



Launch of the Continental Study on “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment and HIV in Africa: The Impact of Intersecting Issues and Continental Priorities”

26 July 2021



SAVE THE DATE

LAUNCH OF THE CONTINENTAL STUDY ON: “GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT AND HIV IN AFRICA: THE IMPACT OF INTERSECTING ISSUES AND CONTINENTAL PRIORITIES”

July 26, 2021

14:00 – 16:00 EAT



I. INTRODUCTION

On 26 July 2021, the African Union Commission - Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (AUC-WGYD), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) organized a virtual event to launch a continental study titled “***Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment and HIV in Africa: The Impact of Intersecting Issues and Continental Priorities***”. The event aimed at bringing to the forefront the key findings and recommendations of the study and garnering multi-stakeholder partnerships around implementation of the key recommendations of the study. The platform brought together UN Agencies, Member States, policy makers, representatives of CSOs and organizations representing women and girls living with HIV, Youth Representatives, Development Partners, AU Organs and Specialized Agencies. Moreover, the key findings and recommendations of the study were presented during the event by the lead consultant Dr. Mary M. Nyikuri.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the dialogue were to:

- highlight the key outcomes and recommendation of the study

- Garner multi-stakeholder partnerships around implementation of the key recommendations of the study

III. ATENDANCE

The launch was attended by over 100 participants including representative of Member States from the Ministries in charge of Gender and Women's Affairs, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) from ECOWAS, IGAD and COMESA, AU Organs and Specialized Agencies UN Agencies, AUC Staff from different departments, representatives of CSOs, youth representatives, development partners and GEWE activists.

IV. OPENING SESSION

The session began with a welcome note from Dr Tapiwa Nyasulu Rweyemamu, who is the Head of Gender Policy and Development Division at the African Union Commission-Women, Gender and Youth Directorate and introduced the topic of the report which was being launched- GEWE and HIV in Africa: Impact of Intersecting Issues and Continental Priorities."

AUC-WGYD- Ngwenya Prudence Nonkululeko, Officer In Charge (OIC) of the African Union Commission - Women, Gender and Youth Directorate:

Ms. Prudence, opening remarks welcomed Her Excellency Commissioner Amira El Fadali, colleagues from UN agencies, experts from various ministries and development partners amongst many others. Ms. Prudence thanked Her Excellency the Commissioner, and Key UN partners- UN Women and UNAIDS for their support and dedication in supporting the development of the study and ensuring the launch of the report is possible.

Ms. Prudence emphasized that the African Union continues to promote gender equality and women's empowerment through WGYD and has prioritized addressing the disparities regarding the gender responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, including people living with HIV and AIDS. She concluded her opening remarks by stating that the study is an example of the endless possibilities offered by collaborating and coordinating with stakeholders and shared that she hopes for a people-driven development for Africa which includes women and young people, particularly the vulnerable and those living with HIV and AIDS.

UN Women- Letty Chiwara, UN Women Representative to Ethiopia, AU and UNECA:

Ms. Letty upon welcoming participants expressed that this launch is very timely as it is taking place not long after the end of the [Generation Equality Forum](#) which culminated in a global 5-year action journey to accelerate gender equality across all areas with multi-stakeholder commitments. In sharing very crucial statistics, Ms. Letty highlighted that

gender inequality surely contributes to the spread of HIV, whereby women and girls often have less information about HIV and fewer resources to take preventive measures. She added that the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures put into place to contain its spread exacerbated health inequities that already existed, with the most vulnerable, marginalized and stigmatized being left behind.

Ms. Letty shared the various programmes UN Women has put in place to amplify the voices of women living with HIV and integrate gender equality and women's rights into strategies, policies, budgets, institutions and accountability frameworks. She discussed that these UN Women programmes are guided by key global norms and standards, such as "the 2016 Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: On the Fast-Track to Accelerate the Fight against HIV and to End the AIDS Epidemic by 2030", the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the Sustainable Development Goals.

Ms. Letty concluded her statement by sharing few over-arching recommendations to stakeholders such as; ensure the involvement of women, especially those living positively with HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases in all decision-making relating to the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes; investment in action-oriented research and documentation and to develop community strategies that will protect women of all ages from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases; provide care and support to women and girls living positively with HIV as well as their families.

UNAIDS- Ms. Berthilde Gahongayire, UNAIDS Country Director to Ethiopia and acting Director to Liaison Office to AU and UNECA

Ms. Berthilde's remark highlighted that gender inequality and discrimination rob women and girls of their fundamental human rights, including the right to education, health, and economic opportunities. The resulting disempowerment also denies women and girls sexual autonomy, decision-making power, dignity, and safety.

She reminded the meeting that in June 2021, the UN General Assembly endorsed a political declaration on AIDS and committed to ensuring that 95% of women and girls of reproductive age have their HIV and sexual and reproductive health service needs met by 2025. But, unfortunately, very few countries in Africa are currently within reach of that target.

She mentioned that evidence shows that secondary education reduces HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), and as such, five UN agencies namely; UNAIDS, UN Women, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNESCO are co-leading the Education Plus initiative. The high-level advocacy initiative uses education as an entry point for HIV prevention among AGYW in Sub-Saharan Africa. It calls for governments to increase investments in secondary education and provide complementary services, including comprehensive sexuality education, sexual and reproductive health and rights,

freedom from gender-based violence, and successful transition from school to work for economic empowerment.

She called on the Member States to implement the rich recommendations in the report and closed by asking for partnership and commitment to empower African women and positively change the course of nations and generations to come.

Keynote Speech: H.E. Amira El Fadil, Commissioner, Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development (HHS)

H.E. Amira El Fadil shared that African women and girls are disproportionately affected by the HIV/AIDS across the globe, and now the pandemic has increased risks that many African women and girls were facing.

The Commissioner urged the necessity to put in place policies that promote the sexual health accompanied by budgets, and institutions and accountability mechanisms, including commitments to transform, harmful norms and practices that hinder women from accessing physical and social services. She added that across Africa millions of girls are at risk of suffering from female genital mutilation and Inequalities in education, employment and access to resources. The lower socio-economic status of women leads to a power imbalance between men and women thus, limiting women from negotiating protective measures and contributing to a high HIV infection among women and girls in Africa.

H.E. declared that the AU recognizes the impact of the aforementioned health and socio-economic issues and continues to implement continental initiatives such as the “Saleema Initiative” to address its real time impact. She further emphasised that the AU leadership is committed to advance gender equality and women's empowerment and the links with HIV/AIDS as a central priority of its continental Initiative.

The Commissioner called on all Member States to scale up approaches to address gender-based discrimination and improve equality amongst men and women and also girls and boys. She stated that gender equality is not only a right but also key in overcoming the HIV pandemic in the continent.

H.E. Amira El Fadil in conclusion officially launched the report ‘***Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment and HIV in Africa: The Impact of Intersecting Issues and Continental Priorities***’.

Youth statement: Ms Hazvineyl Bhubho, A Young activist and GameChanger in Nhangwa and a member of Rozaria Memorial Trust-Zimbabwe

Ms. Hazvineyl opened her statement emphasizing her concern with the state of HIV infection amongst many girls and young women. She stated that she has taken the call towards fighting HIV through Zvandiri, DAC and Nhangwa where she continues to speak on issues like SRH&RR and breaking the silence on HIV and abstinence.

As an advocate she remarked that she has realized the importance of speaking out on behalf for young people about their experiences with HIV and AIDS and emphasized the need for transparent and open discussions as it can help control/reduce the spread of HIV and AIDS.

She further shared a brief about “Zvandiri” a programme supported by the National AIDS Council with a goal to assist the infected and the affected young women and girls have access to holistic care and support, preventions, treatment and mitigation in a transparent and accountable manner to ensure that they participate in decisions that affect them at all levels. She called for donors and partners to invest more on single gender spaces like “Nhangra” where young women and girls share experiences and talk on all issues that affects them. She added, “These spaces are so important for young women like me. It’s my culture and my culture is me.”

Ms.Hazvinel concluded her statement addressing the media’s impact on the youth in Africa and spoke that it should be a tool to disseminate information about HIV and SRH&RR. She stated that the media is critical tool that is becoming silent on issues on HIV with very limited to no coverage as it used to be. Due to more attention invested on COVID-19, neglecting the discussion on HIV has greatly caused an increase in HIV infection.

V. PRESENTATION OF THE CONTINENTAL STUDY ON “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment and HIV in Africa: The Impact of Intersecting Issues and Continental Priorities”

Dr. Mary Nyikuri and Jacob Awoloja the co-authors of the study gave an overview of the current HIV statistics in Africa. They cited 4600 annual new HIV infections among young people aged 15-24 years old; 70% occur among girls. Overall, women account for 63% of total adults 15+ living with HIV. The presenters informed the meeting that this was a desk review that used secondary data from existing reports. The report analyses the available information on the epidemic, intersections between HIV and GEWE, and AU policy frameworks on GEWE and HIV.

They highlighted the progress made in the response and outstanding issues, including stigma and discrimination, failure of laws and policies to protect women and girls from enjoying their rights, harmful practices, limited political will, and inadequate sustainable financing.

The presentation also covered promising practices such as the CSW 60/2 Resolution on Women, the Girl child and HIV/AIDS, the AU Campaign to End Child Marriages, HeForShe Initiative, DREAMS and SASA

Finally, the team presented on a set of key recommendations for action by various stakeholders - AU and its organs, Member States, Civil Society and Development Partners.

VI. DISCUSSION

Question- What practical solutions can be provided to reduce the conditions that make women and girls vulnerable to HIV transmission? What challenges hinder the efforts?

CSO- Suzanne Majani, Policy Advisor on behalf of Dr Angela Akol, Executive Director , Ipas Africa Alliance, under Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC)

Ms. Suzanne began her intervention introducing Ipas Africa which is an organization that works on SRH&RR (Sexual Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights) with a focus on access to services such as access to contraceptives and safe abortion when needed. She further explained that this organization is the thematic lead for health under GIMAC Network.

Ms. Suzanne stated in their experience working on health rights for young women, they have noted that there is a lack of a comprehensive sexuality education across the continent in most of the African countries Ipas Africa works in. She remarked the importance of having education system in place as a cross cutting solution to most of the SRH&RR issues that could be listed including HIV AIDS.

As CSOs, she highlighted that the intervention that bring solution through providing information and services to women and girls who are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. In reference to the report, Ms. Suzanne expressed that they look forward to interacting with it and take it forward in their work to reduce the disproportionate impact of the virus on women and girls.

AUC-HHS- Ms. Nena Thundu Coordinator of the African Union Harmful Practices Project and Policy Expert

Ms. Nena opened her intervention discussing the relevance of the study which she stated is even more pertinent with the current situation of COVID-19.

From the AUC's perspective that there are strategies that are currently under development that look at key issues such as, the higher risk of young girls specially those subjected to child marriage of contracting the virus due to various socio-cultural hindrances. Thus, the AUC aims to work with MS more closely as the starting point of AUC intervention with an emphasis on enhancing community engagement particularly families, traditional and religious leaders bringing to the forefront solution that address the different forms of GBV and harmful practices such as child marriage and FGM.

Ms. Nena emphasized that to bring about the desired change it is important to start at the legislative level and explore what the laws in place dictate. She also discussed that there should be relevant attention given to how these laws trickle down to the grassroots and pay attention as whether these laws are put in place in a language that is well understood by the communities on the ground noting that the roles and influence that cultural leaders hold in their respective communities.

Ms. Nena also went on to discuss the importance of data in the work done by AUC with Member States continuing their efforts to investigate and ensure the availability of enough and relevant data in ministries to support interventions. AUC ensures to have a capacity building stream to capacitate statistical bureaus to generate relevant data that can guide the work of MS.

Finally, Ms. Nena emphasized the importance of access to proper education to ensuring that young girls are engaged in the work force and are able to grasp work opportunity

In conclusion, she shared that AUC is putting in place accountability mechanism to ensure that young women and girls are not only recipients of service but are also part of the solution. She stated platforms such as the girls summit and child parliament are important spaces that empower young girl to be part of the change making process.

Question & Answer:

Question: Majority of female learners have discontinued learning due to several yet intersecting reasons such as teen pregnancy, child marriage, HIV infection and related stigma, poverty and eventually loss of hope. Unfortunately, learning options and platforms in are not empowered to deal with these matters. Would you kindly share what your experience was in this area and any recommendations to both the learners and the school or training institutions; In Uganda we have piloted the second chance education programme but have been hampered by COVID-19. Albeit with those challenges halting the smooth engagement of learners, the intervention seems fair in terms of cost, application given that the survivors are child mothers/child brides and many times young women struggling with the stigma of LHIV. Would appreciate your comment on similar or better initiatives that could be scaled up to support the vulnerable girls and young women cope with life.

Answer (by Dr. Mary Nyikuri): Across the continent there is a challenge in terms of cultural norms and the positioning of the girl child. When a girl drops out of school for different reasons it could seem that it is the end, as such most households would rather send a boy child to school than a girl.

The 'DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-Free, Mentored, and Safe)' initiative can be taken as one example that is working towards addressing this issue. The initiative is really looking at ways in which it can empower young girls and their families It is encouraging to see such projects addressing some of these intersecting challenges

such as, ensuring young girls that have dropped out of school due to pregnancy can return back to school through providing support with childcare, support with education, working with schools so that teachers are not discriminating against them.

When we refer to 'young girls' and issues that they are experiencing, it is not homogenous but contextual caused by cultural, political or religious factors. Thus, having a multi-sectoral approach in place where stake-holders are involved in the campaign to change the norms, to change the practices, that make these girls suffer from stigma and disclination will make a foundation a much stronger foundation in their work towards getting girls to go back to school while still being able to care for their child.

Accordingly, it is important to scale up on the positive practices that have been mentioned in the report such as AU's work on championing the campaign against child marriage and some of the educational programmes that are championed by UNAIDS. It is also important to note that this is where development partners should come in and support initiatives like the ones mentioned by the young advocate above. The girls that are affected by the stigma need to sit at the table and engage in the way forward of how policies and programmes can better serve them.

Question: For 7 years now, HIV is considered as public health no more a strategic development issue, hence it is now getting low attention, unfortunately, the spread of HIV and AIDS across Africa, particularly in the rural areas is increasing. What needs to be done to reinvigorate the fight against HIV and AIDS?

Answer (by Ms. Nena Thundu): In order to address this factors that are for instance drivers of Child Marriage such as poverty, it is very important that social protection schemes are strengthened to allow families to be able to survive so that they are not pushed into situation where they are forced to send their children into child marriages. AU is working on a social protection protocol and is working with MS to have it ratified.

Question: Is there a way that the findings of this reports can go into the curriculum of schools is Africa, taught as course by incorporating them in Textbooks. The curriculum would raise awareness to young boys at an early stage that it is wrong to sexually abuse young girls and women and young girls their right to speak if they have experience something wrong.

Answer (by Ms. Nena Thundu): one of the key initiatives AU has been working on is ensuring the Child Marriage and FGM strategies which will be adopted by the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) in October are inclusive and that education is a priority area.

A lot of the times in schools, children are not taught comprehensively about sexual and reproductive health. Knowing young people will be curious at a certain age, it is important to note that HIV can not only be addressed through combating Child Marriage but also need but also through ending teenage pregnancies and peer to peer transmission HIV AIDS. As such education ministries need to mainstream comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and educate children in an age-appropriate manner. This

must however be done with the buy-in of families who need to understand that their children need to be educated on matters related to these things. Communities also play a critical role in teaching young people as they reach pre-teen to teenage year.

Answer (by Ms. Suzanne Majani): Ipas has worked with different institutions in Kenya and Uganda to create peer-peer clubs and school groups where it tries to ensure women and girls from primary to University education level get as much information about comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) which including SRH&RR indicators including HIV and AIDS. Ipas also implements community based CSE which targets out of schoolgirls.

However, I would like to encourage actors working on these issues to ensure the buy-in of government as it is the biggest driver of sustainability in any of the countries we work in and it will also enhance access to information for girls that desperately need it.

Question: Keen to hear more about any successful accountability initiatives that the team may have come across. We are trying to support the network of women living with HIV to engage with Government and other duty bearers, any learning in this area will be very helpful.

Answer (by Dr. Mary Nyikuri): The report did not identify any accountability mechanisms. Most of these accountability measures are to be community driven and most of these communities unfortunately really suffer from lack of information and which limits their awareness regarding funding and programming at community level.

As we build the capacity of CSOs and more community driven social accountability initiatives we will be able to be more recognized and supported so there is also change to ensure that HIV and AIDS remains a part of the development agenda

Comments from the floor:

Comment 1: The dreams project is great, but very capital intensive. There is also a need to understand what the structural drivers or vulnerability of teenage pregnancy and or early child marriage are, so as to address them.

Comment 2: UN Women HeForShe and young women for life movement has piloted linking the community level for private sector initiatives to address socio-economic drivers

Comment 3: It has to be recognized that HIV and AIDS funding is heavily dependent on external financing particularly the global fund for HIV and Aids, TB and Malaria. However, external financing is alarmingly dwindling in the midst of global financial crisis, donor fatigue and policy shift thus increasing domestic financial paramount.

Response (by Dr. Mary Nyikuri): This is really a call for MS to allocate funding for HIV/AIDS programmes so they can be strengthened, scaled up and sustainable. However, this cannot happen if we do not have enough advocacy on the ground, if we don't have very strong and wide advocacy by youth and the women for funding.

Allocation of resources starts at the policy formulation and policy implementation stage and as we will find pointed out in the report, at the community level, women and girls lack the skills and capacity to hold their government accountable as budgets are being drawn particularly, requesting fund from the treasury, writing donor funding proposals, accounting for how much is being allocated for HIV/AIDS and how much of that is being allocated is for women and young girls.

As donor funding dwindle, national governments must sustain the fight against HIV and account how much of this allocation is really benefiting women and girls. In addition, we need to build capacity of women, girls, youth groups and CSOs that are really working to highlight the issues of HIV/AIDS at a community and national level to ensure they have the capacity to hold the governments accountable. There is also a need to generate gender disaggregated data. Equipped with data, women and girls will be able to speak up and involve media to highlight some of the concerns by really publishing the reports in the different forms of media to ensure governments and all sorts of policy makers are really held accountable.

CLOSING SESSION

Dr Tapiwa Uchizi Nyasulu Rweyemamu- *From policy to action – way forward on dissemination, implementation, and reporting on progress*

Dr. Tapiwa gave a conclusion to the discussion by stating that the study has rich data and recommendations for action by different stakeholders.

She urged the Member States to have national and sub-regional launches of the study. She iterated that AUC, UN Women, and UNAIDS will support in reaching a wider audience and further asked participants/stakeholders to integrate the recommendations in their national AIDS and gender strategies and reporting systems.

Dr. Tapiwa called on CSO and HIV advocates to collaborate and support governments in implementing the recommendations, delivering quality services, and holding governments accountable. She committed that the AUC-WGYD will implement their specific recommendations in the report.

Dr Tapiwa concluded her intervention by informing delegates that the report will be available on the AUC's website for downloading in all AU languages.

Closing Remarks- Ngwenya Prudence Nonkululeko, A.g. Director of the African Union Commission - Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (O.I.C.):

In her closing **Ms. Prudence** expressed her appreciation to the Commissioner Amira El Fadil, all Member States, development partners, civil society organizations to their invaluable contribution to the deliberations. She stated that attendance and participation



here today is a testament to the mutual commitment for an enhanced understanding and knowledge on HIV/AIDs and gender equality and women's empowerment across Africa.

She highlighted that the recommendations in the report for the Member States, AUC, Development Partners, UN agencies and Civil society organizations and HIV/AIDs advocates will be highly observed by all and will be followed by concrete actions to eliminate discrimination against women and girls who are living positively by promoting their rights and by introducing and effectively implementing national, regional and continental measures.

Ms. Prudence also shared her regards to Dr. Mary Nyikuri and to all of those that have contributed in various ways to making this a successful launch.

VII. ANNEXUR

Agenda

Launch of the study on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and HIV in Africa: The Impact of Intersecting Issues and Continental Priorities

26 July 2021 Time: 14:00 – 16:00 EAT

Moderator: Dr. Tapiwa Uchizi Nyasulu Rweyemamu, Head of Gender Policy and Development Division; Women Gender and Youth Directorate (AUC-WGYD)

Time	Agenda Item	Speaker
14:00-14:15	Opening remarks: setting the scene, the purpose of the publication	Ms. Prudence Nonkululeko Ngwenya, Officer In Charge, African Union Commission Women, Gender, Youth Directorate (AUC-WGYD) Ms. Letty Chiwara, UN WOMEN Representative to Ethiopia, AU and UNECA Mrs. Berthilde Gahongayire, UNAIDS Country Director for Ethiopia and Director a.i. Liaison Office to AU and ECA
14:15- 14:30	Keynote speech & official launch	H.E. Amira El Fadil, Commissioner, Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development (HHS)
14:30-14.35	Group picture	
14:35-14.45		Ms Hazvineyi Bbobho, A Young activist and GameChanger in Nhangas and a member of Rozaria Memorial Trust-Zimbabwe
14:45-15:00	Presentation of the study on : Impact of gender inequality and intersectionalities on HIV outcomes in Africa	Dr. Mary M. Nyikuri Independent consultant
15:00-15:30	Moderated discussion on perspectives and experiences on practical approaches for tackling intersecting issues to improve HIV outcomes among women and girls	Voices from the field : CSO- Dr Angela Akol, Executive Director , Ipas Africa Alliance AUC-DHHS- Ms. Nena Thundu Coordinator of the African Union Harmful Practices Project and Policy Expert.
15:30-15:40	From policy to action – way forward on dissemination, implementation, and reporting on progress	Dr. Tapiwa Uchizi Nyasulu Rweyemamu, Head of Gender Policy and Development Division
15:40-15:55	Closing remarks and vote of thanks	Ms. Prudence Nonkululeko Ngwenya, Officer In Charge, African Union Commission Women, Gender, Youth Directorate (AUC-WGYD)