



WOMEN, GIRLS AND HIV: DELIVERING RESULTS

Update on Universal Access for Women and Girls Now!

MARCH 2010

2010 represents an important milestone for universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support and the human rights of women and girls. This year marks the fifteenth anniversary of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, where UN Member States adopted the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. The Beijing Conference identified twelve “critical areas of concern” (see Box 1), which are all key to accelerating universal access for women and girls. World leaders are now just five years away from commitments set out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (see Box 2), including the 2015 target of having halted and begun to reverse the spread of HIV. The significance of these obligations is not simply rhetorical - the ability to access quality HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is a matter of life or death for many women and girls around the globe, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, the region which is home to the majority of women living with HIV. Hence, a sense of urgency must underpin efforts to support countries in delivering results for women and girls.

The UN family has significantly stepped up its efforts to meet the needs of women and girls in the context of HIV. UNDP’s *Gender Equality Strategy (2008-2011)*, affirms an understanding of gender equality as an irreducible condition for inclusive, democratic, violence-free and sustainable development. 2009 witnessed the roll-out of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria’s *Gender Equality Strategy*. In addition, in 2009, the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board endorsed *UNAIDS Action Framework: Addressing Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV* and the *Agenda for Accelerating Country Action for Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV*. These strategies provide key opportunities for accelerating

policy and programming to: (1) empower women and girls; (2) support their leadership; and (3) achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support and the MDGs for women and girls.

This is the backdrop against which UNDP is leading a UNAIDS and UNIFEM effort to implement Universal Access for Women and Girls Now! (UA Now!). A two-year US\$1.57 million initiative, UA Now! is being implemented in India and nine countries in East and Southern Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zambia). The initiative seeks to accelerate progress towards achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for women and girls.

BOX 1: THE BEIJING PLATFORM OF ACTION

Adopted in 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action did not specifically address HIV. However, it did identify key areas of concern that are all central to scaling-up access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for women and girls. These twelve critical areas of concern are key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, especially for women and girls. The areas of concern are as follows:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) women and poverty, | 7) women and power in decision-making, |
| 2) education and training for women and girls, | 8) institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, |
| 3) women and health, | 9) human rights of women, |
| 4) violence against women, | 10) women and the media, |
| 5) women and conflict, | 11) women and the environment, and |
| 6) women and the economy, | 12) the girl child. |

ABOUT UNIVERSAL ACCESS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS NOW!: UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS AND TAKING ACTION

UA Now! provides support to accelerate country-driven processes for addressing barriers to universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for women and girls. UNDP is providing support to countries to assess, analyse and develop action plans to address key barriers and gaps in delivering results for women and girls, including through addressing the gender-specific rights and needs of diverse groups of women and girls. The project's conceptualization, implementation, and learning aspects are guided by three principles: 1) evidence-informed and country-driven planning; 2) meaningful involvement of women living with HIV and multiple stakeholders; and 3) building synergies with relevant national, regional and international HIV, gender, human rights and development policies and processes.

Currently being rolled-out in India, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zambia, UA Now! projects are driven by country teams led by an implementing partner who is a civil society organization or a national AIDS authority. Country Task Teams include representatives of Joint UN Teams on AIDS, government agencies, national AIDS authorities, civil society organizations, including women's organizations and organizations of people living with HIV, traditional leaders, and others.

ENSURING AIDS STRATEGIES, HEALTH SECTOR PLANS, AND POVERTY REDUCTION PLANS MEET THE NEEDS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

Guided by the *UNAIDS Action Framework: Addressing Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV*, several UA Now! projects focus on integrating the concerns of women and girls into national AIDS strategies, health sector plans and poverty reduction strategies and plans. For example, in Zambia, the National AIDS Council (NAC) is working in partnership with women's organizations, UNDP, other UNAIDS Cosponsors and the UNAIDS Secretariat to expand support for integrating gender into the country's *National AIDS Strategic Framework 2011-2015* (NASF). The NAC has recruited a gender advisor to ensure that NASF has a strong focus on women's and girls' rights and that it responds to the specific needs of women and girls.

Where plans with strong gender components exist, implementing partners concentrate on ensuring these commitments are translated into action. Kenya's implementing partner, Liverpool VCT, Care and Treatment (LVCT) is focusing on addressing risks that may undermine the country's ability to meet the gender and universal access commitments articulated in Kenya's third *National AIDS Strategic Plan* (KNASP) III and the country's first *National Plan of Operations to Accelerate Momentum toward Universal Access for Women and Girls*. LVCT has identified the following key risks: 1) limited knowledge and poor understanding among stakeholders and imple-

BOX 2: GENDER EQUALITY, HIV AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS)

"...Where we see progress towards the MDGs lagging the most is often where the needs and status of women and girls are accorded low priority."

UNDP Administrator Ms. Helen Clark, 15 February 2010

In 2000, UN Member States agreed on a set of core, time-bound goals and indicators. These include commitments to ending poverty and hunger, attaining universal education, achieving gender equality, ensuring child health and maternal health, combating HIV, ensuring environmental sustainability, and building global partnerships for development. The 2005 UN World Summit reaffirmed gender equality (MDG 3) not only as a development goal in itself, but as a means and a pre-requisite to achieving all of the other MDGs.

Achieving gender equality is particularly important in relation to MDG 6: Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases. It is impossible to halt or begin to reverse HIV by 2015, or to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, without empowering women and girls or addressing their specific needs in the context of HIV.

menters of the gender dimensions of the epidemic and implications for the response, 2) lack of full appreciation of the nexus between universal access and MDG targets for women and girls, and 3) limited capacities to support the implementation of gender-related activities designed in KNASP III. Using UA Now! and other funds, LVCT is currently implementing a three-pronged program to mitigate these risks, employing a number of key strategies: 1) capacity strengthening on gender and HIV for selected civil society and public sector implementers in two high prevalence regions, 2) commissioning assessments of gender-related factors that drive HIV and the effects on women and girls, and 3) developing national guidelines and tools on how to implement gender-responsive programs across different levels of the national response in order to facilitate universal access for women and girls in Kenya.

INFLUENCING NATIONAL PROCESSES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

Even where integrating gender into AIDS strategies and poverty reduction plans is not the sole focus of UA Now! projects, there is a recognition of the importance of influencing such strategies in order to improve impact and sustainability. In Ethiopia, for example, the Federal HIV Prevention and Control Office (FHPCO) is conducting an assessment of barriers to universal access for women and girls. While FHPCO will use the findings of the assessment to develop an action plan to address key barriers, the project also aims to influence the *National AIDS Strategy and Plan*, the third *Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (2011-2015)* and the *Health Sector Development Plan IV (2011-2015)* to address the needs and rights of women and girls in the context of HIV.

Rwanda's UA Now! project, which supports women and girls who are survivors of gender-based violence and those who face the loss of property due to discriminatory customs and norms, is contributing to meeting the priorities set in *Rwanda's Economic and Poverty Reduction Strategy*. These include improving access to legal aid, including for women and men living with or affected by HIV.

UA Now! in India emphasizes the importance of contributing to on-going national planning processes. Implemented by the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), the project builds on the findings of the midterm review of India's *National AIDS Control Project (NACP) III*. Key gaps identified include loss to follow up of women on HIV treatment, the need to expand coverage of prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV, integration of gender into targeted HIV prevention programs, and addressing women's inheritance and property rights. UA Now! learning will contribute to the design and development of India's *National AIDS Control Project IV*.

IMPROVING HIV SERVICES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Several UA Now! projects are focusing on improving services for women and girls so they can benefit from HIV programs. In Rwanda, for example, the Forum for Activists against AIDS Scourge (FAAS) is working to increase protection from gender-based violence and awareness of laws protecting property rights for women and girls, and to restore justice for survivors of violence. FAAS established a legal aid clinic in Kigali and is providing paralegal services in several parts of the country. Specifically, UA Now! in Rwanda is 1) empowering women economically through facilitating access to land



Consultation with women living with HIV in Malawi where the Coalition of Women Living with HIV/AIDS is implementing UA Now!

and property, including for women who lost their partners to AIDS, 2) strengthening the capacity of women to negotiate matters related to reproductive health and human rights, and 3) empowering women living with HIV to join support groups and other associations (with their partners) to facilitate and support access to HIV treatment.

In Madagascar, Action Socio Sanitaire Organisation Secours (ASOS)—a national civil society organization working in seventeen of the country's twenty-two regions on capacity building, health, and social development—is developing and implementing an action plan to address the key barriers to accessing HIV services for women and girls in regions with high HIV prevalence.

EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS

While empowering women and girls and promoting gender equality animate the work of all UA Now! projects, the projects in Namibia, Malawi and Rwanda emphasize capacity strengthening as a means to improve access to HIV-related services for women and girls. In Namibia, the Legal Assistance Center (LAC) empowers women and girls to access HIV prevention and treatment services without fear of gender-based violence, stigma, or discrimination. In March 2010, LAC trained 125 women and girls in rural parts of Namibia. Future capacity building will cover the rest of Namibia's thirteen political regions. Through its advocacy with traditional leaders, LAC addresses customary laws that render women vulnerable to HIV infection. LAC organized two workshops in February 2010 with multiple stakeholders on identifying and addressing barriers to universal access for women and girls in Namibia.

In Rwanda, FAAS is training judges, advocates, prosecutors and the police to ensure that the claims of women and girls, including those living with HIV are properly addressed. Training of community leaders and paralegals will follow, with the aim of integrating gender into community-level HIV-related programs.

The Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA) in Malawi is improving women's access to HIV treatment and reproductive health services through its work to address gender-based violence, stigma and discrimination. Using the Stepping Stones methodology, the project engages participatory learning approaches to build women's knowledge, risk awareness and communication skills. In January and February 2010, COWLHA organized stakeholder meetings in each of the eight UA Now! focus districts. The project was applauded by various stakeholders, and generated interest among the police at the victim support units and among district monitoring and evaluation officers. COWLHA is conducting a baseline survey on gender-based violence and HIV related stigma and discrimination, and plans to publish the findings in a report.

SOUTH – SOUTH LEARNING AND EXPANDING PARTNERSHIPS

Universal Access Now! aims to expand partnerships between the UN system and multiple stakeholders, including women's organizations, and to facilitate South-South learning. UNDP is working closely with the World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA), and other partners to carry out several global level activities. These include an inter-generational dialogue at the 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women/Beijing + 15 meetings in New York in March 2010; and a satellite session at the XVIII International AIDS Conference in Vienna in July 2010. The aim is to strengthen global consensus on the need to accelerate action toward achieving universal access and the MDGs for women and girls.

To facilitate South-South learning and capacity strengthening, UNDP and the World YWCA, in consultation with the UN Interagency Working Group on Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV, will organize a meeting in November 2010. At the meeting, all UA Now! partners will have an opportunity to reflect, share and learn from experiences across the ten UA Now! countries.

UA NOW! CHAMPIONS

Ms. Elizabeth Mataka, UN Special Envoy on AIDS in Africa and Dr. Nafis Sadik, UN Special Envoy on AIDS in Asia Pacific have both welcomed UA Now! and are championing the project. They will be taking part in UA Now! activities in New York and Vienna, and will also take part in the global learning and reflection meeting.



© UNAIDS
Ms. Elizabeth Mataka, UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa



© UNAIDS
Dr. Nafis Sadik, UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific

BOX 3: GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGIES

UNDP's *Empowered and Equal: Gender Equality Strategy (2008-2011)* emphasizes the agency's support for governments to achieve gender responsive capacity strengthening across UNDP's four focus areas (poverty reduction and the achievement of the MDGs, democratic governance, crisis prevention and recovery and environmental and sustainable development). The strategy affirms UNDP's support to governments to achieve: 1) gender-sensitive government policy and planning systems and financial frameworks, 2) strengthened capacities of women to participate in policy, planning, reporting, and monitoring and evaluation programmes, and 3) greater availability and use of gender relevant data. The strategy pays specific attention to reducing gender-based violence as a matter of human rights and because of its negative impact on achieving the MDGs.

The *Global Fund's Strategy for Ensuring Gender Equality in the Response to HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (2009)* explores ways in which the Global Fund can encourage a positive bias in funding towards programs and activities that address gender inequalities and strengthen the AIDS response for women and girls through: 1) Ensuring that the Global Fund's policies, procedures and structures support programs that address gender inequality, 2) establishing and strengthening partnerships that address gender inequalities, 3) developing a robust communications and advocacy strategy that promotes the gender equality strategy and encourages programming for women, girls, men and boys, and 4) providing leadership externally and internally by supporting and giving voice to the gender equality strategy.

The *UNAIDS Action Framework: Addressing Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV (2009)* and the *Agenda for Accelerated Country Action for Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV (2009)* focus on three areas where the UNAIDS Cosponsors, Secretariat, and UNIFEM can bring specific and unique contributions: 1) strengthening strategic guidance and support to national partners to know the gender dimensions of the HIV epidemic and responses, 2) assisting countries to ensure that national HIV and development strategies and associated budgets address the specific needs of women and girls, and 3) advocacy, capacity strengthening and mobilization of resources to address the needs of women and girls in the context of HIV. They emphasize the key role of multi-stakeholder partnerships, and operate within the context of UN support for gender equality, HIV and sexual and reproductive health and human rights.

Cover Image Credits:

The image to the left is courtesy of USAID.
The image in the middle is courtesy of Trevor Samson / World Bank.
The image to the right is courtesy of UNAIDS.