

Keeping the Promise: An Agenda for Action on Women and AIDS



A UNAIDS Initiative

**The Global Coalition
on Women and AIDS**

The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS

was launched by UNAIDS in 2004 to respond to the increasing feminization of the HIV epidemic and a growing concern that existing AIDS strategies did not adequately address women's needs.

A loose alliance of civil society groups, networks of women living with HIV and United Nations agencies, the Coalition works at global and national levels to advocate for improved AIDS programming for women and girls. It focuses on several key issues:

- preventing new HIV infections by improving access to reproductive health care
- promoting equitable access to HIV care and treatment
- ensuring universal access to education
- securing women's property and inheritance rights
- reducing violence against women
- ensuring that women's care work is properly supported
- advocating for increased research and funding for female-controlled HIV prevention methods
- promoting women's leadership in the AIDS response.

For more information, contact UNAIDS or visit <http://womenandaids.unaids.org>



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**"All AIDS strategies should
pass the test: does this work
for women?"**

***Dr. Peter Piot,
Executive Director, UNAIDS***

The Agenda

AIDS is affecting women and girls in increasing numbers: globally, women comprise almost 50% of women living with HIV. Nearly 25 years into the epidemic, gender inequality and the low status of women remain two of the principal drivers of HIV. Yet current AIDS responses do not, on the whole, tackle the social, cultural and economic factors that put women at risk of HIV, and that unduly burden them with the epidemic's consequences. Women and girls have less access to education and HIV information, tend not to enjoy equality in marriage and sexual relations, and remain the primary caretakers of family and community members suffering from AIDS-related illnesses. To be more effective, AIDS responses must address the factors that continue to put women at risk. The world's governments have repeatedly declared their commitment to improve the status of women and acknowledged the linkage with HIV. In some areas, progress has been made. By and large, though, efforts have been small-scale, half-hearted and haphazard. Major opportunities to stem the global AIDS epidemic have been missed. It is time the world's leaders lived up to their promises. That's why the UNAIDS-led Global Coalition on Women and AIDS is calling for a massive scaling up of AIDS responses for women and girls:





Secure women's rights

Laws and policies that affirm and protect the rights of women are vital for winning the struggle against AIDS. Some countries have passed important legislation on issues such as domestic violence, equality in marriage, HIV-related discrimination and property and inheritance rights. Yet strategies to enforce these laws and finance their implementation are rarely in place. Women's rights need to become women's realities. National governments and the international community must:

- Ensure that laws – whether statutory, de jure or customary – protect women against violence, and uphold their right to own and inherit property.
- Invest in strategies to educate the police, the judiciary, social service providers, civil servants and community leaders about laws and their legal responsibilities.
- Develop and fund programmes to improve legal aid services and other forms of support so that women can claim their rights.

Invest more money in AIDS programmes that work for women

More money than ever before is funding the response to AIDS, but far more needs to go into strategies and programmes that benefit women. National governments and the international community must:

- Review and adapt existing AIDS strategies to ensure they work for women.
- Expand access to the services women need – including education, sexual and reproductive health, antenatal care, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, and antiretroviral therapy.
- Close the funding gap for microbicide development and the female condom.
- Drastically scale up support to caregivers.

Allocate more seats at the table to women

At present, women remain under-represented in—and sometimes plainly absent from—the forums where AIDS policies are decided, strategies forged, and funds allocated. To be more effective, women – particularly women living with HIV – must have more seats at tables where decision are made. National governments and the international community must:

- Review the membership of national AIDS coordinating bodies to ensure the meaningful representation of women and people with gender expertise.
- Invest more in training women, especially those living with HIV, to be effective advocates and leaders in the AIDS response.



The promises

1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

1994 International Conference on Population and Development

States agree to share the costs needed to make basic reproductive healthcare available to all by 2015.

1995 Fourth World Conference on Women

States agree that the human rights of women include the right to decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their own sexuality and recognizes that social vulnerability and unequal power relations block efforts to control the spread of HIV.

2000 UN Millennium Development Goals

MDGs include promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education and reversing the spread of HIV.

2001 United Nations Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

Member States agree that gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental to ensuring an effective response to AIDS and commit themselves to a set of time-bound targets, a number of which relate specifically to women.

2005 World Summit

Global leaders commit to a massive scaling-up of HIV prevention, treatment and care with the aim of coming as close as possible to the goal of universal access to treatment by 2010 for all who need it.¹

Subsequent consultations in over 100 countries worldwide identified actions required by

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