

# Advancing STI Advocacy in Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe: A Summary of Country Advocacy Agendas

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## Overview

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) remain a persistent and under-prioritized public health challenge across many settings, despite their significant impact on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and HIV transmission. In Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, gaps in awareness, surveillance data, and diagnostics, along with challenges delivering essential testing and treatment services, continue to limit effective and equitable STI prevention, treatment, and care. This persists despite the availability of proven prevention tools, including vaccines and diagnostics, and growing evidence of the health and economic consequences of inaction. In response, **STIWatch**, an initiative of AVAC, a global HIV advocacy organization, has collaborated with STI experts, advocates, researchers, healthcare providers, and community leaders to create three new national STI advocacy agendas for Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe, providing the first coordinated agendas to elevate STIs as a national health priority and accelerate action on vaccines, diagnostics, prevention, and care.

**These STI experts and partners include:**

Kenya	South Africa	Zimbabwe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Felix Mogaka</b>, STI testing and treatment advocate</li><li>• <b>Mercy Nyakowa</b>, STI testing and treatment advocate</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Mandisa Mdingi</b>, nurse, public health researcher, and STI advocate</li><li>• <b>Alex de Voux</b>, public health researcher and infectious disease epidemiologist</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Chido Dziva Chikwari</b>, epidemiologist and global health practitioner</li><li>• <b>Constancia Mavodza</b>, global and public health practitioner</li><li>• <b>Moira Chido Majaha</b>, public health researcher</li></ul>

AVAC's role has been to support, convene, and amplify the voices and needs of communities in Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe by working alongside partners to strengthen locally driven advocacy efforts that align with existing policies, systems, and community needs.

**STIWatch**

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# Challenges Across Countries

Across Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, several common challenges emerged:

- Limited policy attention and prioritization of STIs, despite high burden
- Continued reliance on syndromic management, which misses asymptomatic infections
- Gaps in diagnostic capacity and slow uptake of new technologies
- Stigma and limited access to credible STI information, affecting care-seeking
- Insufficient integration of community voices in policy and program design
- Insufficient coordination across stakeholders, including policy, research, and service delivery
- At the same time, each country is at a different stage of strengthening its STI response, reflected in the priorities and strategies outlined below.

## Comparative Overview of Country Advocacy Agendas

Area	Kenya	South Africa	Zimbabwe
<b>Overall Focus</b>	Support the transition to etiologic STI management and strengthen data systems	Expand access to STI information, strengthen advocacy capacity, and improve commodity security	Strengthen national coordination and elevates STIs as a policy priority
<b>Policy Direction</b>	Actively transitioning from syndromic to etiologic management, supported by updated guidelines	Still largely reliant on syndromic management, with growing emphasis on diagnostics and managing antimicrobial resistance	Focus on documenting national STI priorities and strengthening coordination
<b>Primary System Gap</b>	Diagnostic capacity and data use for decision-making	Information access, community engagement, and commodity security (e.g., Benzathine penicillin G)	Fragmented coordination and limited integration of STI priorities
<b>Key Priority 1</b>	Update and implement STI guidelines with etiologic management	Expand access to credible STI information and provider training	Document and align national STI priorities
<b>Key Priority 2</b>	Strengthen health workforce capacity	Strengthen community and stakeholder advocacy capacity	Strengthen health workforce on STI management
<b>Key Priority 3</b>	Strengthen surveillance and data systems	Promote positive sexual health and reduce stigma	Institutionalize community representation in advocacy
<b>Community Engagement Approach</b>	Strengthen demand creation and community participation in policy dialogue	Center clinic committees and community organizations as accountability partners	Embed structured community dialogues and representation in decision-making
<b>Health Workforce Focus</b>	Training on updated guidelines and etiologic management	Provider education through national STI training platforms	Capacity strengthening for service delivery and stigma reduction
<b>Innovation and Diagnostics</b>	Strong emphasis on scaling diagnostics and surveillance systems	Emphasis on need for affordable point-of-care diagnostics and AMR monitoring	Focus on preparing for emerging technologies and innovations
<b>Unique Strength</b>	Clear national momentum toward etiologic management and data-driven decision-making	Strong community and rights-based framing of sexual health	Strong focus on coordination and aligning stakeholders across sectors

# Key Areas of Alignment

Despite country-specific differences, the three advocacy agendas align around several shared priorities for strengthening STI responses:

## 1 Moving Beyond Syndromic Management

All three countries recognize the limitations of syndromic management and the need to expand access to diagnostic-based (etiologic) approaches to improve detection, treatment, and antimicrobial stewardship.

## 2 Strengthening Health Systems and Workforce Capacity

Each agenda emphasizes the importance of training healthcare workers, improving guideline uptake, and ensuring systems are prepared to deliver high-quality STI services.

## 3 Center Communities in STI Responses

Community engagement is a core pillar across all three countries, with a focus on:

- Reducing stigma
- Improving demand for services
- Strengthening accountability between communities and health systems

## 4 Improving Access to Data, Information, and Evidence

All agendas highlight the need for better data systems, research visibility, and public-facing information to inform policy and improve service delivery.

## 5 Aligning STI Responses within Broader Health Priorities

Each country links STI advocacy to broader frameworks such as:

- Universal Health Coverage
- HIV prevention and care
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Antimicrobial resistance

# The Role of STIWatch

**STIWatch plays a catalytic role in supporting these efforts by:**

- Convening diverse stakeholders across government, civil society, and research
- Supporting evidence translation into policy-relevant advocacy tools
- Strengthening cross-country learning and alignments
- Amplifying country-led priorities in regional and global forums

Importantly, STIWatch operates through a partnership-driven model, ensuring that advocacy agendas are locally defined, community-informed, and aligned with national systems, rather than externally imposed.

## Conclusion

The Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe STI advocacy agendas demonstrate both shared challenges and unique country opportunities to strengthen STI prevention, diagnosis, and care. Together, they reflect a growing recognition that STIs must be elevated within national health priorities and addressed through coordinated, evidence-informed, and community-driven approaches.


By supporting country-led advocacy and fostering regional alignment, STIWatch contributes to building more equitable, effective, and sustainable STI responses, advancing progress toward improved sexual health outcomes, globally.

## About This Work

This advocacy agenda is part of STIWatch, an initiative of AVAC, a global advocacy organization working to advance equitable access to HIV prevention. This agenda was co-created with STI experts, advocates, researchers, healthcare providers, and community leaders in Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, ensuring they reflect national priorities and local realities. AVAC's role is to support, convene, and amplify, working alongside in-country partners to advance advocacy that is locally driven, context-specific, and grounded in existing health systems and community leadership. This work is made possible by the support of the Gates Foundation.

**Find out more at [STIWatch.org](https://STIWatch.org) and [avac.org](https://avac.org).**

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