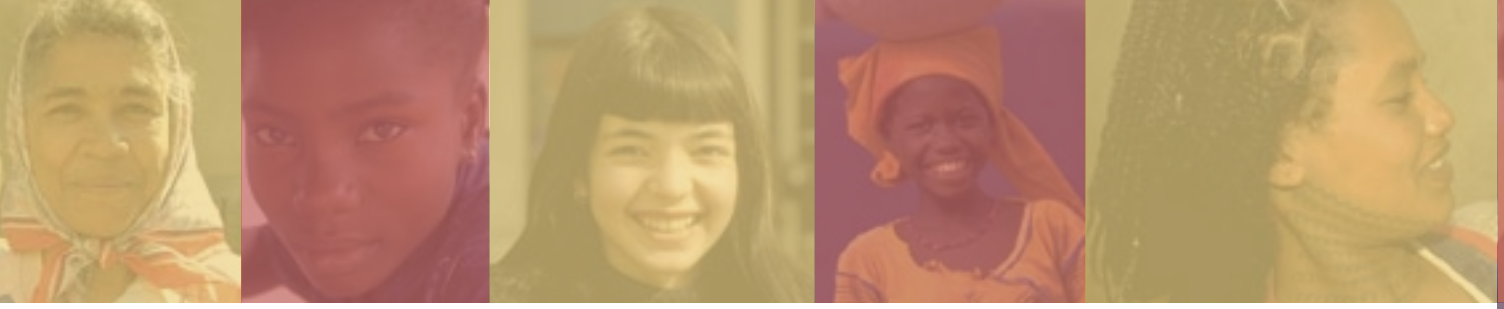

The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS seeks to:

Remove the financial barriers that keep girls out of school. Educated girls have a better chance of building a future for themselves and their families. They also have lower rates of HIV infection. Abolishing school fees, providing cash grants, and introducing flexible schooling are all ways to help increase girls' enrolment in schools and give them a better start in life.

End violence against women. Violence against women occurs in all societies and cultures. Many women and girls live in daily fear of psychological, physical, or sexual assault. In many cases women and girls do not seek advice about HIV because they are afraid this will spark violent reactions from partners, family members, and communities. Twelve years ago, UN Member States signed onto the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Now it is time to move from declaration to action.

Implement laws to safeguard women's property and inheritance rights. Women need a secure roof over their heads if they are to provide for their families, stay safe from HIV infection, and care for relatives when they become sick. Too often, if a husband dies, the widow loses access to that security. Most governments have ratified international conventions which protect women's property rights. Now they need to enforce them.

Improve access to prevention services. Women and girls, including those who are HIV positive, require good sexual and reproductive health services. Most young brides and other adolescent girls find it difficult to access vital information and services. As a result, they are susceptible to unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

Women also need prevention options they can control, such as the female condom and microbicides – sponges, gels, creams, and suppositories that block HIV transmission. An additional US$1billion invested now could produce an effective microbicide within the next 10 years.

Equalize access to treatment. Women and girls have a right to know their HIV status. They need access to voluntary testing and counselling, as well as services to protect themselves and their children from infection. Given that half the world's HIV-infected population is now female, global programmes to step up access to treatment for HIV and related infections must ensure women have equal access.

Value care givers. Most of the burden of caring for the sick falls on women. Sometimes young, sometimes old, they are rarely equipped with the information and resources they need. It is time to acknowledge the value of this work and give it the support it deserves.

Empower Women, Stop AIDS

A UNAIDS Initiative

The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS

Women and AIDS – meeting the challenge

Every day 7,000 women become infected

Of the almost 40 million people living with HIV, half are now women and girls.

Over the past two years, the number of women and girls infected with HIV has increased in every region of the world. Rates have risen particularly rapidly in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America. In sub-Saharan Africa, women and girls make up almost 60% of people living with HIV.

Women are more vulnerable to HIV than men – due to their biology, their economic status, and gender inequalities that permeate all societies.

And yet, women from all walks of life are at the heart of the global response to AIDS. Mothers and daughters, teachers and farmers, sex-workers and nurses, government ministers and girl-guides: all are leading initiatives to prevent the spread of infection and provide care and support to those who are infected or affected by HIV.

An AIDS response for women and girls

Going beyond business as usual

The epidemic affects men and women in different ways. AIDS responses that focus on changing behaviour do not always work for women. In fact they may place women at greater risk of HIV infection.

Most women and girls do not knowingly take risks. They are vulnerable to HIV largely due to the behaviour of others. Women may be forced into sex through peer pressure, by sexually-experienced older men, or because they have no alternative means of earning an income. Abstaining from sex until marriage and being faithful only works if both partners follow the same principles.

This means that new approaches are required to raise the status of women and make it easier for them to access essential resources such as land and income.

So are polices that assure women and girls equal access to HIV prevention, treatment and care services – along with additional funding to build up these services.

In 2004, less than one-fifth of the people who needed prevention services had access to them. And although the number of people receiving anti-retroviral treatment is going up, women and girls are often last in line.

Joining forces: seizing new opportunities

An alliance for change

The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS is a worldwide network of civil society groups, governments, UN agencies, and concerned citizens who have come together to catalyze changes to make the AIDS response work better for women. A dynamic, diverse but coherent alliance, the Coalition is dedicated to empowering women to take control of their own lives in a world with AIDS.

Women are not victims but resilient and resourceful leaders. Many of these leaders are themselves living with HIV. Others have family and friends who are, or who have been, affected by the epidemic.

All of us – including men and boys – have a contribution to make to tackling the spread of HIV and stopping AIDS.

To find out more about the Coalition and how you can support its work, visit its website at:

http://womenandaids.unaids.org

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