



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



AIDS is affecting women and girls in increasing numbers:

- Worldwide, 17.3 million women aged 15 years and older are living with HIV
- 76% of all HIV positive women live in sub-Saharan Africa
- 74% of young people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa are women
- Female HIV infections are on the rise in Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America.
- In the US, AIDS is the leading cause of death for African-American women aged 25–34 years.

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.

Today, women and girls:

- have less access to education and HIV information
- tend not to enjoy equality in marriage or sexual relations
- remain the primary caretakers of family and community members suffering from AIDS-related illnesses
- play little role in designing AIDS policies and responses

To be more effective, the global AIDS response 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. But in general, efforts have been small-scale, half-hearted and haphazard. Major opportunities to stem the global epidemic are being missed.

## THE GLOBAL COALITION ON WOMEN AND AIDS IS CALLING ON LEADERS TO:

### 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 decisions 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.