

**Regional Preparatory Meeting for Africa on Women and Health**  
**Moderator report**

**Session 2: Women, girls and HIV/AIDS**  
*Scaling up efforts to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa*

Stemming from discussions were the following key points and recommendations for consideration:

1. Empowerment women and girls - equal legal rights, education and employment opportunities, to address their socio-economic vulnerabilities to HIV
2. Strengthen synergies between aids response and other MDGs - integration of HIV services with family planning, sexual and reproductive health services (i.e. PMTCT)
3. Engage boys and men in changing gender stereotypes, addressing violence against women and achieving gender equality
4. Ensure a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder response to HIV - engagement of all sectors and a diversity of stakeholders supported by strong political commitment/leadership.
5. Sustainable funding, including through domestic sources, with particular attention to adequate funding for programs for women.

Several crucial issues were highlighted during the session, including:

Detailed country experiences that clearly demonstrated that gender inequality is driving the epidemic among women and girls, who bear the disproportionate burden of the disease in Africa. Multiple examples were given of how the lack of economic, social and legal autonomy increases vulnerability of women and girls to HIV, and affects access to and utilisation of sexual and reproductive health services such as family planning, PMTCT, female (and male) condom use, HIV counselling and testing, and promotes violence against women, stigma and discrimination.

The discussion also revealed some critical ingredients to help reduce the socio-economic vulnerability of women and girls. It was made clear that a multisectoral approach is an essential element, whereby an effective HIV response must go beyond the health sector, including but not limited to ministries of gender, family, social affairs and education, as well as legislation and law enforcement. An effective response must also bring together a diversity of stakeholders, including young people, women, private sector, civil society and religious leaders. Strong political commitment and leadership at the highest level is essential to support these efforts.

It was made clear that enhanced synergies across different sectors and partners would help in the achievement of more comprehensive HIV, family planning, sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls and ultimately, the achievement of MDG goals 4, 5 and 6. The "one-stop shop" approach of integrated services will help to

effectively utilise available resources, and will be especially efficient in remote or resource poor settings.

It was further highlighted that without ensuring gender equality, these MDG goals will not be achieved. It was articulated that it is therefore essential to integrate and mainstream gender and human rights into all development planning, as well as ensure it receives adequate funding. The importance of engaging men and boys has been stressed in order to help change gender stereotypes, address violence against women and achieve gender equality.

Another important issue is to address HIV among young people. We need to work actively to engage our young women and men, provide comprehensive sexuality education, empowering them to be critical thinkers and leaders, seeking healthy behavior and stronger social identities – ensuring that they may look towards a vibrant future.

Social mobilisation and community level programmes were highlighted as essential elements to the response.

When examining country level implementation, there are however, undoubted challenges such as bureaucratic processes, strong reliance on external donor funding (especially within the context of the current global financial crisis), corruption and low absorption capacity. In response to this, there was a specific call for the African governments to seek opportunities to shift away from a reliance on donor funding and move to a more sustainable, self sufficient approach. It was proposed during the session that African governments meet the Abuja commitment of 15 % budget allocation for health expenditure, including a special allocation for women and girls.

Ensuring sustainable access to treatment for women and girls was raised as one of the critical steps for action and it was also made clear that this needs to be closely linked to access to adequate nutrition. It was proposed that in order to address some of the current shortages and to ensure sustainability in access to ARV African government need to explore appropriate strategies.