

Transforming the National AIDS Response

MAINSTREAMING GENDER EQUALITY
AND WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS
INTO THE "THREE ONES"




United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

This is the second edition of the publication, which was originally produced by UNIFEM (now part of UN Women). UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

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"Our vision is that women living with HIV/AIDS and their children should have the absolute right to live a life of dignity, in an environment free of stigma and discrimination and that we succeed in mainstreaming our concerns to enable women to access their fundamental constitutional rights, especially the rights of equality, health, education, livelihood, to form associations, enhance participation and to be free from violations and neglect."

Source: 'Shaping a New Reality: A Vision Document of the 2004 National Consultation of the Positive Women's Network, India', December 2004.

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Preface

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Statistics on HIV and AIDS present a stark reality. Today, after over 25 years of working to combat this pandemic, over 30 million people are living with HIV, half of them women. Women's infection rates are rising, often dramatically, outpacing those of men in many countries particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Unless national and global responses to the pandemic accelerate, these trends project a bleak vision of the future: more and more women infected; still more exhausted from caring for the ill and dying; children left to fend for themselves or rely on their elderly grandparents. The changing face of the disease means that women, especially young women, will continue to be the most vulnerable to infection, the least able to protect themselves and the last to get treatment and care. Widows will continue to be driven from their homes in many places, deprived of land and inheritance rights; the number of AIDS orphans will continue to grow; and families will have little hope of getting out of poverty.

Women have been warning about this future for years. Over a decade ago, they saw what was happening, especially in Africa, and began speaking out. Supported by UNIFEM (now UN Women) and others, they have been working tirelessly to place gender inequality and HIV on national and international agendas—demanding greater attention to the ways in which gender discrimination and violence help to fuel the spread of HIV, and its dreadful consequences in terms of lives and hopes.

Ultimately, there is no quick fix. The single most important strategy in preventing the spread of HIV and AIDS is empowering women and girls

and guaranteeing their rights to prevention, treatment, care and support. But there are other important strategies and actions that can be taken, at different levels, to eliminate the myriad barriers that keep them from exercising these rights.

This resource guide provides examples of these strategies, from transforming national and local institutions in order to break through the silence and stigma that surround this disease, to working with communities to change attitudes and behavior that facilitate its spread. They show what can be done when women and men living with HIV are engaged and empowered to make their needs heard and to help design solutions.

We have an opportunity today to scale up these strategies, by ensuring that gender equality is central to the implementation of the “Three Ones” principles—one national AIDS action framework; one national AIDS coordinating authority, with a broad-based, multisectoral mandate; and one national monitoring and evaluation system. The recognition by world leaders that gender equality and human rights are central to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), together with the High Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS in June 2008 provides opportunities to inject new energies and new resources into a coordinated national response to HIV/AIDS—one that can bring results.

The national AIDS action plan is the central planning tool that guides work at different levels and sectors and behind which donors will align their support. It is a critical framework in which to align commitments to gender equality—under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms

of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and in the Beijing Platform for Action, the MDGs and Security Council Resolution 1325—and to scale up the proven strategies to halt and reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS among women and girls.

Action is urgently needed to ensure that these plans reflect the needs and concerns of women living with HIV and caring for those affected. The support to women’s leadership in the response needs to be prioritized. Women, particularly those most impacted by the epidemic, can no longer be left out of policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring, including actively contributing to decisions about the allocation of resources. Concentrated efforts are needed to ensure that women are empowered and equipped to transform national agendas.

Fortunately, at the global level, there are signs that this message is being heeded. The recently released report of the United Nations Secretary-General on implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS recommends ‘massive political and social mobilization’ to address gender inequality. Likewise, the governing board of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria directed its secretariat to appoint senior “Champions for Gender Equality” to help develop the Fund’s gender strategy and encourage programme proposals that address gender inequality, particularly regarding the vulnerability of women and girls.

This is the kind of leadership that is needed at all levels in order to accelerate responses and change the future for millions of women.

“As a strategy, mainstreaming is about ensuring that gender equality goals are embedded at every level and in all parts of an institution – rather than confined to an often very small, corner. It’s about making sure resources are mobilized to move what is often a huge agenda. Most importantly, gender mainstreaming is not the same as ‘integration’ or adding on gender – the add women and stir approach.”

Source: Everjoice J. Win, Head of Women’s Rights, Action Aid International

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