

Mobilizing Transnational Partnerships to Counter the South African Government in the Fight against HIV/AIDS: The Treatment Action Campaign and its Brazilian Partners

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When the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) –the most prominent HIV/AIDS organization in South Africa– vigorously opposed the South African government when it refused to widely distribute ART medication, it negotiated an emerging multi-polar world and turned for inspiration and support to Brazil, a global model for universal access to ARTs, distributed through public health institutions. The Brazilian government, Brazilian NGOs and international NGOs like Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) were mobilized by the TAC to make ARTs available in Khayelitsha –one of the largest townships in South Africa– so that ordinary South Africans could access life-saving medication, thus proving that widespread ART distribution was a viable solution in a resource-poor setting. At the same time this international network became a crucial tool in turning public opinion, globally and nationally, against the South African government for failing its (poor) citizens and against “big pharma” for valuing profits over lives. This paper aims to explore the mechanisms and strategies employed by an African group like the TAC as it mobilized its global partners to pursue its (local) goals and examines in what ways this strategy served as an example, or inspiration, for other African actors.