

Building women and girls' global meaningful participation in the High Level Meeting on AIDS



**The Global Coalition
on Women and AIDS**

The ATHENA Network and the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (GCWA) initiated a global virtual consultation¹ with regional partners in order to ensure the broadest possible engagement and representation of women (and girls wherever possible) in the processes leading up to the High Level Meeting on AIDS in June 2011 – especially women living with and affected by HIV, and other key populations of women, who often lack platforms for priority issues to be raised and heard. The virtual consultation as a *new* platform has,

for the first time in the 30 year history of the AIDS response, brought together women in (and from) many different areas and with multiple identities in a personal and political capacity to speak to the successes, challenges, and key lessons learned through the AIDS response since the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and in the effort to achieve Universal Access. This virtual consultation was launched on 01 March 2011 and has gathered responses from more than 700 women from over 95 countries around the world.

The focal areas for the consultation were defined by 4 criteria: 1) Centrality of women's rights to the success of the AIDS response; 2) Importance for women, girls, and gender equality; 3) Ability to speak to the future, specifically to move us toward realizing all the Millennium Development Goals; and, 4) Political opportunity to highlight an issue that has not received adequate attention to date in efforts to address women, girls, and gender equality in the context of HIV and AIDS.

¹ An archive of the survey, including translations into 9 languages, is available at http://www.womeneurope.net/index.php/page/SURVEY_on_HL.



TOP PRIORITIES FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

as identified by women in **Eastern Europe and Central Asia** toward achieving Universal Access

1: Inclusive and holistic prevention, treatment, care, and support for women in all of their diversity

- Increasing access to and uptake of HIV prevention and treatment services (including nutrition) for women and girls, with a particular emphasis on access to harm reduction services, HIV prevention services for the general population, and sexual and reproductive health services for women living with HIV.
- Provide low-threshold access to services for vulnerable groups.
- Ensure unimpeded access to HAART medications for all who need them.
- Ensure dedicated health and psycho-social support services for women and girls living with HIV.
- Expand awareness and training of health providers, including gender sensitization, on all aspects of HIV related care, treatment, and support.

"To ensure the funding of a primary HIV prevention program for women of childbearing age from general public, and not from certain target groups (sex workers, IDUs)"

2: Solidarity

- Eliminate stigma and discrimination against women and girls – in particular women and girls living with HIV, and key affected women and girls.
- Legal reform including repealing punitive drug laws and the decriminalization of sex work.
- Confidentiality of HIV status.
- Ensure equal protection for all women by law, including for sex workers.
- Halt stigma and discrimination against women living with HIV and their children in health care settings, especially at ante-natal clinics and maternity hospitals.
- Support peer-led programming for women living with HIV and other key affected women.

"Women from vulnerable groups can provide practical advice not found in any literature; this is always a new look and a new vision. In my particular personal opinion, women (who went through hell) should be maximally involved in the work."

3: Gender Equality

- Promote and achieve gender equality for women and girls, particularly around advancing women's human rights and access to employment.
- Promote women's economic empowerment, including through equal employment opportunities.
- Pass and implement national gender policies which protect women's representation on national legislative and executive bodies, and in the management of large national companies.
- Ensure that women are aware of and able to achieve their sexual and reproductive rights, including through access to non-judgmental and youth friendly information and advice on sexual and reproductive health.
- Promote women's literacy and skills in the areas of legal and social protection, and ensure that women have access to related services.

"Women's movements already exist in Russia, which also include women living with HIV, and should be supported by their colleagues worldwide. Only joint international efforts will lead to the successful advancement of women in Russia, especially of those from vulnerable groups."

“Promote the greater participation of all key affected women and girls in decision-making that affects their lives.”

Concluding Comments

The virtual consultation has been developed with the ethos and intent of democratizing international processes – and to provide a vehicle whereby women from all walks of life and in all regions of the world can have their say on the achievements, challenges, and opportunities for change as the global community prepares for the High Level Meeting on AIDS.

What we have learned through the development of the consultation and through our analysis of

what women are saying is simply that women seek and are thirsty to be engaged and viewed as equal, active stakeholders and as agents of change rather than as subordinate, passive recipients. The responses we have received demonstrate that women want to enjoy opportunity, independence, sexual and physical autonomy – and as such, women seek an AIDS response that is holistic, shared sector-wide, gendered, comprehensive, equitable, and deeply rooted in human rights. Women all over the globe are

taking initiative and are on the frontlines of the response, implementing programs with their own capacity, and bringing about change in their communities.

The most affected must be most central to the response, and as history has shown us repeatedly where true social transformation has taken place, if these same women’s visions and aspirations were adequately supported, then the aspirations of us all would fall into place.

The ATHENA Network and the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS acknowledge and appreciate our outstanding team whose collaboration, investment, and shared expertise is making this virtual consultation possible

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Methodology: We have identified these issues from an open-ended question on the survey tool of the virtual consultation for participants to articulate their top three priority asks for positive change. We categorized the open-ended responses in line with specific areas of the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration.

Collaborating Partners



Additional Supporting Partners

Asia Pacific Network of Women with HIV, (WAPN+), Thailand
EATG, Europe
Echos séropos, Belgium
ICW North America, USA
International Women’s Health Coalition, Global
Mama’s Club, Uganda
Seres, Portugal
UK Consortium on AIDS and International Development, UK

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