness of its analysis and the fact that it was composed of organizations with a long-standing and widely acknowledged expertise in HIV/AIDS.

# A CASE STUDY OF THE “OBSERVATOIRE”, A GROUP OF NGOS IN SENEGAL

However, those who have felt attacked or threatened by the Observatoire have used the fact that it is not a formal organization to deny the Observatoire's legitimacy. A small number of people have also attacked the Observatoire based on the fact that it is exclusively composed of representatives of large NGOs, and have claimed that they act in their own interest and take an “elitist and intellectual approach”.

Many of the key informants interviewed for this case study suggested that it is time to register the Observatoire as a non-for-profit organisation. People suggested that clear membership criteria (including the values and principles of the Observatoire) be developed, and that a small number of other organisations and individuals be asked to join and add to the pool of knowledge and expertise already represented within the Observatoire. They suggested that it would be most important to ensure participation of PLHA, but that some other NGOs that were hesitant to participate at the outset because they were financially dependent on the government and concerned that the Observatoire would be overly critical of it would now also be ready to participate. In particular, participation of organisations representing vulnerable populations was seen as important, but also participation of human rights organizations and women's rights organizations. A few suggested that not only other NGOs, but also individuals with a particular expertise, such as lawyers and physicians could be asked to join. Finally, some suggested that representation from organisations outside Dakar, from at least some of Senegal's 11 regions, will be important, so that the problems facing rural populations will be adequately addressed by the Observatoire.

At the same time, informants agreed that it would be a mistake to create a large organisation, and that the Observatoire needs to remain small, proactive, and flexible. They felt that the number of members should remain small, and that others could input in different ways, for example through consultations.

## *Speaking with a common voice*

A small number of key informants expressed concern that by not involving certain civil society actors, the Observatoire had created a division within civil society in Senegal. They highlighted that, ideally, civil society should speak with one voice. However, others pointed out that not all civil society organisations share the same fundamental values and the vision of the Observatoire, and therefore cannot and should not be part of the Observatoire. They suggested that the Observatoire focus on formalising and expanding its membership, while remaining true to its principles. According to them, the Observatoire should not compromise, but maintain its integrity and leadership role. At the same time, it should neither seek to replace, nor duplicate the work of, other NGO umbrella organisations, but focus on what it has been doing so well so far.

## *Improving communication*

One of the key challenges will be to ensure that the Observatoire regularly communicates with the other stakeholders involved in the response to HIV/AIDS, and with the media. Some of those interviewed pointed out that they had not received any communication from the Observatoire since the press conference, and that they were wondering why the Observatoire had not reacted to certain more recent events. They also pointed out that the fact that the Observatoire did not communicate regularly allowed others to start rumours about the Observatoire and try to discredit it.

A journalist interviewed as a key informant said that the media is keenly interested in an update from the Observatoire, and would greatly appreciate being kept abreast of developments in the area of HIV/AIDS by an independent source. The journalist suggested that this could help increase support among the Senegalese public for



Senegal's response to HIV/AIDS, which he said was currently rather low because the public perceives that HIV/AIDS receives more than its fair share of resources and attention. Some people, including members of the Observatoire, agreed that working with the media is important, but felt that it would be a challenge to get the Observatoire's message across, one focusing on facts and issues, rather than persons and suggestions of scandals.

#### *Monitoring and evaluation*

As one member of the Observatoire put it: "Ultimately, we will have to continuously re-assess what we have achieved. Did we really change

things for the better, or have only the formalities changed? It is not enough to be listened to, we need to achieve results for PLHA and affected people."

#### *What is needed for an Observatoire to work?*

- strong, independent civil society actors with experience
- commitment to providing solutions, not just identifying problems
- a shared vision
- leadership
- trust among the members of the group
- working for the interest of all people affected by HIV, not the interest of the members of the group
- a government that is open to working with civil society

**We are all different and together we are stronger. Some of us are good process facilitators, while conceptualisation and analysis is the strength of others. Some have extensive connections with key actors on the national, international, and community level, including with PLHA. Some are more conservative and diplomatic, while others are more activist. Some are good communicators, while others prefer to think and write. Never would we have been able to do alone what we have done together.**

**– Key informant, March 2006**

# A CASE STUDY OF THE “OBSERVATOIRE”, A GROUP OF NGOS IN SENEGAL

## LESSONS LEARNED

Without any doubt, the achievements of the Observatoire in Senegal have been impressive. But can the experience be replicated in other countries? And what is needed to ensure the longer-term sustainability of the Observatoire in Senegal, and of any similar watchdogs in other countries?

The key informants interviewed for this case study expressed a hope that the experience of the Observatoire would inspire civil society organisations in other countries to claim or reclaim a central role for civil society in the fight against HIV/AIDS. But they also expressed the hope that it would help governments that are sceptical about the value of involving civil society understand how civil society can contribute and the positive impact this involvement can have. They felt that Senegal was well positioned to see an organisation like the Observatoire emerge, since it had a number of strong civil society actors and a government that in principle, although not always in practice, values civil society engagement. In addition, the civil society organisations that took the risk to go public with their criticism and proposals were relatively independent of government funding, thus making them less vulnerable. Finally, the individuals involved in setting up the Observatoire are all strong leaders with long-standing experience and expertise, but they also have a number of different, complementary, skills and assets. These conditions may not exist in all countries and are clearly lacking in some. Nevertheless, most of the lessons that can be learnt from the experience apply elsewhere as well.

### *Strong civil society engagement with government can improve the response to HIV/AIDS.*

This has been recognized in many declarations and statements of commitments, and more recently it has been acknowledged as funders such as the Global Fund and World Bank are increasingly making civil society engagement a prerequisite of funding. Nevertheless, the developments in Senegal in the last two years are valuable because they so clearly demonstrate that civil society can have a huge impact on a country's response to HIV/AIDS, including by playing a key role in scale up efforts and management and implementation of new funds.

### *Civil society groups can more effectively influence government policy if they work together.*

For a variety of reasons, civil society groups often do not work together but in isolation or even competition with each other. Lack of time to communicate with each other and coordinate activities and strategies is often the main reason, but competition for limited sources of funding also sometimes makes developing trust and working together difficult or impossible. However, all key informants interviewed for this case study agreed that it was the fact that the five NGOs came together as a watchdog and spoke with one voice that made their actions so powerful. One or even a couple of the organisations alone would not have been able to achieve the same results. One member of the Observatoire explained that it may not have been easy at the very beginning to develop the trust necessary to work together and put the interests of the respective organisations aside. But very quickly, the representatives of the five NGOs realized how

**Creating a watchdog has spinoff effects: it leads to a strengthening of the capacity of civil society to influence government action. Working in partnership for a common cause leads to greater visibility. But efforts to work together also take time, as does shaping a common vision and response and building trust. Finally, it is important to take risks and to be prepared to “irritate”.**

**– Key informant, March 2006**



much stronger they are when they work together, and their level of confidence in what they were doing and how they were doing it increased.

**When five organizations that have such credibility come together you simply cannot dismiss what they are saying.**  
– Key informant, March 2006

At the same time, the Observatoire has not always been “politically correct” in the way it has worked. It has been composed of a small group of individuals, rather than being inclusive of a larger group of civil society actors, in particular PLHA. It has provided leadership and taken risks and has been able to do so because it has refused to compromise its values and principles. It has demonstrated that such a way of proceeding is sometimes necessary and can be very beneficial.

Informants suggested that the following factors are essential for trust to develop and joint efforts to succeed: a shared understanding of civil society as an independent actor in the response to HIV/AIDS that needs to be strong and retain its autonomy and be critical of government while making constructive recommendations; an ability to work together for a common goal and to set aside the partisan interests of the individual organisations; respect for other individuals and organisations and a willingness to listen and learn.

***Civil society groups are particularly effective if they propose concrete solutions, based on sound analysis.***

All informants agreed that one of the key determinants of the success of the Observatoire is the fact that it does not limit itself to highlighting problems and criticising certain aspects of the government’s (and civil society’s) response to HIV/AIDS, but provides sound and in-depth analysis of how the problems could be addressed and proposes solutions. As one respondent put it: “They [the Observatoire] have given a different face to civil society. Because of their obvious expertise and constructive criticism, those who used to be sceptical about why civil society should be involved have been converted. Now they include them because they are experts and often know better than government what needs to be done, not because it is politically correct or required by several declarations and statements.”

***Civil society groups can engage with government, but must remain independent and critical of government.***

Some of the informants pointed out that at national and international meetings and in many documents civil society and governments are being encouraged to work “in partnership”. They felt that this hides the fact that the “partners” are unequal partners, with unequal power, and have different roles to play. And they highlighted that the Observatoire has been successful because it understands so well that civil society organisations must remain independent of government and, if necessary, be critical of it.

**It is worth trying to get better communication and collaboration among civil society actors – we achieve so much more if we work together.**  
– Key informant, March 2006

***Civil society should be prepared to be as critical of its own actions as it is of government action.***

In its work, the Observatoire has at times been as critical of civil society action as it has been of government action. Informants suggested that it may be difficult for civil society, particularly when it is weak and sometimes discredited by governments, to

# A CASE STUDY OF THE “OBSERVATOIRE”, A GROUP OF NGOS IN SENEGAL

openly address problems in its own ranks. However, they felt that the fact that the Observatoire has not singled out government action, but also denounced the way of working of certain civil society organisations in which one or a small number of individuals cling to power without being accountable to their members, working (too) closely with government, and being more concerned with the survival of the organisations than with the issues they are supposed to represent, has contributed to the credibility of the Observatoire’s work. According to them, this demonstrates that the Observatoire does not intend to work against the government or certain individuals, but for an effective response to HIV/AIDS in all sectors, and for certain principles.

*NGOs can help overcome barriers to disbursing international HIV/AIDS funding to civil society by acting as “intermediaries”.*

As mentioned earlier, experience has shown that governments often lack the capacity and infrastructure to effectively disburse funds to NGOs/CBOs. Senegal has shown that civil society and government can work together and create an open and transparent mechanism to select a civil society “intermediary” It is expected that this will allow resources to reach communities more quickly and more efficiently, thanks to the fact that NGOs are closer to the communities, are more flexible, and can disburse funds more rapidly. It is further expected that this will result in a greater focus on PLHA and their needs and on programmes for vulnerable communities to which governments tend to have little access. While such a model may not work in countries that lack strong, well-experienced NGOs such as the ANCS, the criteria developed in Senegal for the selection of a civil society “intermediary” can be used in other countries contemplating this model.

**They demonstrated that the role of civil society is not just to provide information and education – civil society can play a crucial and constructive role in the way countries run their programmes.**

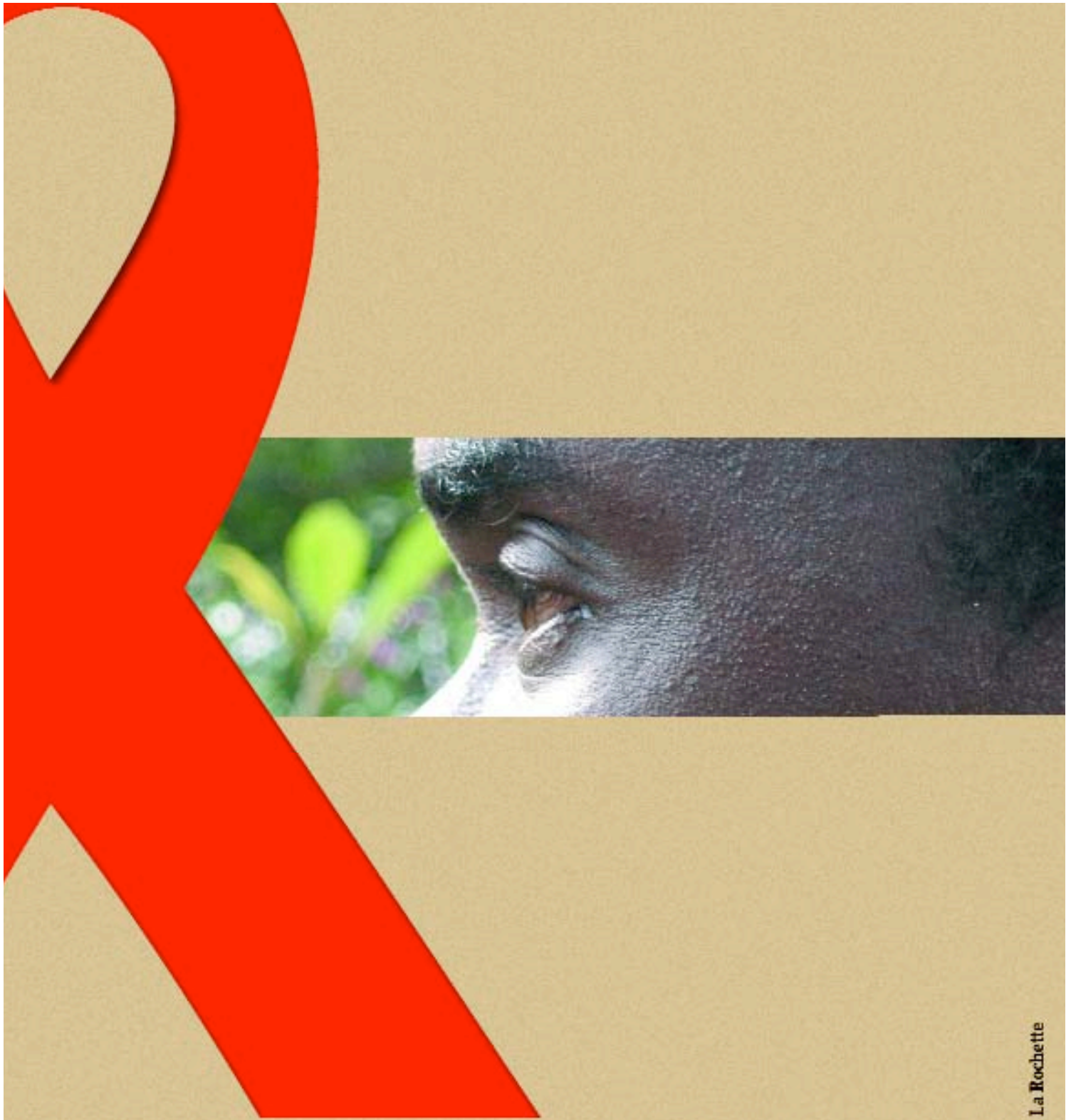
**– Key informant, March 2006**

**We must analyse what we do and how we do it critically – we cannot just criticize others and pretend that we cannot make mistakes, too.**

**– Key informant, March 2006**

## *Selection criteria for civil society “intermediaries”*

- Legal status
- Sound administrative and financial systems (including a procedures manual)
- Knowledge of Global Fund and UN system requirements (having worked at least once as a beneficiary)
- Experience with management of international funds
- Regular external audit
- Minimum 5 years experience in fight against HIV/AIDS in Senegal
- Contractual experience with other NGOs/CBOs
- Transparency and good governance, credibility, and rigour
- Established IT and monitoring and evaluation systems
- Adequate human resources (5-10 persons)
- Adequate infrastructure and equipment



Allyson de la Roche  
L'Alliance de la FINECO

# Alliance

Allyson de la Roche  
L'Alliance de la FINECO

Photo cover & desing by Florence DAO • Printer : La Rochette