**To: Policy and Advocacy Advisory Council**

**PTF letter**

We write this letter on behalf of HIV/AIDS working group - PTF - members. We would like to express our position on Global Fund comments (received on May 1, 2017) on Georgia Transition and Sustainability Plan and draw your attention to some of the issues that are important to be considered and adequately reflected to ensure a smooth transition from GF funding towards fully national funding of HIV and TB national responses. We hope that our position will also be reflected in the further communication between the PAAC and the GF.

First of all, we would like to thank you for the work done during the TSP development process. We believe that the Advisory Council has created more space for interested parties, HIV / AIDS and TB specialists and community groups to keep an eye on and to participate in the elaboration of the plan. However, we would like to note the existence of a language barrier that was related to the writing of the plan in English, and the latter to some extent restricted active involvement of community representatives.

The proper planning of transition from the GF funding towards fully national funding is an important prerequisite for ensuring the sustainability of access and quality of HIV and TB services. In this process, special importance is given to the consideration of the needs of the civil society, especially communities and vulnerable groups, as well as their active involvement in monitoring of the transition process.

We would like to inform you that a group of civil society and community representatives have already been created, which is currently working on the identification of priority areas and gaps of the transition, as well as identification of civil society involvement opportunities and development of the monitoring plan for the transition period. The recommendation from civil society have been underlined once again within the abovementioned process that responds to the PAAC approach and are important for the smooth transition. Namely:

1. **Mobilization of financial resources**: we think it’s important that in parallel with the phased reduction of financing from the GF the financial contribution of the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs (MoLHSA) should increase. Considering the fact that it might exceed the budget ceiling defined for MoLHSA, it is important to timely mobilize the resources and clearly define the potential financial sources for preventing interruptions in the implementation of the National HIV/AIDS and TB responses. It will be important to synergize the resources for HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C prevention for ensuring cost-effectiveness of those resources. This approach will also enable to avoid the fragmentation of resources for preventive services during the transition period;
2. **Improving political environment:** It has been repeatedly stated that the country’s repressive drug policy may be a significant hindering factor for effective implementation of HIV / AIDS national response. Therefore the liberalization of drug policy through decriminalization is extremely important before the Global Fund financing is halted. Hence, it is important to state in the TSP the measures for decriminalization more clearly. Specifically: it is necessary to return the statements that were listed in the plan before its approval by the CCM (February, 2017): a) decriminalization of small dose possession and personal consumption of any type of drugs through removing the Article #273 from Criminal Code; and also add: b) modification of the first part of the Article #260 – amounts (determine doses);
3. **Optimization of contracting mechanisms for CSOs:** Due to the fact that the NGO sector can play a critical role in effective delivery of preventive services, it is important to optimize the mechanism of state contracting of CSOs. Although there is no legislative barrier for their contracting, a bank guarantee worth 1-2% of the total budget specified in a respective tender proposal envisioned in the Public Procurement Law is a hindering factor for many organizations to participate in state tenders. It will be important to formalize special waiver for NGOs and further built their capacities in order to create the competitive environment for service provision.
4. **Legal power of the TSP:** It is important to give adequate legal power to the TSP to minimize the probability of changing the defined priorities and non-fulfillment of goals presented in the TSP. By approving the plan by the Government, it will be possible to grant its mandatory nature.

We would like to inform you that the civil society and community representatives are actively working on the abovementioned directions, the discussions on the package of drug policy legislative amendments at national level are already in the progression, the costing of the complex package of the services for high risk groups is approaching finalization and the stakeholder’s dialog on the waiver for a bank guarantee is in the process.

Despite the successful achievements in TB and HIV/AIDS control, Georgia still faces significant challenges concerning the prevention of these diseases. Therefore, it is necessary to create the abovementioned prerequisites for transferring financial responsibilities to the state before halting the donor support. This is of vital importance for sustaining HIV/AIDS control activities.

We hope that the abovementioned vision and needs of the civil sociaty and community groups will be properly reflected in the TSP.

Sincerely,

STI/HIV/AIDS working group - PTF

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