



## SUCCESS STORY

### Gender-based Violence and HIV: Turning Evidence into Action

**New online tool can help improve health and HIV services for vulnerable women in Kenya**



*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 credit: Elizabeth T. Robinson/HPP*

***"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.***

As a teacher in rural Kenya, Dr. 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. Studies show that women 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 Care & Treatment. LVCT conducts research, promotes policy reforms, and provides sexual and reproductive health services to some of the most vulnerable groups in Kenya, especially women. As a member of the gender and HIV working group for the national HIV/AIDS program, it wasn't long before 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 and credible information to help them formulate policies that address gender-based violence and HIV prevention measures. Providing this information is not always easy. "We'd have a few studies here and there, but there wasn't a comprehensive place that I could consult to show the evidence," said Kilonzo.

Kilonzo is one of 70 international experts to provide input for the 2012 updated website, [What Works for Women and Girls](#), supported by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Open Society Foundations, and the Health Policy Project. The website serves as a clearinghouse of information where users can share details and results on successful interventions, including HIV prevention, treatment, care, and gender-based violence.

Last year, Kilonzo presented some of this information to the Kenyan National AIDS Control Council (NACC), which oversees national planning for HIV programs. As a result, NACC included important support for programs that protect women and address gender issues in the current national plan for HIV and AIDS.

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 address the needs of women and girls in the global HIV response.