

MSI Global Safe Abortion Conference

Panel: Experiences of abortion law reform

Aim

This panel will consider the lessons to be learnt from different forms of advocacy in pursuit of safe abortion in Latin America and Africa. The key question posed is “What are the conditions that give rise to successful efforts to change abortion legislation and to ensure that legislation is implemented on the ground?” The presenters are from a mix of countries and advocacy backgrounds. The presentations will move through a logical sequence. The first will be on a context where abortion is currently illegal but is being seriously debated. The second will be a case study of a successful example of policy change. The third will address efforts to close the gap between policy change and policy implementation.

Panel presenters:

Sarah Onyango on behalf of Reproductive Health and Rights Alliance, Nairobi, Kenya
Gilberta Soares, Brazilian Campaign for Safe Abortion
Patience Aniteye (Ghana), LSHTM UK
Susannah Mayhew, LSHTM UK (Co-organiser)

Chair:

Hilary Standing, Institute of Development Studies, UK (Co-organiser)

Co-organisers:

Hilary Standing and Susannah Mayhew, Realising Rights Research Programme Consortium
Andrea Cornwall, Pathways to Women’s Empowerment Research Programme Consortium Institute

Panel process

Length: 50 minutes. This will be divided into 3 x 10 minute presentations (35 minutes), 3-5 minute overview and 15 minutes for audience participation

The Chair will introduce the session and the process. Presentations will be consecutive with no questions in between. Panellists will provide background material to answer specific questions about their cases.

Presentation 1: RHRA, Kenya This will reflect on the experience of using a mock tribunal to raise the profile and quality of public debate about unsafe abortion and open the debate for changes in abortion policy.

Presentation 2: Gilberta Soares Brazil South American experiences of successful abortion-law change. It will focus on the key events and actors that were effective in different contexts and the factors which led to a change in the policy.

Presentation 3: Patience Aniteye, Ghana The challenges of implementing an abortion policy in a context where some liberalisation of law has occurred but opposition remains and there is ambiguity of the law and moral/religious reluctance to support it openly. It will identify what needs to be done to demystify abortion, open up public debate, and push for proper implementation.

Overview and key messages: Susannah Mayhew

This will draw out the overarching themes from presentations and how they highlight recent policy developments/issues; and questions for audience debate.

- The presentations show that policy-change can be achieved in even highly hostile settings through engagement of key stakeholders including media, religious leaders
- Policy change alone, however, is not sufficient to decrease deaths from unsafe abortion, as the case of Ghana shows
- Advocacy efforts such as those in Kenya are important both to trigger policy change but also to ensure any resulting policies are implemented.

Audience debate questions:

- Is there consensus on what factors can lead to a policy change on abortion?
 - How much does context matter, or can change-strategies successful in one country context be applied to another?
- What advocacy message and strategies have been most successful in leading to policy change and the community and provider acceptance needed for policy implementation?