



## The incorporation of women and girls into the national response to HIV/AIDS in five countries in the Southern Cone



The HIV/AIDS epidemic has long demonstrated societal disparities and inequalities since its appearance 30 years ago, and it continues to affect the most marginalized groups in society by damaging quality of life. In 2010, the Fundación para el Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer (FEIM) in Argentina, as coordinator of the International AIDS Women's Caucus (IAWC), together with its partners Latin America and the Caribbean Council of AIDS Service Organizations (LACCASO) and Latin American and Caribbean Movement of Positive Women (MLCM+), launched a five-country research project in the Southern cone, which

aimed to address the inequalities women face in relation to HIV/AIDS and to expand the incorporation of women and girls needs in the response to the epidemic. The unique 10-month project included participation of 58 local organizations and networks across five countries and incorporated a diverse group of women, including: women living with HIV/AIDS, youth, female sexual and reproductive health activists, transsexuals, gays, lesbians, sex workers and representatives of children's centers, among others.

With leadership provided by FEIM in Buenos Aires, grassroots organizations in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay carried out research to determine local trends and obstacles, to encourage more interaction among organizations, citizens and local governments and to propel the dialogue about women and girls in the HIV/AIDS decision-making process. FEIM developed a Guideline Matrix with a focus on incorporating women and girls-related issues in the diagnosis of the epidemic and to involve the diversity of women's groups in the knowledge of the epidemic. Groups reported results and trends, compiling a national report that was analyzed by FEIM for the development of an overall regional report.



The project aimed to promote the incorporation of the diversity of women and girls into the national and local diagnoses and response to the epidemic, and to expand and strengthen women's groups' participation in the decision-making process.

Specific objectives:

1. Ensure that a diversity of women are trained on the approaches and strategies of interventions to be implemented according to the *UNAIDS Agenda for Accelerated Country Action for Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV*.
2. Better understand the epidemiologic characteristics of HIV/AIDS linked to women and girls, specifically on a local level so that governments can more effectively develop strategies centered on the obstacles specifically confronted by women and girls related to HIV/AIDS.
3. Provide strategies and advocacy actions with local governments to ensure the integration and coordination of policies and programs for women and girl living with HIV/AIDS, specifically to sexual and reproductive health.



The five countries reported similar characteristics with relation to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the key indicators. The project, through the use of the guideline matrix, created a better understanding of the epidemic at local levels, as well as understanding how to better respond to the needs of women and girls in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The results identified progress toward creating free services, programs and networks in all five countries, however funding as well as fragmentation continue to be issues for

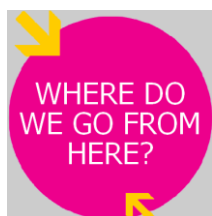
addressing the real and diverse needs of women and girls. Governments are *theoretically* incorporating gender and sexual and reproductive health themes into agendas but action of carrying out proposals is still slow to occur. The following characteristics were reported in the five countries:

- An increasing feminization of HIV/AIDS
- Impoverishment (pauperization) of the population
- Heterosexualization of HIV/AIDS
- Concentration of epidemic in urban areas
- Creation of some institutional care for women
- Free basic healthcare services
- The enactment and enforcement of legislation and affirmative rights advocacy but not necessarily implementation
- Lack of specific policies and programs for women and girls on HIV, except prevention of vertical transmission
- No coordination among HIV/AIDS healthcare services and sexual and reproductive health services
- No knowledge about women's and girls' treatment protocols for HIV/AIDS
- No inclusion of violence against women in the response to the epidemic

The project also created a number of tangible products in efforts to incorporate women and girls into policies and programs addressing HIV/AIDS, including: a Methodology Guideline Matrix, five national reports and one overall report on the Southern Cone region.



This project was unique in its agenda and local scope, instead of national, in order to provide novel and useful information and perspectives for the groups involved. Working on a local level with a diversity of women encouraged more interaction between organizations, citizens and local governments, yielding more action as well as specific and local knowledge of the epidemic than would be possible on a larger scale. Additionally, interactions with policy makers and health providers in each area were reinforced and strengthened, opening a dialogue to discuss incorporation of women and girls in the HIV/AIDS decision making process and the development of new technical tools to respond to the epidemic. Thus, new perspectives, key findings and an important tool for the diagnosis of the epidemic were garnered from this project and will aid in the development of steps to take to further address the gender disparities.



The following **recommendations** were developed by women's groups to create concrete steps to continue the efforts in the incorporation of women and girls into the HIV/AIDS response and to achieve universal healthcare for women:

- Deepen the understanding of the epidemic at a local level to incorporate women and girls' needs into the formal response to HIV/AIDS.
- Increase participation of all groups of women in the discussion and interaction with local authorities to increase knowledge of the epidemic and response.
- Improve local work spaces at the community public health services level in order to promote rights of women and adolescents and to facilitate the dissemination of information.
- Carry out systematic responses to violations of human rights of women and girls related to HIV/AIDS and increase public visibility of these actions and responses.
- Develop and increase support for women and girls facing rights violations in local areas and facilitate access to justice for them.

For more information about the project visit [www.feim.org.ar](http://www.feim.org.ar) or contact FEIM at [feim@feim.org.ar](mailto:feim@feim.org.ar).

