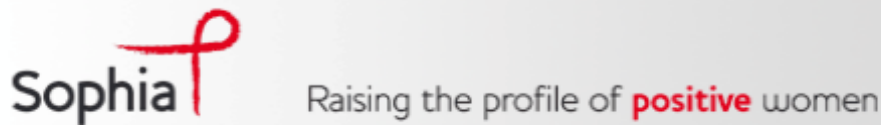


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### In this newsletter:

- Introduction from our Co-Chair: Welcoming Memory Sachikonye and looking forward to our 10th Anniversary
- WISE-UP+ 2015 Coming soon
- HIV and Gender-based Violence: What are the Costs of Inaction?
- My transition from a WISE-UP+ participant to WISE-UP+ facilitator
- Introduction from our new Co-Chair
- Opinion: Transgender people and PrEP: The more we know the more we don't
- How bright is the future for people living with HIV in the UK?

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### Welcoming Memory Sophia Forum's new Co-Chair and looking forward to our 10th Anniversary

I am delighted to be able to say that we have a new Co-Chair Memory Sachikonye. Many of you may already know Memory for the great work that she has done in the HIV sector so Sophia Forum is delighted to have such an amazing woman join us on the Board. Welcome and thank you for joining us Memory.

In late November of this year Sophia Forum will celebrate being in existence for 10 years. This is a cause for reflection, celebration and looking forward to the future. We are delighted that we have made it to this anniversary, in times of continued austerity and cuts to services, continued existence is far from guaranteed.

Sophia Forum is an essential organisation, championing, as it does, the issues for women living with HIV; often in environments where those issues can be overlooked.

We still remain the only organisation in the UK whose sole focus is women living with HIV. Sophia Forum is needed now more than ever, there are 35,500 heterosexual women living with HIV in the UK, 25,100 of whom are Black African. HIV prevalence in

the UK is 1.9 per 1,000 women, for African women 71 per 1,000 women. 1520 women were newly diagnosed with HIV in 2013

We are hosting a 10th anniversary celebratory event on the 25th of November 2015 in Central London. This will be invitation only, with invitations are going out in the next 10 days or so. If you do not receive an invitation but are interested to attend then please [email us](#). Space is limited but we will do our best to accommodate requests.

We are hoping to be able to produce the newsletter on a more regular basis in the future and would like to feature articles from as many women living with HIV as possible. Our next newsletter will be a special 10th anniversary edition and we are happy to take articles for the newsletter from women living with HIV across the country. Please email potential articles to [info@sophiaforum.net](mailto:info@sophiaforum.net).

Lynda Shentall, Co-Chair

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### **WISE-UP+ 2015**

We are facilitating another amazing WISE-UP+ weekend. WISE-UP+ stands for Women Inspire Support and Empower to Unleash Positive Potential.

This is a residential weekend exclusively for women living with HIV to explore their rights, build confidence and develop skills.

It will take place on 30th October in Manchester. Travel, food and accommodation and some support with childcare will be provided.

[Click here to see more information on our website.](#)

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### **HIV and Gender-based Violence: What are the Costs of Inaction?**

With growing recognition of the links between gender-based violence and HIV, why is there still so little being done? And why do the women leading change, making a difference from the bottom up, still lack the funding and a meaningful seat at the table to bring their solutions forward?

Globally, women face vulnerability to HIV and to gender-based violence. These two epidemics are linked - evidence demonstrates that women who have experienced violence are more likely to have HIV, and that women living with HIV are more likely to have experienced violence.

In my work with [ATHENA](#) I partnered with the [Global Coalition on Women and](#)

[AIDS](#)(GCWA) - with support from the UNAIDS - to profile the work being done by women themselves to address HIV and GBV. I carried out this research, speaking to women from all over the world who are leading innovative responses in their communities to reduce violence, reduce HIV transmission and realise the rights of women living with HIV and in all our diversity.

I spoke with women who are providing services and support to women who use drugs in Ukraine, to prevent violence and provide safe accommodation for them and their children when they have experienced it. Women in Namibia leading a legal campaign to secure redress for women living with HIV forced and coerced into sterilisation as a result of discriminatory attitudes about HIV among healthcare staff.

Women from the Coalition of African Lesbians who developed the 'I am/More than' campaign to call for equality for all women regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Women in Bolivia using body map images to tell the story of the impact of violence in their lives as women living with HIV, women who do sex work and trans women.

All these and more are gathered in [Community Innovation: Achieving an end to gender-based violence through the HIV response](#). Yet, despite the extraordinary work led by women in addressing HIV and GBV and the great capacity demonstrated by communities to innovate, lead and effect change - each of these projects suffers from limited, insecure and short-term funding, in contexts of discrimination, legal or political instability and other challenges. Too often, the great promise of campaigns and programmes is lost or undermined when the funding ends and the funders move on, looking for the next innovation. Or a new issue comes along and takes the headlines, and with it donor attention and dollars.

Or, the issue never gets the attention. Here in the UK, the links between HIV and GBV aren't recognised and there is little action to address it, though there is evidence that it is a significant issue. One [study](#), at the Homerton University Hospital, found that of 191 women living with HIV surveyed, 52% had experienced violence perpetrated by a partner. I am a trustee for the [Sophia Forum](#), a charity working to promote the rights of women living with HIV in the UK. Two years ago, Sophia Forum conducted a study into support to address HIV and GBV in the UK. This found a need to better understand the extent and forms of GBV experienced by women living with HIV, and more support and targeted action to address it.

Sophia Forum is ready to take action on this, but lacks the funding to do so. Like so many women's and gender equality organisations, in the UK and all over the world, we struggle to access funding and so the work we can do is limited.

If we are to achieve real change, transformation in gender norms and in attitudes about and perpetration of gender-based violence, the world's attention span needs to

increase and focus on these issues.

Headlines and dollars need to be in it for the long haul, with and alongside women leaders and communities. The case studies in this report show that change is possible, but we all know it isn't quick, and it isn't free. Women's rights organisations are running on fumes, and the risk of exhaustion is huge. But what is the cost of inaction?

Jacqui Stevenson, Sophia Forum trustee  
[Follow Jacqui on Twitter @NetworkAthena](#)

First published in the Huffington Post 10.02.15

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### **My transition from a WISE-UP+ participant to WISE-UP+ facilitator**

Sometime last year, I read about an advocacy workshop for women living with HIV organized by Sophia forum. I was dealing with depression at the time so I was a little bit reluctant but I applied anyway. I got confirmation that I would be attending and I was excited as well as nervous.

Getting to Manchester, I met 23 other women who were living with HIV and it was a weekend of learning and interaction. It was interesting and inspiring to hear and share our stories as well as learn about our rights and be aware of support that is available for us as women living with HIV to live and manage well. While there, we developed strategies on how we can effectively participate as advocates in our various communities after we leave Manchester.

I left feeling very informed and energized and yet I was a little nervous as it was taking a big step ahead for me...

Laura K

[Click here to continue reading on our website.](#)

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### **Introducing our new Co-Chair**

Hello readers. I am pleased and honoured to be the co-chair of the Sophia Forum.

I was diagnosed and have been living with HIV since 2002. At the time of my diagnosis while on a short holiday from Zimbabwe, I thought I was just going to die and go home in a coffin. My life changed when I walked into a room full of women living with HIV and all looking very happy. This was Positively Women then. I immediately knew that I was not going to let HIV take over my life.

As I was on a visitors' visa, I could not work. I therefore decided to take up volunteering for Positively Women and became a PozFem member. It was therapeutic – being able to regain my self-esteem and also giving back and reaching out to other women who would have had the same experience as myself. Through various trainings as a volunteer, I became an experienced public speaker and still advocate for asylum seekers, especially women's rights to services and access to treatment.

I am a mother (now a grandmother) who had left my 15-year-old son back home. I was anxiously waiting to get my residence visa in the UK sorted out. This process took over six stressful years. Once my residency was resolved, I started working for [HIV i-Base](#) as co-ordinator for the [UK Community Advisory Board](#) (UK-CAB). UK-CAB is network of HIV treatment advocates from across the UK with over 730 members and 130 organisations. It focuses on HIV treatment and treatment-related areas. I am responsible for maintaining and developing the CAB network and coordinating meetings.

Over the years, I have gained a lot of experience in UK and international support networks and services. I am a community representative on a number of HIV studies and one of the four community reps on the HIV Clinical Reference Group (HIV CRG) for NHS England.

Before coming to the UK, I worked for 16 years as Head of Information Management Systems for the [Southern African Research and Development Centre](#) (SARDC), a regional NGO in Zimbabwe.

I still volunteer for:

- [European AIDS Treatment Group](#) (EATG) member. I am the chair of EATG's Development and Membership Advisory Group (**DMAG**).
- Service User Representative for the Enfield and Haringey HIV Providers' Forum
- Committee Member for Staff/Patient Forum, North Middlesex Hospital

I look forward working with you all.

Memory Sachikonye

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### **Opinion: Transgender People and PrEP: The more we know, the more we don't**

This is what we know: There is big push from the biomedical community on the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to prevent HIV acquisition.

While data shows that gay and bisexual men had very high levels of protection from HIV infection through intermittent pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) timed around

sexual activity, a mathematical model predicts that most women would require a daily oral dose of tenofovir/emtricitabine combo to prevent HIV infection from vaginal sex.

This data on the efficacy of oral PrEP is undeniably encouraging; however, more questions arise regarding the efficacy and dosing requirement for heterosexual and bisexual trans women as well as gay and bisexual trans men.

As we know the trans community is diverse. From our identities to our physiologies, trans women and men at different stages of gender transition are likely to have very different questions from gay and bisexual men and heterosexual and bisexual women.

The current studies, while claiming that they are inclusive of trans women and men, seem to lack the necessary nuances to make these data relevant to trans people who have sex with men.

In the coming years, the World Health Organization is planning to release consolidated guidelines that include the use of PrEP for all populations.

Until we can truly embrace and understand the difference between trans-responsive and trans-inclusive treatment and prevention, the biomedical community is likely to face more sceptics than followers when their prevention messages continue to miss the mark.

Cecilia S

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### **How bright is the future for people living with HIV in the UK?**

We are now in the fourth decade of the HIV epidemic: giant advancements in medical treatment mean that people living with the virus, like myself, can expect to live to old age if we have access to treatment, support and care, and we are treated with dignity and respect.

I would have never imagined this to be possible when I was diagnosed in the late 90's, a few days before my 30th birthday. As much as I rejoice that I will soon be turning 50, I still cannot say that the future is bright for myself and the other 107,000 people estimated to be living with HIV in the UK.

[Read the full article here](#)

Silvia Petretti

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**Sophia Forum promote and advocate the**

rights, health, welfare and dignity of women living with HIV through awareness raising, research and influencing policy.



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