



## HIV/AIDS and SRH: Civil Society Movements and Policy-Makers Working Together <sup>1</sup>

By Mabel Bianco

After nearly 30 years since the beginning of the epidemic, we know a lot about prevention and treatment and what is most effective. The problem is not the knowledge; the problem is the commitment to do what is necessary. The Declaration of Commitments as a result of UNGASS 2001 brought hope to all of us working on HIV/AIDS, as did the Cairo Conference and its follow-up process for those working on sexual and reproductive rights and health. But we knew we could not continue working separately, because we share problems and obstacles as well as enemies. So we learned that we need to be together fighting to overcome obstacles and avoiding the common enemies that make us fight amongst ourselves when the real enemy is outside.

Based on these beliefs, in 2006 we started the project **Strategies from the South: Building Synergies in HIV/AIDS and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**. The original idea was to put together people from international and regional networks working on sexual and reproductive health and rights, human rights and especially women's rights, young people and migrants, along with those working on HIV, such as PLWHA, NGOs and CBOs, sex workers, drug users and LGBTTT, to discuss what our agreements and disagreements were around six controversial topics and how to work together to make our international and regional advocacy more effective.

We found that we had more agreements than disagreements and that there are many ways to work together and strengthen our impact on decision-making. Two years after our starting point, we reached many successes, not all of them attributable only to the project; some to a great extent and others simply consequences of the project.

The most recent success was a joint pledge we prepared to advocate to governments, UN agencies and donors for this High Level Meeting on AIDS in New York from June 10-11, 2008. Others are the advocacy work we did around the Guidance Note on HIV and Sex Work developed by UNFPA and UNAIDS and how the relationship built through the project allowed for the participation of sex workers in the right places and having a unified positions with sexual and reproductive rights and other activists.

A joint community report was presented last year in Sri Lanka at the International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP8). Meena Seshu was nominated to be Community Rapporteur and she invited five networks that participated in the Asia Regional Dialogue in Bangkok from July 11-13, 2007, to develop a joint statement based on the regional experience of the project.

In Latin America networks are working on joint advocacy materials about gender-based violence, including the different perspectives of and impacts on each special population. Also, a joint research project was developed about youth and HIV in the Andean region, with the active participation of young people's groups in each country from the region.

In Africa they established a joint platform against laws restraining sexual orientations, for example in Nigeria, about laws criminalizing HIV transmission, male circumcision prevention programs and sexuality education claims to avoid abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

As for our next steps, in 2008-2010, we need to have more in-depth analysis amongst ourselves to be able to strengthen our advocacy for 2010 when the next UNGASS meeting is to be held.

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<sup>1</sup>Presentation about the project "Strategies from the South: Building Synergies in HIV/AIDS and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights" at the Pre-UNGASS Meeting "Sexual and Reproductive Rights: Challenges for the UNGASS/AIDS Commitments" held on 6 June 2008 at the Ford Foundation in New York, NY, organized by GESTOS and the Foundation for Studies and Research on Women (FEIM). The project's publication was officially launched at this meeting.