

Transforming the National AIDS Response

Advancing Women's Leadership and Participation



ATHENA



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

About the publication

Transforming the National AIDS Response: Advancing Women's Leadership and Participation highlights strategies for incorporating gender equality and women's rights into national AIDS responses.

Conducted in collaboration with the ATHENA network, the study sets out to locate where, and in what ways, women most affected by the epidemic are participating in the response. It assesses the opportunities and challenges to their participation and identifies strategies that can be used to advance their full and meaningful participation at all levels. The study is based on in-depth interviews and consultations carried out with more than 100 key informants, including institutional leaders, women leaders and decision-makers as well as individual case studies.

Key findings

- Too few women sit on powerful agenda setting and policy-making mechanisms such as the National AIDS Coordinating Authority or the Country Coordinating Mechanisms of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.
- Women, especially those most at risk and most affected by HIV, face significant barriers to their participation. Reasons include gender norms, stigma, lack of access to information and resources, the burden of care-giving and women's multiple responsibilities in the home, illiteracy and low self-esteem.
- Even where women are represented in decision-making bodies, they face challenges to their meaningful involvement. This includes lack of capacity to substantively engage in formal processes, competing agendas in decision-making spheres and a lack of critical alliances. Moreover, women are often invited to speak about 'women's issues' only and rarely have the opportunity to put forward broader policy considerations.
- Broader alliances between the women's rights movement and networks of women living with HIV are needed.

Recommendations

- Strengthen the capacity of affected women, particularly HIV-positive women and young women, to participate in the HIV and AIDS response. Leadership training, sustained technical support and mentorship are essential to promote a new cadre of women leaders at local and national levels.
- Facilitate greater access to resources by women's organizations, especially community-based ones.
- Increase women's awareness and understanding of human rights, including the right to full and meaningful participation.
- Ensure that national plans and programmes on HIV and AIDS prioritise women's needs and rights as identified by women themselves through consultation and engagement.
- Reserve formal places for women's meaningful participation and leadership in decision-making bodies, such as on the Country Coordinating Mechanisms of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.
- Strengthen gender expertise within formal decision-making bodies and funding mechanisms involved in the response to HIV and AIDS.

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