

Submission PFA: Gender and HIV

1) *Link of new area with PfA*

The PfA clearly emphasises that synergies should be explored with strategies to promote both SRHR and gender within the context of HIV/AIDS programmes. Since 2005 several important new policy documents have been adopted that aim to strengthen gender and SRHR and these documents need to be integrated into the PfA.

- EU Agenda for Action on the MDGs (June 2008)
- To be finalized EU Action Plan for Gender Equality, based on Commission Communication of March 007 entitled Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Development.
- Joint EU-Africa Strategy
- Official target on universal access to Reproductive Health by 2015 under MDG 5
- European Consensus on Development (Dec 2005)
- Conclusions of the General Affairs and External Relations Council adopted on 14th May 2007 on Gender equality and Women's Empowerment. In Development Cooperation.

Rationale:

Issues of gender inequality and discrimination against women are often perceived - and therefore addressed - in an isolated manner. This is also true of initiatives for violence against women and girls. However, the nature of the HIV/AIDS crisis demands a joined-up approach: gender inequality and all forms of violence against women are among the root causes that fuel the pandemic.

- **Feminisation of HIV/AIDS:** In sub-Saharan Africa 60% of HIV positive adults are women and girls account for 75% of all new cases of HIV/AIDS infections among young people.
- Women and girls often lack the social and economic power to control key aspects of their lives, including control over their own sexual and reproductive health.
- Women and girls that become victims of human trafficking, genital mutilation, forced prostitution, sexual violence, exploitation and child marriage are at an especially high risk of becoming infected.
- There is an information gap between men and women on the ways of transmitting HIV/AIDS and on preventive measures that is reinforced by a climate of discrimination and gender-based violence.
- Violence against women affects as many as one in three women, with domestic violence being the most common form and sexual violence also highly prevalent. Violence against women is not only a human rights problem but directly affects the progress we make towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Yet, the response to date has been grossly inadequate and resources to tackle violence against women are limited.
- Family planning programmes both improve sexual health and also empower women to move from an almost exclusive child-rearing role to more meaningful participation in economic, educational and political spheres.

2) *Recommendations for focus of EU/EC Action*

To play an effective role in tackling the HIV/AIDS crisis, the European Union and its Member States must play a much stronger role in addressing the causes that make women more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, including gender norms, role behaviour and norms about sexuality that perpetuate gender inequality and violence against women.

The rising figures of HIV/AIDS infected women clearly demonstrate that women should be the focus of renewed international and European efforts to combat HIV/AIDS. The further spread of this disease cannot be brought under control unless we also focus more on gender equality and empower women to take greater control over their sexual health.¹ In the humanitarian phase, post war reconstruction, and long-term development programmes SRHR, including the fight against sexual violence, should be a high priority for HIV/AIDS initiatives.

More concretely:

The realisation of sexual and reproductive rights counteracts the feminisation of HIV/AIDS and the epidemic in general and contributes to the empowerment of all women and to a more equal and prosperous world.

In order to improve the sexual and reproductive health of all women, regardless age, religion, culture, ethnicity or sexual orientation, the following concrete actions should be taken..

Concrete Actions Points should be:

- Improve women's access to health care systems by the integration of HIV/AIDS programmes and sexual and reproductive health services;
- Improve women's access to information on sexual and reproductive health, the prevention of unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, STIs and sexual violence; and to services including safe abortion, counselling and treatment;
- Involve women living with HIV in the design of programmes to improve the services for this group of women;
- Invest more in the development and implementation of preventive measures that are friendly to women, such as microbicides;
- Link these action points to other criteria that empower women, such as the right to education and the right to health care for women; and the involvement of men.

¹ Presidency Paper on Recently Emerging Issues regarding HIV/AIDS (2007)