

as of 14 July 2004



Leadership Statement Women leaders

Conveners:

UNIFEM

International Community of Women living with HIV/AIDS (ICW)

International AIDS Women Caucus, Int'l AIDS Society

Thai Women and AIDS Task Force

We, women leaders representing women's groups and forms of leadership worldwide, firmly believe in human dignity and human rights, especially in light to HIV/AIDS responses. All gender and women related issues in the context of HIV/AIDS are interconnected and inter-linked, thus we recognize that all forms of leadership must be included in responses to HIV/AIDS. Women's movements and NGO, particularly organizations and networks of people living with HIV/AIDS, as well as grass roots organizations are playing imperative roles in demonstrating important and effective leaderships in prevention, care and treatment of HIV/AIDS since the beginning of the epidemic. We agree the priority issues pointed out by the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS are key ones in the responses to the epidemic, taking into account that women and girls are increasingly becoming vulnerable.

Each of us individually, as well as collectively commits ourselves to identifying and putting into action practical solutions and ensuring that they are carried through. We also embrace diversity, challenge patriarchy which oppresses us all – irrespective our gender – and we believe that both men and women would benefit from gender equality.

Initiatives such as the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS and Barcelona Bill of Rights or other forms of international mechanisms address issues related to women and HIV/AIDS. However, the implementation of these international instruments requires stronger leadership, pragmatic solutions and actions to respond to the feminization of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The Forum reaffirmed that key issues outlined as priority action by the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, in response to the growing “feminization” of the epidemic. Seven priority issues identified for action by the Global Coalition include:

- 1. preventing HIV infection among women, especially young women*

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Women especially young women and girls, have rights to access youth-friendly, gender sensitive and empowering communication, negotiation and relationship skills, and access to relevant services. Young women's access to such information/ education in the utmost gender-sensitive manners must be ensured. Traditional HIV/AIDS information and education, including messages of "ABC" has been failing on women. Young women's leadership in prevention and responses to HIV/AIDS must also be encouraged and strengthened. It is also important to recognize the needs of young women born with HIV/AIDS, as they are becoming sexually mature.

2. reducing violence against women

Women and girls have rights to live free of all forms of violence. This includes their rights to be free of sexual, physical, and psychological violence from within the home and institutions. Violence against women must be widely recognized as both causes and consequences of HIV/AIDS infection for women. It is also important to de-emphasize the "private-domain" of the violence against women. Women in armed conflict situation vis-à-vis their high vulnerabilities to HIV/AIDS must not be forgotten.

3. protecting the property and inheritance rights of women and girls

Women and girls have the right to property and inheritance. It is imperative to assure the development and implementation of legal mechanisms that protect women's fundamental rights to property and inheritance, irrespective of their HIV status. Economic security of women living with and directly affected by HIV/AIDS cannot be ensured without such legal mechanisms, in addition to their full accesses to other means of economic empowerment.

4. ensuring equal access to care, treatment and support

Women and girls, irrespective of their HIV status, have rights to access to comprehensive health care, treatment and support. The comprehensive health care includes reproductive and sexual health services, ARTs, treatment of opportunistic infections, and psycho-social support. Sensitization of and support for medical service providers, especially with gender sensitivities, must be undertaken in order to reduce stigma and discrimination against women living with HIV/AIDS in the health care system. Leaders should also promote a comprehensive package of care, which expands the concept of care to ensuring food, transport to healthcare facilities, etc., which enhance the well-being of women and girls living with and/or directly affected by HIV/AIDS.

5. supporting and improving women's access to community care, bearing in mind of the women's burden of care

Women and girls have rights to receive care, irrespective of their HIV status. Community and home-based care often imposes women to become the healthcare system for people living with HIV/AIDS at home, bearing burden of care. Leaders should take effective and appropriate measures to ensure that burden of care be equally shared by men and women.

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6. promoting access to women-controlled prevention methods, i.e., microbicides, female condoms

Women and girls have rights to protect themselves from HIV infection. Leaders should allocate sufficient resources and leadership to accelerate the development of female controlled prevention methods, such as microbicides and female condoms.

7. supporting “education for all”, especially for girls

Girls have rights to education. Keeping girls in school/education increases young women’s ability to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS, as well as enabling girls and young women to make informed decision on their sexual lives.

In addition, the Women’s Leadership Forum raised some key issue areas that also require leadership and urgent attention. Some of those are:

a. Women and girls’ sexual and reproductive health/rights

Women and girls, irrespective of their HIV status, have rights to make their fully informed reproductive and sexual choices. Leaders should ensure that their choices be met by safe, accessible and supportive services.

b. Essential and meaningful involvement of women of all ages living with HIV/AIDS in designing, implementing, and monitoring HIV/AIDS responses at all levels

Leaders should ensure meaningful and active involvement of HIV positive women of all ages in decision-making of policies and programmes, accountable programme design and implementation. All policies need to be reviewed on the basis of grassroots experiences, especially those of women living with HIV/AIDS.

c. Involvement of men and boys in reducing women’s vulnerabilities to HIV/AIDS

Men make differences – and their active participation and involvement in reducing women’s vulnerabilities is imperative to curb the epidemic of HIV/AIDS.

d. Ensuring that AIDS money works for women

Mechanisms to monitor gender-sensitivity and accountability in funding HIV/AIDS responses must be put in action. Women’s leadership also must be in place for development of and effective implementation of such mechanisms, so that AIDS money works for women, especially at the community level where needs are the highest.