



Call for Abstracts: Revisiting Customary Law and HIV and AIDS in Southern Africa

The Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) is a growing African institution committed to deepening democracy, protecting human rights and enhancing good governance in the region. OSISA's vision is to promote and sustain the ideals, values, institutions and practices of open society, with the aim of establishing vibrant and tolerant southern African democracies in which people, free from material and other deprivation, understand their rights and responsibilities and participate actively in all spheres of life.

In pursuance of this vision, OSISA's mission is to initiate and support programmes working towards open society ideals, and to advocate for these ideals in southern Africa. This approach involves looking beyond immediate symptoms, in order to address the deeper problems - focusing on changing underlying policy, legislation and practice, rather than on short-term welfarist interventions. Given the enormity of the needs and challenges in the region it operates in - and acknowledging that it cannot possibly meet all of these needs - OSISA, where appropriate, supports advocacy work by its partners in the respective countries, or joins partners in advocacy on shared objectives and goals. In other situations, OSISA directly initiates and leads in advocacy interventions, along the key thematic programmes that guide its work. OSISA also intervenes through the facilitation of new and innovative initiatives and partnerships, through capacity-building initiatives as well as through grant making. Established in 1997, OSISA works in 10 southern Africa countries: Angola, Botswana, DRC, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. OSISA works differently in each of these 10 countries, according to local conditions.

Overview

The HIV and AIDS programme is implementing a project, *Revisiting Customary Law and HIV in Southern Africa*. Customary law is an important aspect of people's lives in Southern Africa. It should however be applied and practiced in a way that is non discriminatory on the basis of gender and does not pose a threat to the lives of people that practice it. It is important both regionally and nationally to harmonize international, regional and domestic laws that refer to customary law in order to formulate mechanisms that address harmful cultural practices that have a link to the spread of HIV and AIDS. Through this project we will develop a long term advocacy strategy that will facilitate the harmonization of these laws evaluate the achievement and failure of previous advocacy strategies that were aimed at addressing the issues, *inter alia*, constitutional challenges through litigation, different methodologies on education and training in communities including strengthening positive aspects of customary law, for example, engagements with traditional authorities. This includes examining different mechanisms of enforcement and implementation of laws either through the civil law systems or existing traditional systems.

Request for abstracts

The HIV and AIDS Programme, therefore, invites submissions for abstracts to be considered for publication from the following countries: **Angola, Botswana, DRC, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe.** The nominated abstract will lead to a publication and possible invitation to present at a roundtable strategic convening which will take place in 2012. The project seeks to revisit the issues on customary law and HIV in Southern Africa with the aim of developing a country specific and/or a regional advocacy strategy to address concerns related to law and harmful cultural practices that discriminate and make people, especially women and children, more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS.

Focus areas

The publication will focus on country specific challenges related to customary law in the context of HIV and will be guided by one of the following themes, which should be discussed in the context of HIV and AIDS:

- Health and Human rights.
- Women's rights and gender inequality.
- Children's rights.
- Economic, Social, cultural rights and religious rights.
- Civil and political rights.
- Rights of person belonging to minorities.
- Indigenous people's rights.

The above themes should cover one or more of the following focus area:

- How is customary law defined in your country? Who defines customary law? What are its sources?
- Is your country a signatory of the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women?
- Is customary law enshrined in your national Constitution and other legislations? If so, what are the challenges, problems and opportunities for advocacy using the constitution and legislation?
- Has the judiciary made any ruling related to customs and traditions that affects human rights or that advance human rights in your country?
- Are traditional structures recognized i.e., traditional chieftaincy/ leadership and traditional courts structures etc. if so, what are the challenges, problems and opportunities for advocacy to engage these structures. What are experiences in your country working with these structures?
- What are harmful cultural practices that drive the HIV epidemic in your country? Are there positive cultural practices that can help prevent or mitigate the effects of the HIV epidemic in your country?
- In your context are there any recommendations you can make to address the issue of harmful cultural practices that drive the HIV epidemic in your country?

Eligibility and criteria

All abstract must adhere to the mandatory criteria. Abstracts received without the mandatory criteria will be rejected. The criteria include the following:

- Abstract must be submitted by individuals working in nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations and community based organisations with strong capacity for research, writing and advocacy.
- Only one abstract per author.
- Abstracts should not be more than **300 words** and must be written in English.
- Abstracts should strictly adhere to the abovementioned themes and sub themes.

Selection process

- Abstracts will be evaluated by the OSISA expert committee. The expert committee is responsible for compiling the shortlist of abstract.
- The screening of abstracts submitted will strictly adhere to mandatory criteria.
- Key issues which will be considered in the evaluation of the abstracts that adhere to the mandatory criteria will include but not limited to, vast knowledge of the subject matter.
- The recommendation of the expert committee and final approval will be conveyed as stipulated on the time frames below.

Time frames

The abstract should be submitted to ntokozod@osisa.org not later than 22 September 2011, and if selected full articles should be submitted not later than 11 November 2011. OSISA will notify you by 28 September 2011, if the abstract has been accepted. Publication of the paper is conditional on producing a final paper of publishable quality. Participants will be notified if papers are accepted for presentation at a roundtable strategic convening to be held in 2012.

Contractual agreement and honorarium

The final selection of the abstract will rest with the OSISA office in Johannesburg. If the paper submitted is of publishable quality, contractual arrangements will be entered into between OSISA and the successful author.

OSISA pays an honorarium for papers that are accepted and deemed satisfactory by the editorial team.