

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 across **Asia and the Pacific** toward achieving Universal Access

- **Ensure access to inclusive, holistic, and non-judgmental HIV services for women and girls in all our diversity**

"It is important to note positive changes that have occurred over the last 10 years, particularly in relation to access to health services, including SRH services to women living with HIV. Increased access to ART has clearly contributed to an increase in the type of services available to women living with HIV, particularly cervical cancer screening and family planning methods available."

- **Promote dignity and rights for all women and girls, in particular those of us living with HIV, and eliminate stigma and discrimination**

"Sex workers experience debilitating stigma and discrimination that erode their ability to protect their health and well-being. As a result of law and social practice sex workers face difficulties accessing health care, housing, and supplementary employment opportunities. They risk verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, arbitrary arrests, and harassment. Stigma decreases their

ability to seek protection from the courts or the police when they suffer from violence and discrimination."

- **Advance gender equality in governance, policy-making, education, employment, and property rights**

"There are very few HIV-positive women in the Asia Pacific region on decision-making bodies. Women have not forged strong bonds between HIV and women's rights."

- **Promote safety for all women and girls through the HIV response, by protecting our rights, ensuring access to justice, and ending gender-based violence**

"Violence against women is the main cause of HIV transmission as well as consequences of HIV itself. Marginalized women including sex workers and injecting drug users are also potential to get violence. Safety and security for women and girls are the fundamental rights that must be upheld in everywhere."

- **Ensure access to comprehensive sexuality education and promote access to education for all women and girls**

"Marginalized women have less access to education which puts women into poverty and increases their risk for HIV infection, so to save women and their children, equal opportunity for education should be guaranteed for women and men."



“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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For more information, please visit www.womenandaids.net and www.athenetwork.org or contact us by email at info@womenandaids.net and admin@athenetwork.org.