

### Making a seat at the table for young women: CSW 60

#### Dear friends:

The ATHENA Team, as part of our mandate within the Link Up consortium, was delighted to have a young women-led team bringing their vision for HIV and SRHR, and their commitment to women's human rights and gender equality, at this year's Commission on the Status of Women.

Why did we prioritize CSW this year? Gender equality is a cornerstone of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and as such, the 2016 CSW was the first opportunity to make the links between gender equality and health, HIV, SRHR, and GBV an explicit part of the new development landscape.

More, we saw a key opportunity to build an important bridge to the future for a robust woman- and girl-centered HIV response with the resolution on 'Women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS'. The negotiations around this resolution, and the hot button issues within it, are vital to track so that we advance and ensure a strong High Level Meeting on AIDS in June 2016 and its Political Commitment.

What are we learning? With shrinking space for Civil Society across the UN and other political platforms and the ever shrinking resourcing of women's rights advocacy, our first priority is that we must have **investment in civil society and community partners**, **specifically and particularly investment in women's and young women's civil society and the organizations**, **networks**, **and initiatives they lead**. This is fundamental to a successful HIV response, this is fundamental to achieve gender equality and meaningful leadership by women and young women, and this is a fundamental part of democracy and strong civil society writ large.

Let's have women in the driver's seat, at the decision-making table, and part of programs and responses and initiatives from conceptualization through to evaluation of impact - and let's have the accountability mechanisms to ensure that we are changing lives, reducing the burden of HIV, and preventing new cases of acquisition as we continue on the long, hard road to equality.

#### What were some of our objectives? And what did we achieve?

- Build diverse partnerships beyond the HIV arena
- Bridge common health, economic, and human rights disparities among women living with HIV, young women, women throughout key populations and women broadly
- Build linkages between the HIV and Feminist movements
- Create a decriminalization agenda that addresses and reflects the overlapping and intersecting ways in which women's lives and bodies are criminalized
- Support the leadership, advocacy and visibility of young women living with HIV
- Agenda building and integrated strategizing toward the HLM and SDGs



- Make a clear call for financing young women's and women-led organizations beyond singular bio-medical interventions and commodities
- Showcase the success of Link Up programs and methodology; featuring the local contributions of young women and adolescent girls
- Create advocacy opportunities between women's civil society organizations and members states and UN bodies
- Participation, skills building and leadership of young women at the UN Youth Forum
- Young women sponsored by Link Up participating in the CSW youth forum and supporting drafting, youth engagement and linkages in the development of the CSW Inaugural Youth Declaration
- Facilitation of the youth-led Young Feminist statement

The 60<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women took place from 14-25 March 2016 in New York City. The CSW convenes UN Member States with Civil Society representatives to take stock of the status of women around the world. The priority theme for this year's conference was Women's Empowerment and its Link to Sustainable Development, in light of the recent adoption by world leaders of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. ATHENA led a delegation of team members to attend both the pre-conference inaugural Youth Forum and the 1<sup>st</sup> week of the CSW.

#### Young Women's Leadership Initiative

ATHENA, and Link Up, supported a cadre of youth HIV/SRHR activists to participate in CSW, through our Young Women's Leadership Initiative. These young women leaders were actively involved in different aspects of the conference, including drafting of the youth declaration, advocacy and presenting and speaking in various fora. They were also involved in training and skills building to strengthen their skills in speaking out for women's rights, particularly women living with HIV and young women, and to advocate for more inclusive processes that create space for young people to meaningfully engage and participate. Key ATHENA young women leaders included:



L'Orangelis Negron Thomas from Puerto Rico, a member of ICW and Taller Sallud, as well as a volunteer with Red de Jovenes





Cierra Fox from USA, a volunteer with the JACQUES Initiative in Baltimore, MD



Resty Nalwanga from Uganda, a member of ICWEA and the Uganda Network of Young People Living with HIV and AIDS (UNYPA)

With ATHENA core team members Ebony Johnson, Teresia Otieno, Alex Murphy, and Alyssa Basmajian, as well as external ATHENA partners such as Annah Sango, Steve Letsike, Johanna Kehler, Eugenia Lopez Uribe, Susana Fried, and others, these young women leaders advocated on a range of key issues, highlighting priorities including: the critical importance of funding women-led civil society organizations; the need for urgent social and legal reform to end criminalization of women, based on HIV status, gender identity, sexual orientation, sex work and other statuses; the need for women to define and reclaim language and diversity issues and the value of self-identification; and ways to strengthen and enhance youth participation at all levels from civil society to national governments and global policy fora.

"If you do activism in your free time, the amount of time, information, and access you have is less. I study and I have my work here in Puerto Rico. I have to spend a lot of time reading and following emails...I don't get paid for it. I don't have access to the internal information from working in the field." - L'Orangelis Thomas

Read more about the spaces we were in and the dialogues we catalyzed below.



To ensure meaningful involvement of those most affected by HIV in the processes leading up to, and ultimately the outcome document of the High Level Meeting on AIDS 2016, ATHENA has convened a young women's leadership initiative working group to steer our work in this area. Building on our Young Women's Leadership Initiative launched in 2011, and guided by mentor leaders, this group has mobilized around processes leading up to the HLM, including CSW and the Civil Society Hearing. Recognising the lack of spaces for young women's engagement, the group is very active and well-subscribed, with participants primarily from East and Southern Africa, but also North America and the Caribbean. The groups represents young women in all of their diversity, including transgender young women and others most



impacted by HIV who are often excluded from decision making spaces. The group developed key advocacy messages that were carried into CSW by YWLI representatives. Our working group aims to bring together and amplify the leadership that the YWLI has already seeded, and cross-pollinate with external initiatives such as DREAMS and All In! as well as embed the expertise and experience of the Link Up young women focal points.

"It is extremely important for women and girls to engage actively in the CSW and HLM as it then makes them actors in the solution as opposed to being mere subjects of the solution. I think the key priority for women, girls and gender equality in this context is engagement in all process and at all levels in all interventions directed towards our communities" - YWLI working group participant

#### **Youth Forum**

In the pre-conference Youth Forum from 11-12 March, L'Orangelis Thomas Negron and ATHENA team member Alex Murphy worked with Annah Sango of the Stakeholder Task Force to the HLM, the CSW Young Feminist Caucus, and other youth advocates to ensure progressive SRHR/HIV language and robust participation in the launch of the first CSW Youth Declaration (Spanish translation can be found here).





The Declaration was handed over to the CSW Chair, Brazilian Ambassador Patriota, to be used in CSW negotiations on 17 March. As a result of this, a paragraph referencing and supporting the Youth Forum was then developed and proposed for inclusion in the CSW Agreed Conclusions, though this was not adopted, with member States citing a lack of understanding of and knowledge about the Youth Forum. Looking to next year, it will be key for youth advocates to ensure that their governments are aware of the importance of the CSW Youth Forum as an avenue to give young people a voice on the issues most affecting their lives, and advocate for the Youth Declaration to be adopted formally in the Agreed Conclusions.

The Youth Declaration directly calls for the inclusion of issues on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI); lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI) recognition; sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) including comprehensive sexuality education (CSE); sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV); and HIV and AIDS to be a funded aspect of UN Member States' work toward implementing the 2030 Agenda. To read more about the Youth Forum process and the importance of providing funding, support, and information to ensure meaningful youth participation, read L'Orangelis' blog.

#### **Advocacy in Practice Training**

The International Women's Health Coalition held an Advocacy in Practice training for new(er) advocates from 11-12 March, attended by Cierra Foxx for the YWLI, to provide an overview of the CSW process and the importance of advocacy to protect and uphold women's rights. To read more about Cierra's experience in the AiP, visit her blog here.

"Being a part of this forum really opened my eyes to the hard work of advocacy. Advocacy in Practice is a training for women all over [the world] to come together and fight for their human rights and so their needs can be met. This gives us a voice of the continued fight and justice of women." -Cierra Foxx

#### **Organizing around CSW**



ATHENA participated in the Young Feminist Caucus, an active hub shaping and supporting advocacy both at CSW and through social media, and supported the development of a Young Feminist Statement which has been endorsed by over 100 organizations. The Caucus organized two Twitter rallies throughout CSW, whose messages on #WhatYouthWant and #WhatWomenWant at #CSW60 trended globally and reached over 300,000 people. To read the dialogue among advocates, visit ATHENA's Twitter Storify.



"After CSW, I felt engaged working with the young women's working group on whatsapp...Even though I wasn't there I was able to mobilize and provide important input. They were open to it and I was able to share my experiences through the chat, which was very motivating. I felt a kind of sisterhood constructed through the chat." - L'Orangelis Thomas



#WhatWomenWant is for leaders and stakeholders to INVEST in a robust HIV response at the community level to address gendered BARRIERS that affect access to services. Linking to this, we MUST CREATE SPACE for Women living with HIV to be key players in decision making

Teresia Otieno
ATHENA NETWORK
International Community of WLHIV

## Panel Discussion - Financing for Gender Equality Implementation of Commitments to End VAW

Link Up youth advocate Resty Nalwanga presented on this panel, speaking from her experience to share the key to unlocking women's potential around the world: financial support as change agents to implement the solutions that they know work best in their communities. As the funding landscape for women and HIV continues to shrink, we are in a critical moment where only a fraction of money intended for women actually makes it to women. Advocacy on funding mechanisms to robustly support women-led civil society and grassroots organizations has never been more vital.

Resty cited specific examples of why financing for gender must be prioritized immediately, such as one Ugandan district where limited equipment and funding have forced women to deliver babies by the light of a cell phone torch. She explained how lack of money for SRHR education and information have contributed to high teenage pregnancy and unsafe abortion rates, which in turn lead to higher maternal mortality rates. Resty's work in two Ugandan districts has highlighted the need for more partnerships to transform gender norms, and to put all women (especially young women) in charge of their own lives. Thanks to the bold



message Resty brought forward, she was asked to present to a panel of African Ministers of Gender on this topic the very next day!

"The most moving moment at CSW is when I was invited by the minister from Cameroon to come and speak with fellow ministers... because I was giving my issues according to the experience and the narratives I've been going through and I've been seeing as a person, so I found it good that I was given the opportunity to share issues affecting people in Uganda and Africa at large." - Resty Nalwanga

There is a need for activists and feminists to be engaged in other spaces that will determine the implementation and funding of the gender equality commitments. The Statistical Committee, mandated to develop the indicators for the SDGs, is especially important – to understand the processes and be engaged. Communities have great power to address the issues they are facing. Localizing the commitments and resolution made is key. CSO's should follow-up in-country and track progress and seek opportunities to work together to build the momentum reflected at Global forums. – Teresia Njoki

# Panel Discussion - Criminalization, Women and HIV: Redefining the Decriminalization Agenda



On 15 March, ATHENA collaborated with AIDS Legal Network, Access Chapter 2, International HIV/AIDS Alliance, ICW Global, Link Up youth advocates, and other partners to convene a highly engaged dialogue moderated by ATHENA team member Ebony Johnson, on the intersecting identities we hold as women, and the violation of our rights and lack of agency to make free and informed choices about our bodies and lives. Panelists shared stories of being arrested on the streets of DC for having more than 4 condoms in their purse, of being forcibly sterilized in Kenya for giving birth while

living with HIV, of the stigma and discrimination experienced for being a lesbian or transgender woman.



The criminalization session was dynamic and cross-cutting. The session looked beyond HIV and criminalization from a legal framework. The interactive dialogue unpacked systemic institutional, religious, cultural and socio-economic factors that facilitate criminalization, stigma and discrimination. The session explored means of advocacy and action to reform and repeal punitive laws and improve rights-based approaches in health, government and beyond. However, most remarkably, the session was infused with innovations to change norms, language and attitudes that reinforce social criminalization. Participants put out a call for introspective examination of bias and recommendations for trainings for gatekeepers ranging from policy-makers to direct service providers to community thought leaders. Overall, the session focused on commonalities and shifting perspectives to forward change. – Ebony Johnson

The discussion was the 5th instalment of an ongoing series, during which the panel called for continued advocacy across sectors and identities to ensure the realization of women's rights, and the initiation of a collaborative advocacy process towards AIDS 2016 in Durban, South Africa. Resty Nalwanga spoke of the need to step up and engage service providers, local officials and community leaders in addressing the rights of women and girls, and to halt the persistent criminalization of women in all of our diversity, at the community level.

"These are the people who can give you the real issue, real feeling, and the people who can bring everything that they feel at the grassroots level to you. So it's good to let them come and its good to let them speak because they are at that community level. The hope is to at least get a solution about how we can deal with different challenges." - Resty Nalwanga





In partnership with the AIDS Legal Network, we also launched the <u>CSW Edition of Mujeres Adelante</u>, the specialist journal on women's rights and HIV. Building with the dialogue we jointly convened at CSW, the issue includes articles on the Dapivirine ring, redefining the decriminalization agenda and diversity, amongst many others.

#### Panel Discussion - Achieving Women's Empowerment for Women in their Diversity

On 17 March, Susana Fried moderated a panel of gender and HIV experts from AIDS Legal Network, ATHENA, Dandelion Kenya, Access Chapter 2, Coalition of African Lesbians, and FEMNET on the normative power of words and how women in all of their diversity use them to identify themselves. Convened by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, Link Up, ATHENA, and others, the panel spoke of intersectional identities and the danger of leaving behind those who fall into multiple categories of 'key populations' in policy and programmatic work by not addressing their needs as women first.

Resty Nalwanga discussed different strategies to unite activists working on intersectional identities, based on Link Up's model of work. She joined the panel in exploring ways to work together and advocate as group of women without having to identify according to a key population category, presenting Link Up's success in working with young women living with HIV in Uganda. To read more about Resty's thoughts and experience at CSW, visit her blog.





#### Think Tank - Women's Organizing toward the 2016 High Level Meeting on AIDS

"I do not apologise for insisting on continue to focusing on women and girls. It is a nonnegotiable. "

ATHENA, FEIM, Women Won't Wait, and the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS convened a Think Tank at the Ford Foundation with gender equality leaders to strategize on upcoming advocacy and engagement opportunities, looking for specific points of synergy and ways to amplify women-led civil society voices toward the Civil Society Hearing on April 6 and the High Level Meeting on AIDS in June.

The objective was to strengthen the political space for and attention to women, girls, gender equality, and HIV at the UN, and to look forward to how we might embed achievements and lessons to date in the new landscape of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 on Gender Equality.

Highlights of the discussion and key points of agreement included:

- Young women need to be leading the change with resources, in partnership, through knowledge sharing and capacity building, and across generations so that our work is continually strengthened by and addresses their lived realities across the life cycle
- There is need for a clearly articulated, human rights-based women's statement to advocate across intersectional issues of HIV, GBV, SRHR and CSE, and others that calls for commitments that governments will be accountable to
- Language in the HLM Political Declaration must be rooted in concrete actions that can be realized at the national level, as well as rights and principles
- Human rights are fundamental to and indivisible from good health, especially sexual and reproductive health and rights and comprehensive sexuality education
- The principles of choice, bodily integrity and autonomy, informed consent, and freedom from violence, stigma, and discrimination must underscore all commitments at the HLM
- Young people, particularly young women, must be involved in regional or national mapping strategies to assess advocacy opportunities and build platforms for leadership

Moving towards the HLM with an agenda that puts women and girls at the center will require cross-movement collaboration, tireless advocacy and the political strength to stand up for the rights of women and girls around the world. We look forward to working with partners to set and realize the commitments needed to ensure an equal world for all.



2016 CSW was a watershed moment for young women's leadership. Young women from Link Up took a remarkable role in ensuring clear, inclusive and focused language on SRHR in the inaugural UN Youth Forum Declaration. The effort, advocacy and partnerships cultivated by young women at CSW60 are foundational for HLM and SDG focus and outcomes. Girl power was indeed in action and in effect! - Ebony Johnson

"I kindly ask, to those who can afford, not to leave issues behind in New York; take them home, implement them, and have results." - Resty Nalwanga

For the next CSW I would like to see more women living with HIV... it would be better to have women living with HIV, rather than women talking about women living with HIV." - L'Orangelis Thomas