

## Evidence: It's What Works

### Data from new website used to urge policymakers to improve health and HIV services for vulnerable women in Kenya

As a teacher in rural Kenya, Nduku Kilonzo never thought she would become involved in women's health, gender issues, and HIV. However, it was during her time as an educator in the 1990s when she began to realize disparities that threatened the health and well-being of her female students. "Women were looking after the sick or couldn't afford to send their daughters to school because they were spending money on health care," she recalls.

Over the years, her interest in women's health crystallized into a focus on how gender norms affect the spread of HIV. Acquiring HIV can be linked to violence and women who are living with HIV are more likely to suffer from violence. According to Kilonzo, gender-based violence is pervasive, but the response is often lacking. "Programs for HIV say 'Be faithful, practice abstinence, use condoms,' but for women and girls who face violence, or coerced sex, this makes no sense," says Kilonzo.

Eventually, Kilonzo obtained a doctoral degree and plunged into managing a Kenyan non-profit organization, [LVCT](#), which provides sexual and reproductive health services to some of the most vulnerable women in Kenya. However, as a member of the gender and HIV working group for the national HIV/AIDS program, Kilonzo discovered that addressing women's health issues and gender-based violence at the policy level was more difficult than she initially imagined.

A national response to HIV needs to include policies and legislation to protect women from violence. To do so, government officials and decision-makers need accurate information they trust to formulate policies that address gender-based violence and prevent HIV. Providing this information is not always easy. "We'd have a few studies here, a few studies there, but there wasn't a comprehensive place that I could consult to show the evidence," said Kilonzo.

In 2010, Kilonzo was one of 50 international experts to review a new website, *What Works for Women and Girls: Evidence for HIV/AIDS Interventions*. Materials are based on a comprehensive review of more than 2,000 articles and reports on programs and studies conducted in more than 90 countries. Users can share information on interventions for which there is substantial evidence of success: from HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support to policies and programs encompassing violence and gender norms.



Dr. Nduku Kilonzo, manager of an NGO for women's health and HIV services in Kenya, has been a lifelong supporter for improving the well-being of vulnerable women and girls.

Photo by Elizabeth T. Robinson/HPP

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**"We've been able to keep pushing the agenda for women. Now we have evidence for what can be done. These are the options. These are the opportunities," says Kilonzo.**

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Last year, Kilonzo used information from the website in a presentation to the Kenyan National AIDS Control Council, which oversees national planning for HIV programs. She and the gender working group were able to influence council officials to support programs that protect women and address gender issues in the current national plan for HIV response.

Acknowledging the increased focus on gender issues in HIV programs, Kilonzo says, “There is still a long way to go. We need dedicated financing for women and HIV.”

With the *What Works for Women* website, Kilonzo—and advocates across the world—have a resource to match their passion for women’s health with the information they need to influence policymakers to meet the needs of women and girls in the global HIV response.

### **About the What Works for Women Website**

*What Works for Women & Girls* is supported by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Open Society Foundations and is being carried out under the auspices of USAID's Health Policy Project and the Public Health Institute. Visit the website at [www.whatworksforwomen.org](http://www.whatworksforwomen.org).

### **About the Health Policy Project**

The USAID-funded Health Policy Project (HPP) builds capacity around the world for improved health policy, advocacy, and governance. HPP contributes to improved health outcomes through strengthening the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of health systems. It is implemented by Futures Group, in collaboration with the Centre for Development and Population Activities, Futures Institute, Partners in Population and Development – Africa Regional Office, Population reference Bureau, RTI International, and the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood. For more information, please visit [www.healthpolicyproject.com](http://www.healthpolicyproject.com) or contact [info@healthpolicyproject.com](mailto:info@healthpolicyproject.com)