

## **Women's Empowerment and Community-based Health Care Systems for the Fight against HIV/AIDS in Rural Southern Africa**

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In the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Southern Africa, the intervention guidelines are set by the many actors of international development - Western governments, multilateral institutions, private foundations and NGOs – that, over the last decade have been highlighting and addressing the “growing feminization” of the epidemic, meaning that it exists a relationship between gender inequalities and AIDS. This powerful policy discourse has resulted in a series of specific interventions aimed at empowering women and increasing their autonomy in order to fight the “feminization of AIDS”. Of particular interest for this paper are the interventions directed at alleviating the burden of home-based care for women through offering community-based care and support, including by increasing men’s involvement. Gender scholars have argued that this kind of interventions are very limited in their reach and impact in that they do not take into consideration the characteristics of the rural communities in which they are implemented and could result in reproducing hierarchical gender divisions rather than empowering women. Moreover, the complexity of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and of the related health problems require health services other than home-based care, calling again into question the role of public health systems in rural Southern Africa.

The paper aims at reviewing international and national policies and programmes aimed at women’s empowerment in the fight against HIV/AIDS, analyzing their reach, impact and social sustainability. Three case studies from Mozambique, South Africa and Malawi will be selected and analyzed, highlighting the historical, political, economic, social and gender contexts in which the programmes are implemented.