Evidence shows that HIV programs are more effective when affected communities, including men who have sex with men, transgender people, sex workers, people who use drugs, and people living with HIV, are involved in their design and delivery. The Global Fund Strategy (2017-2022) includes an objective to support the meaningful engagement of key and vulnerable populations and networks in Global Fund-related processes. To help achieve this meaningful engagement objective, the Fund commissioned the Community Leadership and Action Collaborative (CLAC; a collaboration among global key population networks) to carry out an independent study to solicit recommendations and identify key strategic actions and mechanisms to ensure greater accountability by The Global Fund to communities.

The study took place October to December 2016 and involved a desk review of current best practices, and 90-minute interviews with 19 key informants nominated by CLAC to represent all regions, diseases, and population groups. Interview findings were synthesized into a working definition of meaningful engagement, and a draft set of strategic recommendations. Seven worldwide in-country consultations were hosted (100 participants in total) to review the recommendations and provide additional country-specific context. Finalized recommendations were summarized into five categories, with ten strategic actions and follow-up activities directed at The Global Fund and other partners.

There was considerable consistency and agreement about what will foster better community engagement in Global Fund process. These included:

- Effective and proportional representation in planning and decision-making bodies and processes
- Adequate time and resource allocation to communities to understand systems, derive shared priorities, contribute to debate and discussion, and deliver programs
- Independent oversight of grant negotiations and implementation
- Ongoing efforts to strengthen the capacities of community organizations and community leaders to take on increasing responsibilities and achieve greater impact

This independent review was conducted at the outset of the 2017-2019 funding cycle. Ongoing monitoring is required to ensure that the recommendations are being heard and acted upon. An agreed definition of meaningful engagement and a measurement tool would help to ensure that the meaningful engagement strategic objective is implemented, and The Global Fund is held to account.

We wish to acknowledge and thank the people living with HIV who have generously shared their lives, experiences, and bodies for the purposes of this research. Each of the light adapted HIV and AIDS models upon which this work is built helped to produce the findings we share here, and our fight against HIV and AIDS is indebted to those past and present.