



HIV/AIDS and Gender: Fact Sheet Overview

Gender is an inextricable part of the HIV/AIDS equation.

Young women are disproportionately vulnerable to infection; elderly women and young girls are disproportionately affected by the burden of care-giving in the epidemic's wake.

Gender inequality and poor respect for the human rights of women and girls are key factors in the HIV/AIDS epidemic: both from the point of view of effectiveness and from the call for social justice, HIV/AIDS programming must take account of the gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS and its processes.

This resource pack sets out the latest information on HIV/AIDS and its impacts, and makes recommendations for effective programme and policy options.

The Operational Guide explains how gender inequality is driving the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the need for a rights-based approach both to improve responses to HIV/AIDS and to protect and promote the rights of subordinated groups. It provides a conceptual framework for programme implementation from a rights perspective, and carefully constructed tools and checklists to help development practitioners respond strategically to the gender-HIV/AIDS nexus.

The Fact Sheets aim to provide policy makers with concise information about gender related aspects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. They deal with core facts and issues in thematic areas and are underpinned by an analysis which clarifies how gender issues are fuelling the crisis. Each theme presents a self-contained set of issues and recommendations and many of the themes are interlinked. All of them are connected by a concern to promote a gender-enlightened and comprehensive response to HIV/AIDS and its impacts.

1. The fact sheet on **HIV/AIDS, Gender and Global and International Commitments** gives an overview of the commitments relevant to gender and HIV/AIDS made by UN member states. It draws attention to the articles which are particularly relevant as advocacy tools and which have direct implications for HIV/AIDS policy and programmes.

2. The **HIV/AIDS, Gender and Human Rights** fact sheet elaborates on how observance of human rights can help to address the gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS and on the international human rights instruments and key documents available to advance this approach. It draws attention to the fact that HIV/AIDS responses should include the promotion of participation and empowerment of women such that they, as citizens, can collectively demand and obtain their rights.

3. The **HIV/AIDS, Gender and Education** fact sheet discusses both how education systems suffer under the impact of HIV/AIDS and how education can play a major role in addressing HIV/AIDS and in impact mitigation. It highlights how gender relations operate, often to the disadvantage of girls, in educational contexts, and how educational initiatives can promote gender equality and HIV/AIDS prevention.

4. The **HIV/AIDS, Gender and Young People** fact sheet draws attention to how the lower social status of young people interacts with gender inequalities to enhance vulnerability to HIV/AIDS amongst young girls. Half of all new adult infections now occur amongst 15-24 year olds. Young people are especially vulnerable, but they are also the key to controlling HIV/AIDS in the future.

5. The fact sheet on **HIV/AIDS, Gender and Male Participation** addresses men's roles in the spread of HIV, including stereotypes of masculinity which encourage sexual aggression and predation and endanger both themselves and their sexual partners. It draws attention to successful initiatives to involve men that emphasise positive aspects of masculinity such as leadership and courage. It calls for interventions to engage men as friends, community members, caring partners and fathers in the response to HIV/AIDS and the challenge to gender relations that it must be based in.

6. Gender-based violence takes a variety of forms and is a major reason why women are more vulnerable to HIV infection than men. The **HIV/AIDS, Gender and Violence Against Women** fact sheet spells out some of these forms and the contexts in which they occur. Violent sex increases HIV transmission because vaginal abrasions facilitate entry of the virus. In addition to this, violence or the threat of violence is often key in maintaining or



exacerbating relationships of power and subordination between men and women which are at the core of HIV spread. Tackling this situation requires a comprehensive approach rooted in community and national action for the promotion of women's rights.

7. Conflict situations expose affected people to additional forms of violence, and to a higher risk of HIV infection. The **HIV/AIDS, Gender and Conflict Situations** fact sheet clarifies the factors behind this increased risk and alerts policy makers to ways in which humanitarian assistance programmes can incorporate HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation measures such that interventions recognise women's particular vulnerabilities and support their rights.

8. The prevention of mother-to-child transmission is an important programme initiative traditionally focussed on the prevention of transmission from HIV-positive pregnant women to their babies. **HIV/AIDS, Gender and the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission** highlights new calls to broaden this area of work to include HIV prevention among HIV-negative pregnant women and young women, the prevention of unintended pregnancies among HIV-positive women, and the treatment and support of HIV-infected women and their families.

9. Commercial sex workers have been the focus of many HIV/AIDS interventions, as evidence shows that preventing transmission amongst those with numerous sexual partners can help prevent spread into the wider community. The **HIV/AIDS, Gender and Sex Work** fact sheet draws on this experience to elaborate how gender relations resonate in sex work contexts, and often mitigate against the ability of sex workers to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS. Successful sex-worker focussed HIV prevention programmes have taken into account the contexts in which sex workers work and comprehensively addressed STI treatment, condom promotion and sex worker empowerment issues.

10. The **HIV/AIDS, Gender and Microbicides** fact sheet highlights that microbicides are promising transmission prevention substances which have significant potential in particular for women's ability to protect themselves. They are as yet underdeveloped in terms of medical research, and the fact sheet calls for further effectiveness trials.

11. The **HIV/AIDS, Gender and Male and Female Condoms** fact sheet explains that both male and female condom use are mediated by gender relations, which must be addressed in condom promotion initiatives. Such initiatives should in particular include work to strengthen negotiation skills for condom use amongst young people and women.

12. Gender affects the world of work because people take their gender identities to work, and the workplace mirrors gender inequalities present in wider society. The **HIV/AIDS, Gender and the World of Work** fact sheet identifies types of work situation and groups of people within them that may have higher risks of HIV infection, and the gender relations which exacerbate risk. It provides specific recommendations for workplace policy on sexual harassment and sex education.

13. Care-giving in HIV/AIDS affected households carries an enormous opportunity cost in terms of time and energy, almost always for women. The **HIV/AIDS, Gender and the Care Economy** fact sheet expresses this also as an 'empowerment' cost, contributing to deepening poverty in HIV/AIDS affected households, and calls for urgent social protection benefits to compensate for carers' loss of income, as well as campaigns to encourage change in gender relations in the household.

14. The **HIV/AIDS, Gender and Food Security** fact sheet exposes how agricultural livelihoods and households are affected, focussing on how HIV/AIDS impacts on the cycle of food and nutrition, health, agricultural labour and food production. Women's roles in food production and in care-giving are critical in this cycle, and the trade-offs they face in HIV affected households are instrumental to the spiral of poverty the disease can fuel.



15. The **HIV/AIDS, Gender and Rural Development** fact sheet chronicles the impacts of the epidemic on rural economies and agricultural production, despite a widespread myth that HIV/AIDS does not affect rural populations. It shows how gender inequalities fuel the epidemic in rural areas, and how the epidemic often exacerbates gender inequalities in workloads, poverty and rights to land. When survival strategies include transactional or commercial sex, an especially vicious cycle of risk and impact is produced. Rural women's empowerment is an essential aspect of HIV/AIDS responses.

16. The final fact sheet, **Gender-Sensitive HIV/AIDS Indicators for Monitoring and Evaluation**, gives examples of gender-sensitive indicators for assessing the inputs, outputs and processes of HIV/AIDS programmes. Without the systematic use of indicators such as these feeding into the programme on a continual basis, programme effects on the gender issues that fuel the epidemic will remain a subject of speculation.





HIV/AIDS, Gender, and Global and International Commitments

The complex relationship between gender, health, development, and socio-economic status means that gender, and women and men's vulnerabilities to HIV/AIDS must be addressed as cross-cutting issues, not only through the health sector but also through education, the media, and public policy. Although not every United Nations convention, declaration, or programme of action specifically addresses the issues of gender inequity and HIV/AIDS, nearly all of them address some aspect of health, human rights, or women's rights; and all are inextricably related. Listed here in reverse chronology are the United Nations declarations and programmes of action which deal specifically with gender, or gender and HIV/AIDS. Each document is different, and carries with it different legal and policy implications for United Nations Member States.

Collectively, the documents address such diverse issues as:

- **GENDER** - gender stereotypes; gender-based violence; male involvement; women's empowerment; sexual exploitation; gender mainstreaming.
- **HIV/AIDS** - vulnerability to transmission; HIV testing and counselling; sexual and reproductive health services; treatment; access to and development of barrier methods, drugs and other therapies; people living with HIV/AIDS; behaviour change; prevention strategies; access to information and education; caregiving; mother-to-child transmission; discrimination and stigma; sexuality education.
- **POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CLIMATE** - socio-economic status and poverty; age; ethnicity; political commitments; the economic impact of HIV; emergency and conflict situations; refugee and internally displaced populations; international humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping; policy and decision-making; laws and traditional practices; information and data collection and analysis.

Taken together, these documents represent a comprehensive and powerful articulation of commitment by Member States to addressing and eliminating gender inequity and HIV/AIDS, a commitment which must be honoured and fulfilled. It is essential for policy makers and those seeking to engage in policy advocacy to understand the international and national legal frameworks within which their interventions are structured. The links below provide access to the full text of each of the documents:

UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS Declaration of Commitment

Date: 2001

Who made the commitment: Heads of State of UN Member Countries.

Website: www.unaids.org/UNGASS/index.html

By far the most comprehensive effort to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the **Declaration of Commitment** from the UNGASS sets out a number of policy and programmatic resolutions and recommendations – many of which address both gender and women's vulnerability.

Article 14 of the Declaration stresses "...that gender equality and the empowerment of women are fundamental elements in the reduction of the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS".

This and other articles (see articles 4, 6, 23, 37, 47, 53, 54, 59-62, 68, 75, 78, and 94) carry with them significant gender-based implications for policies and programmes which attempt to address this global crisis.

Millennium Declaration and Development Goals

Date: 2000

Who made the commitment: Heads of State of UN Member Countries.

Website: www.un.org/millenniumgoals/index.html

Millennium Development Goal # 3 - Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women Target - Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.



Millennium Development Goal # 6 - Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases **Target** - Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The **Millennium Declaration** also commits states to “promot[ing] gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable”.

On more than one occasion (for example, International Women’s Day), Secretary General Kofi Annan has stated that Goal #3 is essential for the achievement of all the other Millennium Development Goals (www.un.org/events/women/iwd/2003/sgmessage.html).

World Education Forum

Date: 2000

Who made the commitment: Governments, Organization, Agencies and Groups in Attendance.

Website: www.unesco.org/education/efa/wef_2000/index.shtml

In Article 7, Paragraph ii of the Dakar Programme for Action, the participants in the forum made a commitment to ensure “...that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality”.

In Article 8, Paragraph vii, participants further committed to “implement as a matter of urgency education programmes and actions to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic”.

Fourth World Conference on Women (“Beijing”) Declaration and Platform for Action

Date: 1995

Who made the commitment: State representatives who attended the conference. The declaration and platform were subsequently endorsed by UN Member States during a General Assembly.

Website: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/

Strategic objective C.3 - Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health issues.

The Beijing Platform for Action, through Strategic Objective C3, addresses the issue of Gender and HIV/AIDS quite comprehensively, setting out 16 “Actions to be Taken” in order to increase the gender-sensitivity of programmes and projects which address HIV/AIDS.

Beijing +5 (2000) - www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/beijing+5.htm

Article 3 of the Beijing +5 Outcome Document re-states the importance of integrating a gender perspective into the HIV/AIDS response, highlights continuing problems relating to the epidemic, and recommends solutions for states and the international community.

International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action

Date: 1994

Who made the commitment: State representatives who attended the conference. The programme was subsequently endorsed by UN Member States during a General Assembly.

Website: www.unfpa.org/icpd/icpd.htm

In Article C of Chapter 7 (on Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Health), the ICPD Programme of Action addresses sexually transmitted diseases and the prevention of HIV from the perspective of women’s vulnerability to the epidemic, setting out key recommendations for addressing HIV through reproductive health services.

In article E on Adolescents, the Programme sets out how governments and civil society can work to meet the distinct HIV-prevention needs of adolescents.



ICPD +5 (1999) - www.unfpa.org/icpd5/icpd5.htm

World Conference on Human Rights Declaration and Programme of Action ("Vienna Declaration")

Date: 1993

Who made the commitment: UN Member States.

Website: www.unhchr.ch/html/menu5/wchr.htm

Though the Declaration does not mention either gender equity or HIV/AIDS specifically, it "...recognizes the importance of the enjoyment by women of the highest standard of physical and mental health throughout their life span" (Article 41), and makes several other significant statements relating to women's human rights and violence against women.

Vienna +5 (1998) - www.unhchr.ch/html/50th/vdparev.htm

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Date: 1989

Who made the commitment: UN Member States.

Website: www.unicef.org/crc/

Though the Convention does not mention either gender equity or HIV/AIDS specifically, it recognizes "...the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health". Furthermore, it commits States Parties to ensuring "...that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services" (Article 24).

In particular, Section 2(f) of Article 24 commits States Parties to developing "...preventive health care, guidance for parents and family planning education and services", which has broad-reaching implications for the issue of HIV/AIDS.

Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Date: 1979

Who made the commitment: UN Member States.

Website: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/conven.htm

Though the Convention does not mention either gender equity or HIV/AIDS specifically, Article 12 of the Convention commits States Parties to "...take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning". Article 12 is also being used by a number of countries to call for HIV/AIDS prevention and care services.

The **CEDAW Committee** has also released a set of *General Recommendations on HIV/AIDS* (1990)

Website: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recomm.htm



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