



Agenda for accelerated country action for women, girls, gender equality and HIV

How civil society, governments and the UN system can together create an effective response

A briefing note for action by communities

An agenda for accelerated country action

In 2009 UNAIDS brought together representatives of women's organizations, positive women's networks, organizations of men working for gender equality, the UN system, governments and academic institutions in order to accelerate country action for women, girls, gender equality and HIV, as requested by the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board. Through a high-level global task force and three working groups, and under the leadership of the UNAIDS Executive Director, these experts developed an Operational Plan for the UNAIDS Action Framework on Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV. Six months later, the Board warmly welcomed this agenda for accelerated country action and called for its immediate roll-out at the country level.

Why is accelerated country action important?

In most societies, women, young women and girls face power imbalances, unequal opportunities, discrimination and violations of their human rights, including widespread violence inside and outside of the home. These factors can be a consequence of HIV and can make women, young women and girls more vulnerable to HIV infection, for example if they prevent them from negotiating when and how they have sex. In addition, women and girls commonly carry the burden of caring for the sick and for orphaned children.

Nearly 30 years into the HIV epidemic, HIV programmes and policies do not sufficiently address the specific realities and needs of women and girls, or fail to respect and protect their human rights. For example, service providers often treat women disrespectfully and reinforce stigma. Few HIV services provide essential sexual and reproductive health care and HIV-positive women are often

pressurized, or even forced, not to have children as a requirement for AIDS treatment.

UNAIDS and its partners believe that it is now time to overcome these injustices and use AIDS responses to improve the lives of women and girls. UNAIDS, together with UNIFEM, civil society, governments and development partners, has therefore developed an agenda for accelerated country action.

This community brief introduces the Operational Plan to communities and civil society organizations, in particular women's rights advocates, networks of women living with HIV and organizations of men and boys working for gender equality.

Who is the agenda for accelerated country action for?

The agenda for accelerated country action provides guidance for UN agencies at the country level (UN joint teams on AIDS) on actions to be taken in collaboration with governments, civil society and development partners to make national AIDS policies and programmes more responsive to the specific needs, and more protective of the rights, of women and girls.

Civil society is especially important because it often has close relationships with women and girls, including at the community level, in-depth understanding of the realities of women's lives and the local situation, and the skills and experience to design and carry out effective programmes.

What is the agenda for accelerated country action about?

The agenda for accelerated country action is built around three main recommendations:

1. Jointly produce information on and a better understanding of the specific needs and rights of women and girls in the context of HIV, so that national AIDS programmes can respond more effectively.
2. Turn political commitments into increased resources and effective actions, so that HIV programmes better respond to the needs of women and girls.
3. Mobilize leaders to create safer environments in which women and girls can feel empowered to exercise their human rights.

The agenda for accelerated country action identifies key actions to support women and girls to claim their rights and to meet their needs related to HIV. These actions build on campaigns and initiatives already in place, such as the UN Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign.

There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable.

UN SECRETARY-GENERAL BAN KI-MOON

The time frame of the agenda for accelerated country action is January 2010 to December 2014 and its implementation will make a key contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

What can civil society organizations do?

Civil society organizations can support the implementation of the agenda for accelerated country action by advocating with governments, the UN and donors, providing technical support, developing model programmes and research, monitoring progress and holding the various stakeholders and themselves accountable. Key actions include:

- Collect and use information—in five-year age groups (especially 10–14, 15–19, 20–24)—on how HIV affects women and girls, particularly those living with HIV, and on how programmes affect women’s and girls’ human rights and health outcomes.
- Analyse how cultural factors, stigma and discrimination, poverty, and social and legal barriers prevent women and girls from exercising their human rights and make them more vulnerable to HIV and to the consequences associated with it.
- Monitor implementation of national, regional and global commitments by governments related to women, girls, gender equality and HIV, including through the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and use the information for advocacy and to hold governments accountable.
- Support ‘know your rights’ campaigns and the provision of free and accessible legal aid services to enable women and girls to exercise their rights.
- Incorporate into national AIDS programmes actions to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, based on improved data on violence against women and girls, for example through the UN Secretary-General’s UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign.
- Ensure implementation of a national minimum package of integrated services for sexual and reproductive health, HIV and tuberculosis.
- Support women, especially young women and girls, to demand sexual and reproductive health rights, including safe and consensual sexual relations and increased access to sexual and reproductive health services, information and supplies, including female condoms.
- Educate men and boys about a woman’s right to negotiate whether and how sex takes place.
- Advocate for and support nationwide access to comprehensive sexuality education that promotes gender equality, human rights and skills-building for negotiation of sexual relations.
- Promote broad social movements to reduce stigma and discrimination and to advance women’s rights.
- Support microfinance and social protection schemes that strengthen women’s economic positions and that reduce their vulnerability to HIV.
- Engage men and boys and address social norms about gender and sexual relationships in ways that reduce violence, address stigma

and discrimination, and provide the foundation for gender equality.

- Advocate for quotas or targets for women with the necessary expertise to participate in Country Coordinating Mechanisms (at least 40% of positions).
- Partner with political, religious and other leaders to establish common advocacy messages for policy and for the protection of the human rights of women and girls.

What are the next steps for civil society?

UN joint teams on AIDS in each country are expected to discuss with the government, civil society, especially networks of women living with HIV and women's groups, and development partners which actions are most important and urgent. The agenda for accelerated country action encourages civil society to partner with the UN joint team and others by taking the following steps:

First. Civil society organizations come together to review the agenda for accelerated country action and agree upon the priority actions that are most relevant to their context. Based on these, they identify the relevant skills, knowledge and resources available to support implementation.

Second. Civil society organizations collectively contact the UN joint team on AIDS agencies to begin a dialogue with the national AIDS authority and relevant ministries, for example the ministry of education, on priorities for implementation of the Operational Plan and on how to move forward.

Third. Civil society organizations together with the UN joint team on AIDS, governments and development partners jointly develop and implement a programme of action, including assigning responsibilities to each of the partners, with capacity-building as needed.

Fourth. Civil society organizations together with the UN joint team on AIDS, governments and development partners jointly monitor implementation and assess results, for mutual accountability.

Where can civil society organizations get support?

Civil society organizations can contact the UNAIDS office in their country. Additional tools and information can be accessed online at www.unaids.org/en/PolicyAndPractice/Gender/default.asp or by contacting genderandhiv@unaids.org.

“Gender equality must become part of our DNA—at the core of all of our actions. This will require a social revolution. Addressing gender inequality as a human right and development imperative constitutes a main plank of this social revolution. This is not only necessary for social justice but also for achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.”

Michel Sidibé, UNAIDS Executive Director, International Women's Day 2009