

## A movement story: Treatment Action Campaign

Responding to the HIV-AIDS epidemic in 1990s South Africa, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) organised HIV+ people to gain better treatment and confront stigma. Started by anti-apartheid HIV activists, TAC grew into a dynamic social justice movement. A powerful factor was TAC's ability to attract and involve strategic allies – from international organisations such as Doctors Without Borders to local community groups, faith-based networks, labour unions, children's organisations, legal support and research institutions, and health-service associations among others.

A membership-based organisation, TAC, began with a centralised leadership structure in which key community members and allies made decisions and took action with great agility. Later, TAC developed local branches across the country, and this allowed for more direct community participation, including voting on major movement decisions and working as HIV educators and promoters with government health centres. Despite challenges, TAC affected all levels of power including government, corporations, and the invisible systems of beliefs and norms that stigmatise HIV and reinforce people's sense of powerlessness. TAC has achieved substantial impact – improving the health and dignity of people living with HIV as well as the entire health system and even levels of democratic participation. A variety of factors contributed to TAC's success, including its founders' experience both in South Africa's liberation struggle and in being HIV positive; the resultant political trust; the agility and efficient coordination with which TAC could respond to changing power dynamics; and the scope and creativity of its strategies – from those aimed at the expansion, education, and participation of its members and allies, to the combination of confrontational direct actions with more traditional advocacy and communication approaches.