



TURNING GENDER AND HIV COMMITMENTS INTO ACTION FOR RESULTS: An Update on United Nations Interagency Activities on Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV

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INTRODUCTION:

In September 2000, 189 UN Member States committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. Among these goals is a commitment to promoting gender equality and empowering women (MDG 3) and combating HIV, malaria and other diseases (MDG 6). Today, almost ten years on, addressing both gender inequality and AIDS remain two of the most significant challenges to achieving the MDGs, as well as broader health, human rights and development goals.

This update highlights key 2009 interagency initiatives, all of which operate at the intersection of gender equality, women's empowerment and HIV.

- **Universal Access for Women and Girls Now!:** a two-year initiative to empower women and girls in the context of gender-sensitive national AIDS responses, by accelerating universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Encompassing **India and seven countries in East and Southern Africa**, the project emphasizes integrating key gender actions into national AIDS strategies and plans and key HIV actions into national gender equality plans.
- **UNAIDS' Programme Acceleration Funds (PAF):** The UNAIDS PAF is currently supporting UN Joint Teams on AIDS to implement gender projects in thirty-four countries.
- **Enhancing regional technical capacity on gender and HIV:** An interagency project led by UNDP with the participation of the Expert Group on Women, Girls, Gender Inequality and HIV, for building capacity of regional technical support providers to assist countries in addressing the needs and rights of women and girls in their HIV strategies and programmes.

UNIVERSAL ACCESS NOW!

To help jumpstart the implementation of *UNAIDS Action Framework: Addressing Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV* in countries which are home to over 60 percent of women living with HIV, UNDP,

on behalf of and in partnership with the Interagency Working Group on Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV, launched "Universal Access for Women and Girls Now!" (UA Now!) in July 2009. A US \$ 1.37 million dollar initiative, UA Now! aims to develop a better understanding of the key barriers and gaps in delivering for women and girls in national efforts, identify priority actions and implement action plans for achieving universal access. The project involves participation of multiple stakeholders, including groups of women living with HIV, women's groups and other civil society organizations, government agencies, the UNAIDS family and UNIFEM, and academic institutions.

UA Now! is currently being implemented in **Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Malawi, Madagascar, Namibia, Rwanda and Zambia**.

In **Ethiopia**, the UA Now! country task team includes the UN Joint Team on AIDS, the **Federal HIV Prevention and Control Office**, National Network of Positive Women Ethiopians, Network of Ethiopian Women Associations, and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. While focusing on integrating gender into the *National AIDS Strategy and Plan*, the project also aims to integrate gender and HIV into other national strategies, such as the third *Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (2011-2015)* and the *Health Sector Development Plan IV (2011-2015)*.

In **India**, the **International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)** is working with the country task team to organize three multi-stakeholder consultations and identify key access barriers for women and girls. ICRW will develop and implement an action plan to address some of these barriers with India's Positive Women's Network, and other stakeholders. The project builds on the findings of the midterm review of India's *National AIDS Control Project (NACP) III*. Key gaps include loss to follow up for women on ART, PMTCT coverage, integration of gender into targeted prevention strategies and women's inheritance and property rights. Lessons learned from the initiative will be crucial for informing the development of NACP IV.

Kenya's implementing partner, **Liverpool VCT, Care and Treatment (LVCT)** is focusing on risk factors that may undermine the country's ability to honor the gender and universal access commitments expressed in Kenya's *National AIDS Strategic Plan* and the country's first *National Plan of Operations to Accelerate Momentum toward Universal Access for Women and Girls*. Along with the Joint UN Team, key partners include: Women Fighting AIDS in Kenya, the Network of People Living with HIV in Kenya, Kenya AIDS NGO Consortium, the Gender Commission, the National AIDS Control Council, and the Ministry of Gender.

In **Madagascar**, **Action Socio Sanitaire Organisation Secours (ASOS)** is a national civil society organization working in seventeen of the country's twenty two regions on capacity building, health, and social development. ASOS is joining UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNDP to conduct an assessment of women's vulnerabilities and to ensure better access to HIV services for women and girls in regions with high HIV prevalence.

In **Malawi**, **The Malawi Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA)** is working with the country task team to address gender-based violence, stigma and discrimination and improve women's ability to access and continue using HIV treatment and reproductive health services. Using the Stepping Stones methodology, the project engages participatory learning approaches to build knowledge, risk awareness and communication skills, and to stimulate critical reflection. COWLHA has already piloted this project in six districts, with funds from UNFPA and UNAIDS.

The Legal Assistance Center (LAC) in Namibia is working with the country task team to drive progress on the empowerment women and girls to make safer sex choices and access HIV prevention and treatment services without fear of gender-based violence, stigma, or discrimination. The project addresses customary laws that render women and girls vulnerable to HIV infection. It will build knowledge of traditional authorities and women in rural areas about national laws that empower and protect women. Project partners include Malawi's Network of People Living with HIV, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, the National Planning Commission, and the Joint UN Team.

In **Rwanda**, **The Forum for Activists against HIV Scourge (FAAS)** is leading the country task team in an initiative to increase the protection of women and girls from violence and to restore justice for survivors of violence and for socially excluded women. The project will contribute to meeting priorities in Rwanda's *Economic and Poverty Reduction Strategy*, such as improving access to legal aid, including for those infected or affected by HIV.

In **Zambia**, the **National AIDS Council (NAC)** will expand support for integrating of gender in the country's *National AIDS Strategic Framework (NASF) (2011-2015)*. The NAC, along with the Joint UN Team, has recruited a technical advisor to ensure that NASF has a stronger commitment to women's and girls' rights and that it is gender-respon-

sive. NAC is working in partnership with several Zambian women's organizations, UNDP, and UNAIDS.

UNAIDS PROGRAMME ACCELERATION FUNDS (PAF) - CATALYTIC COUNTRY LEVEL ACTION ON GENDER

To date, thirty-four countries are implementing PAF projects on gender and HIV. Projects have been developed by the Joint UN Teams and Theme Groups on AIDS. PAF is being used to support catalytic action on gender and AIDS, with the additional aim of leveraging resources and action on gender. Projects are country led, vetted by UNAIDS Regional Support Teams, and implemented in collaboration with national partners including governments, civil society organizations and academic institutions.

Each project responds to specific epidemiological contexts. The projects use diverse approaches that include: gathering strategic information, advocacy, training, and service provision.

ASIA AND PACIFIC

Two countries are gathering evidence to better understand issues around intimate partner transmission. In **Thailand**, **UNIFEM**, in collaboration with the **Thai Positive Women's Network, Mahidol University** and the **Center for Health Policy Studies**, is using gender and human rights perspectives to better understand power relations between men and women in marriages and in long-term relationships. Similarly, **WHO, UNFPA** and the **UNAIDS Country Office**, in collaboration with the **Ministry of Health in Fiji and Kiribati** are conducting quantitative and qualitative assessments to better understand transmission patterns of sero-discordant couples.

Thailand's PAF also includes a component to collect evidence to inform strategies for improving access to health care by men who have sex with men, in collaboration with the **Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand and Hua Chiaw University** and led by **UNESCO**.

The projects in **Vietnam** and the **Philippines** aim to strengthen gender in the national response to AIDS. In **Vietnam**, **UNIFEM** in collaboration with the **Ministry of Labor Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA)** is mainstreaming gender into the new *National Strategic Plan for 2011–2020*, which includes a gender audit that aims to address the key issues which have constrained an effective and sustainable response to HIV. In the **Philippines**, **UNICEF** is enhancing gender and age-sensitive HIV policies, programmes, and monitoring and evaluation both in the *National Strategic Plan* and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

In **Pakistan**, **UNIFEM** is developing training materials to strengthen the capacity of NGOs providing services to most at risk populations, including spouses of injecting drug users, spouses of migrant workers and female sex workers. In **India**, **UNODC**, the **Department of AIDS Control**, and the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** are developing service delivery models for women drug users and partners of male drug users.

PARTNERING WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS TO SUSTAIN COMMITMENTS TO UNIVERSAL ACCESS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

The World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA), a key UA Now! partner, is focusing on several global activities. These include a side event at the 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women/Beijing + 15 in New York in March 2010; and a satellite session at the Vienna International AIDS Conference in July 2010. In addition, UNDP and World YWCA, in consultation with the UN Interagency Working Group on Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV, will organize a meeting in November 2010 to reflect on and learn from the UA Now! process. Countries currently involved in UA Now! will share lessons, challenges and good practice. The reflection and learning process will inform next steps in existing projects and will guide future rounds of UA Now! should funding be secured for additional phases.

Cambodia and **Malaysia** projects constitute interventions in the area of sex work, so as to reduce vulnerability and ensure greater access to services. In **Cambodia**, UNFPA and the **UNAIDS Country Office** are collaborating with the **Women's Network for Unity** to build the capacity of sex worker networks to improve community engagement for universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and support. In **Malaysia**, UNHCR is assessing vulnerability to, and risks associated with sex work among women and girls and men and boys within the refugee community in **Kuala Lumpur**, where UNHCR is currently assisting 47,000 registered refugees, mainly from **Myanmar**.

In **Sri Lanka**, the **ILO** and the **Employers Federation of Ceylon** are working on preventing HIV infection in young women (ages 18-25 years) working in the apparel industry. The project will train and sensitize management and young female workers from a large apparel sector company that employs nearly 25,000 young women mainly from rural areas.

EAST AND CENTRAL EUROPE

There are currently three PAF projects in **Eastern and Central Europe**. In **Belarus**, UNFPA is working with the **Ministry of Health** and the **Department of HIV Prevention** to conduct a gender assessment of the key drivers of the epidemic. Findings will be integrated into the country's first UNDAF. In **Serbia**, UNDP and local partners are conducting qualitative research among "most-at-risk-populations" to analyze relationships between vulnerability to HIV and STI and gender-based vulnerabilities, including violence. In addition, UNDP is working with the **Republican AIDS Commission of Serbia**, **National AIDS Office** to implement a project on the links between women's empowerment and HIV. In **Moldova**, UNDP and the **UNAIDS Country Office** are supporting the gathering of strategic information to inform the national response.

LATIN AMERICA

Four of the five PAF projects in **Latin America** (in **Chile**, **Colombia**, **Costa Rica** and **Nicaragua**) address men who have sex with men. Each of these projects includes measures to address stigma and discrimination that affect sexual minorities and people living with HIV. For example, UNDP in **Chile** and three national partners are in the process of establishing a measurement tool to develop a baseline for stigma and discrimination to monitor trends. Results will inform a strategy to reduce stigma. In **Nicaragua**, the Joint Team led by the **UNAIDS Country Office** is seeking to strengthen the gender perspective in public policy and supporting a communication campaign which aims to address sexuality-related taboos. In **Colombia**, UNDP is working with select municipalities to promote positive attitudes towards transgender communities.

In **Costa Rica**, WHO is identifying gaps in the AIDS response and inequalities that increase women's and gay, bisexual, lesbian and transgender persons' vulnerability to HIV.

In **Panama**, the **Panamanian Association for Family Planning**, the **Ministry of Health** and UNHCR are providing services in two border towns, focusing on sex workers. The project involves sensitizing the border patrol/police force and communities in relation to HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and the prevention of violence against women.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

In the **East and Southern Africa** Region, **Lesotho**, **Malawi**, **Mozambique**, **Rwanda**, and **Zimbabwe** are implementing projects on gender through the PAF mechanism.

In **Rwanda**, UNIFEM is partnering with the **Rwanda Women's Network** to implement a project on land rights and HIV education. The project addresses the links between lack of knowledge of law on one hand, and vulnerability to gender-based violence and HIV infection on the other hand.

UNFPA is intensifying efforts to support the Government of **Lesotho** in addressing gender-based violence in the context of HIV through communication and awareness campaigns.

In **Mozambique**, WHO is working to strengthen the capacity of the **Mozambique Access to Treatment Movement (MATRAM)**, a community based organization created by PLHIV to integrate gender and human rights in their work.

In **Zimbabwe**, the **UNAIDS Country Office** and UNDP are supporting the **Zimbabwe National AIDS Commission** and **Zimbabwe AIDS Network** to strengthen the national response to HIV by training National AIDS Commission officers on gender responsive planning, management, monitoring and evaluation.

UNFPA is implementing the Stepping Stones methodology in **Sudan** and **Malawi**. In **Sudan**, the AIDS programme at the state level (in **Darfur**) and several academic institutions are using Stepping Stones to integrate HIV and reduce the risk of gender-based violence in the region. In **Malawi**, the **Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA)** is implementing the Stepping Stones methodology in six districts and raising awareness around violence against women.

There are seven countries in **West and Central Africa** implementing PAF projects: **Burkina Faso**, **Gambia**, **Guinea**, **Guinea-Bissau**, **Ghana**, **Mali** and **Togo**. Three of these countries are gathering evidence to better inform approaches to address the needs and rights of men who have sex with men. In **Ghana**, the **Center for Popular Education and Human Rights** and UNDP are partnering to map sexual networks of men who have sex with men and sex workers and to create a "safe and stigma free" drop-in centre for men who have sex with men. In **Guinea Bissau**, WHO, along with the **Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais (INEP)** and EDNA, a regional civil society organization based in **Dakar**, is conducting behavioral research among men who have sex with men to inform the devel-

UPDATE: 'VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND HIV: WHAT WORKS?' UNAIDS, GENEVA, 27-29 OCTOBER

Efforts to end violence against women and girls can be enhanced by looking to the response to AIDS as an opportunity to reduce intimate partner and sexual violence and to develop comprehensive responses to gender-based violence. These are key elements of the Joint Action for Results: UNAIDS Outcome Framework's nine priority areas. In that respect, the WHO, on behalf of the UNAIDS family, convened a meeting of experts and practitioners whose work focuses on understanding and intervening on the linkages between violence against women and HIV. The meeting, which took place in Geneva from 27 to 29 October, 2009, reviewed programmatic interventions and strategies that address the intersection of HIV and violence against women in order to help build consensus and inform UNAIDS and global and national partners on effective strategies for national AIDS programmes. A report which summarizes the key evidence and issues discussed at the meeting is currently being finalized. In addition, a policy brief will capture the draft recommendations made at the meeting.

opment of programs focusing on men who have sex with men. In **Togo**, UNDP is conducting operational research on how to improve access to HIV information and services for men who have sex with men in collaboration with the **National Council for the Control of AIDS**. The **Gambia's** project, led by UNDP in collaboration with **The Gambia Network of AIDS Support Societies**, and other community based groups, aims to enhance skills of women living with HIV and to support positive prevention and disclosure techniques.

Two of the projects in **West and Central Africa** address violence against women. In **Guinea Bissau**, UNFPA and UNICEF in collaboration with the **Ministry of Justice** and several civil society organizations, including the **University Colinas de Boe** and **TOSTAN** (a community based NGO), are building the capacity of community, faith-based, and youth organizations and networks to promote human rights and stop gender-based violence. The project includes a gender assessment of existing national strategies, laws and policies and draft laws outlawing gender-based violence and female genital mutilation. In **Guinea**, the **UNAIDS Country Office**, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNDP, along with **four local partners**, are conducting a study on sex work and gender-based sexual violence.

UNDP is working with women's and other civil society organizations in **Burkina Faso**, **Mali** and **Guinea**, with the aim of strengthening the capacity of these groups.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Five PAF projects related to gender are underway in the region: **UN Joint AIDS Teams** in **Egypt**, **Iran**, **Lebanon**, **Saudi Arabia** and **Sudan** are addressing various thematic areas, including MSM, IDU and sex work. In **Egypt**, UNFPA is working in collaboration with **Al Shehab Institution** and **Refugee Egypt** to intensify and scale up HIV prevention programmes for sex work, including female refugee sex workers.

UNFPA and UNODC are currently working with **national partners** in **Iran** to develop an evidence-informed and gender sensitive model for HIV prevention among IDU and their heterosexual partners.

In **Lebanon**, UNDP and the **National AIDS Programme** are conducting research to better understand the health care needs of MSM and health care providers and gaps in service. The aim is to improve access to services.

In **Saudi Arabia**, WHO and UNDP are working with the **Ministry of Health** to build the capacity of primary health care providers on STI syndromic management and voluntary counseling and testing.

ENHANCING CAPACITIES TO INTEGRATE GENDER INTO AIDS RESPONSES:

Integrating gender concerns into national AIDS responses entails cooperation between government, civil society organizations, donors and the UN system. Toward this end, UNDP is leading an interagency project, designed with the participation of the Expert Group on Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV¹, to develop two resources on women, girls, gender equality and HIV:

A COMPENDIUM OF RESOURCES ON INTEGRATING GENDER INTO NATIONAL AIDS STRATEGIES:

This on-line compendium of resources consolidates, synthesizes and summarizes the most effective and accessible tools, materials and assessments that address the integration of gender into national AIDS strategies. The aim is to enhance advisory support for policy makers and those responsible for implementing programs in this area.

A ROADMAP FOR ASSESSING NATIONAL AIDS RESPONSES:

The roadmap is designed to build and strengthen the experience and contributions of women and girls, and emphasizes women's/girl's empowerment and gender equality in the context of national AIDS responses. The roadmap is an accessible, easy-to-use, step-by-step framework for national policy and programme development to: assess the current national AIDS response; identify gaps in programming and barriers to implementation; and develop an action plan that is evidence-informed and human rights-based.

1. For more information about Expert Group members, please contact Deena Patel (deena.patel@undp.org).

MEET UA NOW! CHAMPIONS:

MRS. ELIZABETH MATAKA AND DR. NAFIS SADIK

Mrs. Elizabeth Mataka and Dr. Nafis Sadik, special Envoys on HIV and AIDS in Africa and Asia-Pacific respectively, have both welcomed UA Now! and expressed their willingness and enthusiasm to participate in launching the projects at country, regional levels. The Envoys will also speak at events organized at the CSW/Beijing + 15 and Vienna meetings.

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