

# 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 consultation<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> An archive of the survey, including translations into 9 languages, is available at [http://www.womeneurope.net/index.php/page/SURVEY\\_on\\_HL](http://www.womeneurope.net/index.php/page/SURVEY_on_HL).



## TOP PRIORITIES FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

as identified by women from **West and Central Africa** toward achieving Universal Access

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

- Expand access to health services, especially in rural areas, including increased HIV prevention services for women and girls, HIV testing and treatment, primary health services, treatment for opportunistic infections, sexual and reproductive health services, and nutrition.
- Ensure care and positive prevention for widows.
- Expand access to female condoms.
- Ensure women have access to safe, legal abortion in the event of unintended pregnancy.

*"Rural women lack access to information and are therefore vulnerable to HIV transmission; they also lack access to services."*

*"Positive women are not offered a comprehensive range of family planning options, and are vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy."*

### 2: Solidarity

- Eliminate stigma and discrimination against women and girls – in particular women and girls living with HIV, women who engage in sex work, lesbian, bisexual, other women who have sex with women, transgen-

der women, and other key affected women and girls who are not protected from stigma, discrimination, or harassment by law.

- Ensure passage and implementation of laws to stop stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV, and raise awareness of the rights of people living with HIV.
- Introduce laws to protect women diagnosed HIV positive in ante-natal care from abandonment or violence on disclosure to partners.
- Raise awareness around issues of positive living, treatment as prevention, and positive prevention such that people living with HIV in discordant couple relationships will not be vulnerable to stigma.

*"Women in prison continue to be discriminated against in regards to all HIV related services."*

### 3: Gender Equality

- Enforce national gender policies ensuring these policies promote women's financial autonomy.
- Action towards realizing rhetoric on women's political representation at 35%.
- Increase women's economic empowerment including through skills training and access to loans.
- Increase awareness on women's rights, in particular sexual and reproductive rights.

- Mobilize the necessary resources to support programmes aiming to raise the status of women.

*"A woman raped by her husband can only access health care services if she can afford it but not legal services as she is looked upon as the husband's property in this part of the world."*

### 4: Safety

- Achieving an enabling environment for women and girls and eliminating gender-based violence through the promotion of women's human rights.
- Ensure passage and implementation of laws to stop all forms of violence, including domestic violence and sexual violence against women, including domestication of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.
- Eradicate harmful traditional practices and gender norms including those that increase women's vulnerability to HIV.
- Legalize sex work, and protect the employment rights of women who engage in sex work.
- Strengthen women's capacity to negotiate their sexual rights including through training women living with HIV on condom and female condom negotiation and use.

*“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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