The Idea:

The Twinning Project brought together women from HIV communities in Germany and Eastern European and Central Asian countries. By becoming a twin pair, the women got the possibility to attend the International AIDS Conference (IAC) in Vienna 2010 together and to exchange and advance their knowledge. Building individual bridges should enhance transnational networks, empowers the women, betters their often isolated situations and contributes to HIV prevention. After the IAC communities would benefit as participants shared their experiences within their home countries. For this project the GSSG cooperated with supranational women networks like Athena and Women Arise; with networks in Europe like WECARE+, and with German organisations as AAWS, the women’s section of the German AIDS Society, spi research and German AIDS-Hilfe.

The Methodology:

In February 2010, an independent commission of experts set up criteria for participation and developed an easy-to-fill-in application form in English and Russian for all interested women. Application forms were distributed via e-mail to a broad variety of organisations in the respective regions and through mailing lists. The application period was five weeks. Nearly 100 activists from Germany, Eastern Europe and Central Asia applied to become a Twin. The Applications were received mostly (85%) from Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Most (48%) of the applicants lived in the Ukraine and Russia, but there were also applications from Eastern European countries and from Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. To participate in the project, the women had to be part of their home country’s HIV community. Further criteria for selection included speaking at least one of the official conference languages, English or Russian, and preparing to share their experience and knowledge within their communities back at home. In late April, the commission chose the participants. The selected women were notified by May 3rd.

The Results:

Immediate results: The commission nominated ten women making up five twin pairs. The selected women from the East came from Lithuania, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Russia. They were coupled with five women from Germany. All women attended the conference completely and jointly. All Twins participated in a scheduled presentation of the Twinning Project at the Women’s Networking Zone. A monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process was conducted by an independent consultant prior, during and after the conference. The M&E report shows that the Twins benefited on a personal, institutional and networking level.

Mid-term results: Measurable benefit of the Twinning Project showed up a couple of weeks after the IAC. For example, the participant from Russia has started to build a self-help network for women living with HIV in her region. Together with four Russian women with HIV she visited the GSSG in October 2010 and also met with other Twinning participants. Another participant was encouraged in coordinating a national HIV testing campaign.

Long term results: The participant from Tajikistan co-founded the first national network of women with HIV in Tajikistan. She started to involve in networks for women living with HIV on an international level. Assured by the developments in Tajikistan, women in Kazakhstan started to create a network of women with HIV in their country. Some Twins (6/10) became involved in the network Women in European and Central Asian Regions plus (WECARE+). To show long term effects and sustainable impact beyond a personal level but also for the communities, continuous communication and monitoring will be necessary. As far the evaluation shows that the Twinning Project can serve as a model of good practice.

The Twins with Christin Seifert (left) and co-ordinator Harriet Langanke at the IAC’s Women’s Networking Zone (photo: Alina Harmon)