



# Consultative Workshop to Reflect on Gender and National Strategic Plans

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Hosted by:

HEARD ([Samantha.willan@gmail.com](mailto:Samantha.willan@gmail.com))

ATHENA Network ([tyler.crone@gmail.com](mailto:tyler.crone@gmail.com))

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Author of workshop report: Lauren McNicol ([lauren.mcnicol@gmail.com](mailto:lauren.mcnicol@gmail.com))

# 1 Introduction

## Why Engender NSPs?

Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic in much of the world, and this is especially true of the generalised epidemics of southern and eastern Africa, where 60% of new infections are amongst women and girls (UNAIDS, 2008), and unpaid care giving is predominantly undertaken by women and girls in the community (Akintola, 2008). Gender differences in social status, opportunities and behavioural expectations are underpinned by power inequalities, which privilege male power and result in the subordination of women, and men with subordinated identities (Greig, Peacock, Jewkes, & Msimang, 2008; Jewkes, 2010). Thus, responses to the epidemic must recognise gender inequality as a key driver of HIV/AIDS to effectively address the needs of women and girls (Greig et al., 2008; Jewkes, 2010; UNAIDS, 2010).

National Strategic Plans (NSPs) provide a clear commitment of a country's response to HIV and AIDS. Ideally, they allocate roles and responsibilities for this response, set targets and provide clear guidance on how a country should be responding to HIV and AIDS. NSPs have the potential to serve as influential platforms for articulating and supporting a gender responsive HIV/AIDS agenda. However, in reality, NSPs often fall short on integrating gender responsive approaches and language in their recommendations for policy and programming (prevention, treatment, care, and support) or insufficiently operationalise these gender directives (Greig et al., 2008).

## Rationale for the HEARD-ATHENA Engendering NSPs Project

In line with supporting the more effective engendering of the next generation of NSPs in southern and eastern Africa, HEARD and ATHENA embarked on a project with the dual objectives of firstly, developing a framework for engendering NSPs in the region and secondly assessing current southern and eastern African NSPs against this framework. The initial phase of this project, in mid-2010, entailed a critical scan of the literature on integrating gender into NSPs and evidence for best practice at the intersection of gender, human rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV. We sought to compliment the many ongoing processes around engendering NSPs, which have successfully defined why it is important to address gender, what key issues require reflection, and how to embark on the engendering process. For instance, the UNAIDS Agenda for Accelerated Country Action for Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV<sup>1</sup> encapsulates the key global issues and strategies for addressing the needs and rights of women and girls within the context of HIV. However, we identified that there was still a space and need for a short, user-friendly guideline for actually crafting gender responsive NSPs—and that such a framework could also be used as an accountability tool for civil society. The Agenda for Accelerated Country Action recognises the development of new NSPs as a strategic opportunity for supporting women's rights and gender equality.

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to as the "Agenda for Accelerated Country Action"

Therefore, we envision the NSP framework and subsequent assessment as one tool for effectively addressing gender inequality and supporting women and girls in the context of HIV. The framework and assessments will assist southern and eastern African countries to improve the gender responsiveness of their NSPs, while also serving as an advocacy and accountability tool for key civil society partners. Ultimately, HEARD and ATHENA view the engendering NSP project as among several key contributions towards the overarching goal of advancing women's rights and gender equality in southern and eastern Africa.

## **Development of the Framework Thus Far**

HEARD and ATHENA committed themselves to developing the framework through an ongoing, collaborative process with key stakeholders from civil society, positive women's groups, the UN family and researchers. These stakeholders offer rich experiences across various areas of expertise, with the common goal of improving the lives of women and girls and achieving gender equality. In September 2010, we put out a global call via a number of networks and list serves for feedback to create the draft framework. Based on this feedback and a review of existing literature, we drafted and presented our work-in-progress framework to a diverse group of delegates (see Annex I for full delegate list) at a consultative workshop on 7 October 2010 in Durban. This report focuses on capturing the key debates, lessons learned, and ways forward for engendering NSPs that were discussed at the workshop.

## 2 Consultative Workshop – 7 October 2010

### Objectives

HEARD and ATHENA hosted the consultative workshop with three objectives in mind:

- ✂ Reiterate “what works” in relation to gender and NSPs, reflecting on literature and delegate expertise
- ✂ Identify core content that an ideal NSP should include in order to meaningfully address women, girls and gender equality
- ✂ Agree on a “minimum package” or “framework” of what all NSPs must include

### Participants

The 23 workshop delegates represented a diverse cross-section of civil society, UN and research partners working in southern Africa. Unfortunately, limited funding only permitted one delegate from eastern Africa to attend. Delegates brought with them a range of experience in research, programme work, policy and advocacy on HIV/AIDS and gender relating to: human rights, gender-based violence, sexual reproductive health and rights, sex work, the inclusion of men and boys, prevention, treatment and care giving and positive women’s experiences. Some delegates had been involved in consultations and drafting of their country’s or other another country’s NSPs, and thus shared important reflections on the politics and processes of engendering NSPs. In addition, many delegates had been involved in integrating gender into similar national policies and processes. We also wish to acknowledge those stakeholders who were absent with apologies (see Annex 1).

### 2.1 Lessons Learned About Engendering NSPs

Several important lessons emerged from our initial session, which was devoted to informal sharing of experiences with engendering NSPs and other national-level policies.

#### **It is important to reconcile the need for evidence-based policy with the fact that gender research is under-funded**

In reflecting on their experiences of engendering NSPs, delegates lamented how “issues of gender are generally marginalised in terms of research funding.” There is indeed a misalignment between the need for a strong evidence-base around HIV/AIDS policy for women, girls and gender equality and the chronic under-funding of the gendered research needed to establish such an evidence base

(Susser, 2009). To realign policy needs with funding priorities, governments must be held accountable to funding and commissioning research that addresses gender issues. Similarly, it is necessary to also hold donors and other funding bodies accountable to recognising local research needs, so that resultant policies reflect local contexts and lived experiences.

### **When we interrogate the engendering process, we should bear in mind variations in “who is invited to the table”**

In some countries, the composition and power differentials among those tasked with developing and creating an NSP acted as a significant barrier to engendering the NSP. In one instance, the Ministry of Gender was not invited to key planning meetings, and was thus sidelined throughout the process of developing an NSP. In so doing what could have provided an opportunity for an engendering process, was missed. Depending on what sectors of the NACs and government are involved, those developing an NSP are likely to hail from vastly different backgrounds with varying capacities for understanding key gender issues, and authority for influencing budgetary decisions.

### **Bridge the gap between NSP development and implementation**

The conversation about how to engender NSPs changes when you move from discussions with ‘designers’ to discussions with ‘implementers’. There were country variations and differing opinions as to whether NACs typically serve as advisory and/or implementing bodies. Regardless of NAC policies and the guidelines, the operationalisation and implementation of NSP guidelines may depend on the political agendas and capacities of whatever government departments, ministries and sectors are tasked with moving the NSP forward.

### **We should consider how engendering NSPs occurs across international, national, provincial and local levels**

There was some discussion about how the engendering process may proceed at international, national, provincial and local levels. Some key language for engendering NSPs is borrowed from international legislation about women’s rights and gender equality. NSP designers should be aware of how their country strategy links up with broader global efforts for addressing HIV/AIDS from a gender perspective, but international relevance must not come at the expense of national contextual specificity. How the engendering process relates to provincial level activities will largely depend on the country-specific government structures. Some delegates were clear in distinguishing national levels as ‘policy spaces’ and provincial levels as ‘implementation spaces.’ Nonetheless, it is likely that NACs should make efforts to close the communication gap with provincial AIDS councils to better inform implementation strategies. However, such national-provincial dialogue can become messy and divide accountability with adverse affects on achieving gender goals. There was a strong sense that the push for

accountability should be targeted at the national level and should come from grassroots civil society rather than provincial governments, who are often less equipped for advocacy.

**“Giving people a framework will do nothing if they don’t understand it”**

The process of engendering NSPs must involve consultations with the people who will undertake or be affected by the result, which includes but is not limited to NACs, parliamentarians, civil society, grassroots organisations and positive women. Such processes of engagement are likely to require separate consultations of stakeholders around what NSPs should be tackling, and provide an important space to introduce and discuss key issues surrounding gender and HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, consultation with communities may build ownership and awareness of NSPs or other policies. Without consultation, community members lose opportunities to shape these policies. The discussion made clear that in order for stakeholders to engage with the engendering process, they must both understand and feel a sense of ownership over the framework.

### 3 Key Debates from the Workshop

The workshop stands as testimony to the energy and expertise available within the region for active collaborations within civil society, with important insights from key UN and research partners. Indeed, channeling delegates' passion and experience whilst reconciling differing political views was an exciting and at times challenging exercise, one that made the discussions more dynamic and the framework more robust. HEARD and ATHENA continually emphasised that for the framework to be effective it needs to have clear language and common priorities. Delegates openly, willingly and actively engaged around important issues, working towards consensus to ensure that the framework emerged as rigorous. As a result, several critical debates and discussions have shaped and informed the framework's purpose, structure and content. The result is a robust framework-in-progress that reflects a shared voice and a collaborative product. Below we briefly capture the key debates and discussions that, in addition to the literature review, have shaped the framework.

#### **Importance of naming “names” when it comes to key populations**

We discussed how the framework could employ a gender lens that draws attention to the issue of women and girls but also includes how power dynamics affect sexually diverse and marginalised communities. The rationale for such an approach was to encourage a gendered response to HIV/AIDS that is robust, inclusive and relevant to women in all their diversity.

#### **“Women, girls and gender equality” or “women, girls, men, boys and gender equality”?**

‘Engaging men and boys’—four words contained within a section header in the draft framework—prompted the most contentious yet fruitful debate of the day. The draft section included points about transforming harmful masculinities, strengthening men's health seeking behaviour and access to HIV services such as HIV testing, prevention and treatment, and increasing men's equal and shared role in care giving. The potential benefits and risks of engaging men and boys in preventing HIV and achieving gender equality is widely debated in the field of HIV/AIDS and gender (e.g., Pease, 2008), and does not stand to be resolved in the context of an engendering NSPs workshop. Nonetheless, this debate was crucial in prompting a fundamental re-examination of the reasons for engendering NSPs.

Everyone agreed that an engendered NSP should i) address gender inequality as a key driver of HIV/AIDS and ii) focus on improving the lives of women and girls. But there were diverging views on what role there is for the involvement of men and boys, if any, in promoting gender equality for the benefit of women and girls. And, if male involvement is potentially an effective strategy for gender equality,



how might we engage men and boys without losing a specific focus and funding for women and girls?

The answers to such questions are not simple and are informed by the feminist worldviews and organisational principles of those present in the discussion. To ensure a focused and productive discussion, we positioned the concerns of 'engaging men and boys' more specifically in conjunction with developing the policy language of NSPs and its implications. Delegates discussed how this 'engaging men and boys' frame, embedded in an NSP, may be reflected in donors' funding strategies, taken up in funding proposals, and ultimately interpreted by grassroots organisations in ways that either help or hinder the end goals of gender equality. There has been evidence of success from projects that focus explicitly on engaging men and boys in gender equality, such as Sonke Gender Justice Network's 'Fatherhood and Child Security Project,' which has shown positive shifts in gender- and HIV/AIDS-related knowledge and attitudes among male workshop participants (Sonke Gender Justice Network, 2009). Other promising approaches are programmes that engage both women and girls and men and boys in the same processes. For instance, the Stepping Stones programme has been associated with an increase in male condom use and reduction in perpetration of gender-based violence in South African communities (Jewkes et al., 2008).

However, the growing trend towards 'engaging men and boys' may also divert funding and energy in ways that create an even more challenging rather than supportive environment for women's rights projects. These funding diversions often heighten existing tensions between projects devoted to supporting and building women's autonomy, dignity and choice and those committed to strengthening men's partnership and participation.

Overall, there was consensus that the involvement of men and boys must be worded in relation to benefiting women and girls and must be integrated in ways that prevent problematic misinterpretations. The major revision entailed dissolving the separate category of 'Engaging men and boys for gender equality' and integrating specific instances of men and boys' involvement throughout other key priority areas of the NSP framework.

### **Male involvement in vertical transmission/PMTCT**

Male involvement in PMTCT may be important for improving support for women during pregnancy and labour, enhancing PMTCT uptake and adherence, and for encouraging the more active and equal engagement of men in parenting (Auvinen, Suominenb, & Välimäki, 2010; Peacock, 2003). However, there remained concerns that women with non-supportive male partners may face discrimination, stigma, violence and/or abandonment upon disclosure of status, which may act as barriers to full and successful participation in PMTCT programmes. Furthermore, programmes that seek to encourage male involvement risk undermining women's autonomy and decision-making power, while seeking to 'do what's best'.

## **Voluntary medical male circumcision**

As a major element of current debates around gender and HIV-prevention, voluntary medical male circumcision was an important consideration for the framework. However, the question was raised as to whether this issue has a direct impact on women and therefore, whether it has a place in the framework. By its very nature, medical male circumcision is a male-centred HIV prevention technique, where modeling suggests that direct benefits to women accrue only over the long term when a critical mass of the male population has been medically circumcised (Nagelkerke, Moses, de Vlas, & Bailey, 2007). The short-term concern is that male circumcision may be having adverse impacts on women's vulnerability to HIV, insofar as men may feel a bolstered sense of protection against the transmission of HIV after being circumcised. Moreover, there is evidence that where there is resumption of sexual intercourse before complete wound-healing by men who are HIV positive, this may in fact increase HIV-transmission to their female sexual partners. Furthermore, concerns have been raised over the ways in which male circumcision is currently being rolled out across the region. Broadly, this discussion returns to the debate about whether the framework should focus on prevention strategies that are women-controlled and women-centred or a broad approach of gender-related prevention. The decision was made that voluntary medical male circumcision should be addressed in the framework insofar as it might affect women, and not simply as an HIV-protector for men.

## **“Brilliant language” and “beautiful documents” are just the beginning: Moving from policy to implementation**

The persistent concern throughout the workshop was how this framework might bridge the policy-implementation divide. Similar consultative endeavours in the past have developed comprehensive guidelines and toolkits for engendering policy and practice around HIV/AIDS. These parallel processes have captured key issues and assisted in developing appropriate gendered language. However, the challenge of moving beyond the policy realm and in reaching intended audiences for change on the ground persists.

Examples of this policy-practice disjuncture are numerous and span all sections of an NSP. For instance, in terms of HIV prevention, many southern and eastern African NSPs have supportive policies for female condoms<sup>2</sup>, but meanwhile female condoms are rarely available or distributed to those who need it (Peters, Jansen, & van Driel, 2010). Funding may be committed towards programmes that address gender inequality, but may not reach the civil society organisations best positioned to implement them (Birdsall & Kelly, 2007). Across government and civil society sectors, there is a lack of technical capacity for translating gender analysis into concrete programming, which further limits effective budgeting and spending (Greig et al., 2008). The workshop delegates discussed ways that we can move this framework and NSPs beyond the policy realm and into the lives of women and girls living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. As one delegate

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<sup>2</sup> A word search found that 14 of 23 NSPs mentioned female condoms as targets or indicators.

described, “We have a lot of beautiful documents, but how are they actually being used?”

As part of an emerging movement to engender NSPs, several documents and guidelines have been developed that hold strategic value in articulating and pushing forward an agenda supporting women, girls and gender equality in HIV/AIDS responses. The delegates agreed that the framework should not repeat, but rather build from and complement parallel processes. Our contribution to addressing the policy-implementation divide will be to make the framework user-friendly and to embed it (funding permitting) in a wider, longer-term process of engendering responses to HIV/AIDS. There was recognition that even with user-friendly content reflecting good practice, a single framework cannot ensure that policy leads to implementation. Rather, it must be a long-term bridge building exercise with the participation of multiple stakeholders, including those designing the NSP (including NACs and consultants), those directing and implementing NSPs (including NACs, parliamentarians/ministers, civil society partners) and those affected by the NSP (particularly positive women’s groups) in southern and eastern Africa. The potential for this framework to contribute to change on the ground will only be realised in conjunction with ongoing consultative and supportive processes with these actors.

Possible processes for engaging key stakeholders include training and awareness raising workshops and consultations with both policymakers and communities. Through workshops, we could build the awareness of policymakers about the underlying principles of engendering HIV/AIDS responses, and provide guidance on how to tailor the framework and other guidelines to their country-specific contexts, with reference to their existing policies and structures. In addition, consultations at community level could introduce the framework to people affected by HIV/AIDS across southern and eastern African.

## 4 Key Recommendations for Moving Forward

- ✂ Revise the framework through ongoing virtual collaboration with workshop delegates and other key stakeholders who were unable to attend.
- ✂ Endorsement of the framework by civil society from southern and eastern Africa. Acknowledgement of their involvement in the process of developing the framework will be given by UNIFEM and UNDP.
- ✂ Assess southern and eastern African country NSPs against the framework. Devise and disseminate report cards for key countries, and consider developing a visual ranking system to encourage 'healthy competition' and progress.
- ✂ Ongoing engagement with key stakeholders in government and civil society who are involved in the design, implementation and uptake of NSPs.
  - Devise a strategy to work with the diverse sectoral and ministerial structures across southern and eastern Africa. Each NAC is comprised differently and varies in its position in relation to influential ministries, such as finance.
  - Work directly with NACs, particularly those that have done well in terms of identifying gender issues.
  - Conduct information and feedback sessions with communities. Make use of existing networks and relationships between local civil society organisations and communities across the region.
- ✂ Continue to build relations with key partners in order to expand regional involvement in the framework consultation process. Distribute the framework to establish broader buy-in through regional networks. Funding for continued consultation is needed.
- ✂ Ensure regional relevance through translating the framework into the Portuguese and French languages, funds permitting.
- ✂ Encourage use of the framework as an ongoing tool for implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and accountability in the next generation of NSPs.
  - Evaluate the ability of civil society structures to evaluate and influence NSPs from the outside, so what we understand the potential of the framework as an evaluation and accountability tool.
- ✂ Develop an annex to the framework that aligns specific NSP policy points for each country with each section of the framework. The intention is to provide a clear tool for policy-makers tailored to their specific context.

## 5 Conclusion

Since the workshop, we have continued consulting and have invited delegates and others who were unable to attend to further refine the specific structure and language of the framework. We anticipate that the final framework will represent a shared civil society voice and vision, with endorsement from all organisations that have provided input to this process.

This civil-society endorsed framework will contribute a robust, concise and user-friendly 'minimum package' for an engendered NSP. It will clearly identify priority areas, key issues and key interventions, with an emphasis on effective language that reflects best thinking and practice for women, girls and gender equality.

We envision two key audiences and functions for the framework. We intend the framework to act as a guiding tool for the designers of the next generation of NSPs, which typically includes NACs, consultants and government ministers, and in some cases civil society actors. These actors will be able to refer to and draw on the framework for how to incorporate key gender concepts and language in their country's NSP. Furthermore, the framework will be able to serve as an accountability tool for civil society organisations to assess NSP content and ensure government accountability on key priorities for women, girls and gender equality in responses to HIV/AIDS. The framework has the potential to create policy space for implementing gender responsive programmes on the ground, thus enabling civil society to leverage the framework for advocacy and accountability purposes.

In the interest of bridging the policy-implementation divide, we situate this framework within the wider, ongoing consultative processes for engendering NSPs, such as those outlined by UNIFEM and UNDP. As the Agenda for Accelerated Country Action outlines, such consultations create the potential to "generate synergies between AIDS responses" and also to "tap into the richness, expertise and diversity of the women's movement (p. iv)." HEARD, ATHENA and the workshop delegates are among the many key stakeholders who are eager to contribute to processes of engendering NSPs and complementary processes, such as the roll out and operationalisation of the Agenda for Accelerated Country Action, that ultimately aim to improve the lives of women and girls.

## Annex I. Workshop Delegates

Name	Organisation
Johanna Kehler	ALN – Cape Town (AIDS Legal Network)
Michaela Clayton	ARASA – Namibia (AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa)
Elizabeth Tyler Crone	ATHENA Network
Jennifer Mufune	GEMSA (Gender and Media Southern Africa)
Andy Gibbs	HEARD (Health, Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division)
Jenevieve Mannell	HEARD (Health, Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division)
Lauren McNicol	HEARD (Health, Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division)
Alan Whiteside	HEARD (Health, Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division)
Samantha Willan	HEARD (Health, Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division)
Promise Mthembu	Her Rights Initiative
Vuyiswa Gladys Nikelo	Positive Women's Network
Wendy Isaack	POWA (People Opposing Women Abuse)
Jean Kemitare	Raising Voices
Emily Keehn	Sonke Gender Justice Network
Tim Shand	Sonke Gender Justice Network
Dianne Massawe	SWEAT (Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce)
Nomfundo Eland	TAC (Treatment Action Campaign)
Lebo Moletsane	UKZN School of Education
Alejandra Morales	UKZN School of Education
Lydia Mafhoko-Ditsa	UNDP – HIV/AIDS Programme, Botswana (United Nations Development Programme)
Tilly Sellers	UNDP – Regional Team
Simone Ellis Oluoch-Olunya	UNIFEM – Regional Team (United Nations Development Fund for Women)
Juliana Davids	WAC (World AIDS Campaign)
<b><i>Absent with Apologies</i></b>	
Neelanjana Mukhia	ActionAid, Women Won't Wait Campaign
Cati Vawda	Children's Rights Centre
Vicci Tallis	Open Society Initiative for Southern African (OSISA)
Paul Dover	SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency)
Caroline Sande	RST ESA (Joint United Nations Programme for HIV/AIDS – Regional Support Team for Eastern and Southern Africa)
Jantine Jacobi	UNAIDS Secretariat
Susanna Fried	UNDP – New York
Nazneen Damji	UNIFEM – New York
Bongai Mundeta	VSO – RAISA (Volunteer Services Overseas, Regional AIDS Initiative of Southern Africa)
Chilufya Siwale	World YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association)

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