

## SAT's School Without Walls (SWW)

### The origins of SWW:

When SAT started in 1990, it was based on a traditional North-South technical assistance model. Skills and knowledge were to be transferred from North America to Southern Africa to improve the local response to AIDS. The knowledge was meant to trickle down via a 'Training of Trainers' (TOT) approach to a large group of African field workers.

However, it was soon obvious that this approach did not meet the real capacity development needs of community-based organisations. TOT provided by the international experts was usually directed at African academics and professionals. These people were rarely well placed or able to translate new knowledge into useful skills for community workers. Furthermore, though TOT led to an increase in knowledge, it did not necessarily lead to an increase in practical skill. Most formal training schemes provided one-off learning opportunities with limited ongoing support to ensure the incorporation of new skills into project implementation.

Also, significantly, most of the people already involved in responding to the emerging HIV epidemic were COMMUNITY MEMBERS, not professionals with academic training. The additional skills that community activists and volunteers needed were more readily available within the region. This is the stimulus for the School Without Walls: a network of peers, learning and sharing lessons from their practical experiences of responding to HIV and AIDS in communities across Southern Africa.

### School Without Walls Partners

School Without Walls Partners are community-level or national networking organisations that (i) regularly attend our skills training workshops or (ii) organisations and institutions with the skills or experience to facilitate training, host study visits or mentor SAT's Implementing Partners.

### SWW basics:

- SWW is based on learning by seeing and doing in real settings. Training tends to emphasise 'how to do', more than 'what to do'.
- SWW utilises and builds local technical support capabilities, and forges local relationships. Transfer of skills is organisation-to-organisation.
- The emphasis on networking, co-operation and facilitation ensures SWW is responsive to partner needs and the changing AIDS environment.
- SAT partners contribute expertise, time, physical and human resources, and links to downstream organisations and institutions.
- SAT is facilitator, planner and co-ordinator of SWW. It supplies the overall structure, and most of the financial resources required.

### Aspects & activities of SWW

**Skills training workshops:** These workshops last between two and five days and are facilitated and hosted by SAT partners or SAT itself. They are attended primarily by SAT partners, but other organisations – mostly SWW Partners - also take part. The workshops can include personal coaching, group exercises and field visits. The skills offered range from practical, site-based teaching sessions at national level, to more technical training at regional level. The workshops provide a way for new organisations and for new staff/volunteers to rapidly acquire knowledge and skills. They also create a forum for new and more experienced partners to exchange programme experience and to find solutions to problems mutually encountered. Workshop topics

include both technical HIV and AIDS programming issues and organisational development issues.

**Organisation-to-organisation mentoring:** Here, experienced SAT partners mentor new groups over a period lasting weeks, months or even years. Staff of the mentoring organisation help the recipient organisation to design programmes, supervise and monitor activities, and solve technical or administrative problems, according to their needs and demand. Mentoring relationships can include a provision for apprenticeships. Staff or volunteers from one SAT partner spend a period of one to four weeks with another SAT partner, usually a well-established programme. This allows the apprentice to gain practical experience that can be shared with colleagues on return and integrated into programme activities. Mentoring often develops into long-term organisational relationships of benefit to both parties. Mentoring is provided by organisations that:

- Implement HIV and AIDS activities of proven effectiveness.
- Demonstrate commitment to serving vulnerable groups in their communities.
- Have training capability and the desire to share their knowledge and experience.
- Work methodically and systematically and have a strong emphasis on accountability.
- Have the initiative and ability to sustain mentoring follow-up.

**Structured study visits:** Less experienced groups or organisations that want to introduce new activities visit more experienced organisations to observe their programmes in action. The visiting and host organisations are carefully matched to ensure the relevance of the concepts and skills to be transferred.

**Support & monitoring visits:** Partners completing SWW skills workshops or other SWW activities are visited by SAT staff or the staff/volunteers of mentoring partner organisations, their activities observed, difficulties discussed and solutions and improvements agreed upon.

**Network meetings:** These meetings are a mechanism of mutual support and learning for community-based organisations. They are non-bureaucratic - i.e. they do not have any staff or secretariat (and therefore do not challenge formal, national networks). Participants define what is discussed, shared and learned. In this way, SAT networks allow new priorities and needs to be identified rapidly and translated into programming responses. The networks may be national or regional and participant organisations are drawn from SAT partners and others with an interest or activities in specific areas such as children affected by HIV and AIDS. Mainstreaming of gender is emphasised in all network activities.

One particular type of network meeting is referred to as “cross networking”. Cross-networking is designed to widen the goals and perspectives of organisations working in areas related to the response to HIV. Cross networking meetings bring together activists on gender equality, human rights, community development and AIDS from different countries in Southern Africa. This allows diverse organisations to identify common areas of activity and interest, and assists in the cross fertilisation of HIV and gender programming.

### SWW Contracts

SWW contracts are developed for all SWW activities. Funds are advanced quarterly based on a quarterly work plan. At the end of the quarter, all funds have to be accounted for according to services provided.

The SWW contract may be with a SAT Implementing Partner, for example to fund a national skills training workshop or a study visit. This funding is separate from and additional to the Capacity Development Contract established with the partner.

SWW contracts may also be signed with other types of SAT partner (see below), in effect buying their services to provide technical support for SAT partners. Organisations that have gone

through the SAT capacity development partnership process are first preference when SAT is identifying partners to be contracted through this type of SWW contract. These organisations may be specialised in:

- Training or development of learning materials.
- Providing on-site technical support.
- Specialised technical areas of programming.
- Facilitating meetings, networks and other fora.