

Membership matters

By Sophie Hobbs

NACOSA's network of members lies at the heart of our work to support, strengthen and unite civil society in its response to HIV, AIDS and TB. The Network represents the voice of civil society in the areas of health, social development and gender issues as a broad-based and inclusive linking, sharing and learning collective. This year, the NACOSA Network Secretariat conducted a survey to understand network members' challenges and needs so that we can make the network more effective and responsive.

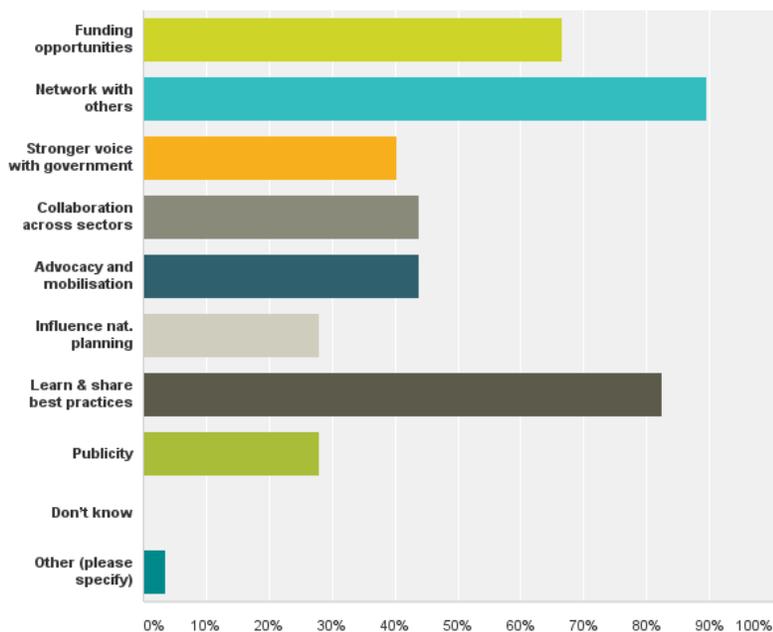
The survey results have provided valuable information for the Network Secretariat and this knowledge will be supplemented by views drawn from focus groups at provincial consultative forum meetings in the first quarter of the year

THE MEMBERS

Most survey respondents were organisation members (45%), a quarter were Global Fund sub-recipients (25%) and 8% said they were individual members. The majority were long-standing NACOSA members: 45% had been members for between one and four years, 31% for between 5 and 10 and 17% had been members since the beginning. Just 4.15% said they had just joined the network.

Members had a wide range of focus areas, the most common of which were counselling and support (71%), health (66%), prevention (63%), education (59%), support groups (57%) and care (50%). Most respondents said that their organisations operated in the Western Cape, followed by KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and the Free State.

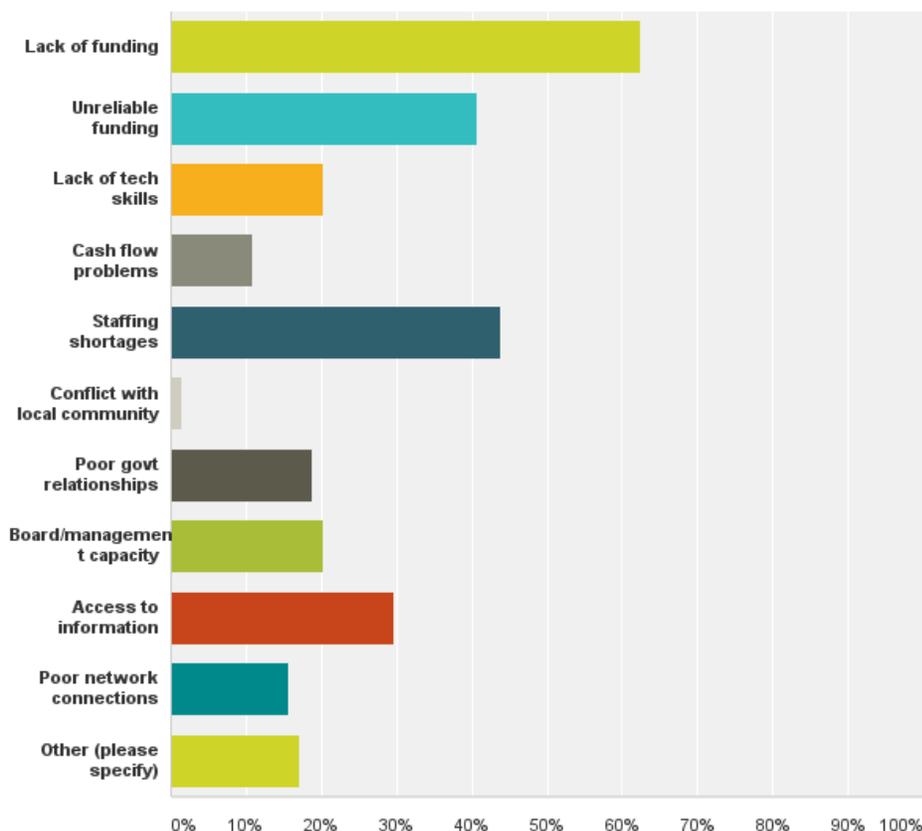
Most described their organisation as a medium-sized non profit organisation or NPO (48%) and 20% said they were a small, formal NPO. Just 4% identified themselves as a small, informal community-based organisation. This may reflect the electronic format of the survey and the focus groups should be able to gauge the views of smaller members that may not have internet access. When asked why they decided to join the NACOSA network, most organisations cited learning and sharing and networking with others.



CHALLENGES

Funding and resource issues are by far the biggest challenge facing NACOSA members at the moment. The majority of respondents reported lack of funding (63%), staffing or human resource shortages (44%) and unreliable or inconsistent funding (41%) and access to information about funding and other opportunities (30%) as major challenges. Lack of technical skills was listed by 20% of respondents and staff retention, funding for salaries, lack of equipment and office space and “lack of local political will to assist clinical staff” were also reported by some members.

MAJOR CHALLENGES FACED BY MEMBER ORGANISATIONS



Given these challenges, it was unsurprising that 67% of respondents reported access to funding opportunities as the reason they joined the NACOSA Network. But the ability to network with other organisations was listed by almost 90% of respondents and 82% said they joined to learn and share best practice. Collaboration across sectors and advocacy and mobilisation both received 44% and capacity building and training for staff were also mentioned.

COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION

Regular and useful communication (email alerts, newsletters, the NACOSA website, consultative forums and advance notice of funding opportunities) were rated as being of most value to members. Negotiated discounts with service providers, discounts on training and organisational capacity assessments were also thought to be valuable.

The communication theme emerged strongly in suggestions to improve the network. “Using all forms of communication” and “Ensuring weekly and monthly notices or information” are examples.

“Always stay in contact and make us aware of any trainings and workshops in our surrounding areas.”

Once respondent remarked: “I don't receive newsletters or emails that are outside of our contract, would be good to hear what's going on in the sector from NACOSA's point of view.” While another stated: “Ask for stories from members so as to share them in the newsletter”.

In line with the learning and sharing aspect of the network, respondents said they wanted to be kept informed about what others are doing: “Let us know what others are doing, provide opportunities to network and partner with others.”

“Please inform us with everything you think can assist emerging organisations.”

One final suggestion was “Doing surveys like this more regularly”.

If you would like to contribute your thoughts on membership, email the Secretariat: Marisca@nacosa.org.za