

# Building women's global meaningful participation in the High Level Meeting on AIDS



The ATHENA Network and the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS initiated a global virtual consultation in nine languages, engaging approximately 800 women from over 95 countries, in order to provide a platform for women and girls - especially those of us living with and affected by HIV - to voice our priorities and vision for the future of the HIV response. The consultation aimed to take stock of women's experiences of the measures in place to curb HIV to date; and to ensure

women- and girls-centered input into the High Level Meeting on AIDS in June 2011.

In looking to the future, we recognize the centrality of women's rights and gender equality to the success of the HIV response and reaffirm our shared commitment to women, girls, and gender equality in the context of HIV and AIDS. In these key regional messages, women and girls voice our vision for positive change. Our first message is to ensure that all women

and girls are respected, engaged, and recognized in all the rich diversity of our multiple - often overlapping - identities: as women and girls living with and affected by HIV; young women; sex workers; lesbian, bisexual, or transgender women; migrant, refugee, or internally displaced women; women with experience of prison, drug use, caregiving, widowhood, and disabilities; and indigenous, rural, and urban women.



## HIV PRIORITIES FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

as identified by women from **East and Southern Africa** toward achieving Universal Access

- Ensure access to inclusive and holistic prevention, treatment, care, and support services for women and girls in all our diversity

*"Provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services to women living with HIV including family planning options and youth friendly services through one stop centres."*

- Accelerate women's empowerment to advance our participation in political decision-making processes and our access to sexual and reproductive health and rights

*"The socio-economic status of women makes them dependent on their spouses, and makes them more vulnerable to be unable to effectively protect themselves against HIV. Girls living with HIV are in a particular situation where they are abandoned to their own, especially in regard to their human rights including sexual and reproductive rights."*

- Promote safety for all women and girls through the HIV response, by eliminating gender-based violence and ending harmful customary practice

*"Legislation around domestic violence, sexual violence, and other laws that protect women's rights exist on paper but are frequently not translated or comprehensively implemented."*

- Promote the dignity and rights of all women and girls, and eliminate stigma and discrimination

*"Health workers are still judgmental about HIV positive women's sexual and reproductive choices."*



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

## Concluding Comments

The virtual consultation was developed with the ethos and intent of democratizing international processes – and to provide a vehicle whereby women and girls 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 looks to the 2011 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 HIV 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 front-lines of the response, implementing programs with their own capacity, and bringing about change in their communities.

The most affected women and girls 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.

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