



# AFRICAN WOMEN'S INITIATIVES ON HIV/AIDS

(REPORT OF AWDF PARTNERS' CONVENING AT THE YWCA INTERNATIONAL  
WOMEN'S SUMMIT; WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP ON HIV/AIDS)

DATE: 7TH JULY, 2007

VENUE: INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL NAIROBI, KENYA



THE AFRICAN CAPACITY  
BUILDING FOUNDATION



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## The African Women's Development Fund

The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) is a grant-making foundation which supports local, national and regional organisations in Africa working towards women's empowerment. AWDF through institutional capacity building and programme development seeks to build a culture of learning and partnerships within the African women's movement. The vision of AWDF is for African women to live in a world in which there is social justice, equality and respect for women's human rights. AWDF's mission is to mobilise financial resources to support local, national and international initiatives led by women, which will lead to the achievement of this vision. The fund seeks to raise money and make grants for the support of non-profit African women's organizations working for social justice, equality and peace. AWDF has four key roles:

- Fundraising within and outside Africa
- Grant-making on an Africa-wide basis
- Communication, focusing on the work and achievements of African women's organisations.
- Providing technical assistance to strengthen grantee organisations

## AWDF'S Funding Priorities

AWDF awards grants to African women's organizations working in the following thematic areas:

- Women's Human Rights
- Economic Empowerment
- Political Participation
- Peace-Building
- Health, Reproductive Rights
- HIV/AIDS

AWDF also funds programs which develop and promote women's leadership across all these themes. Since 2001 AWDF has supported over 600 women's organizations in 41 African countries to the tune of over US\$8,000,000.

## AWDF's HIV/AIDS Fund

In response to the magnitude of the impact of HIV/AIDS on African women, AWDF in November 2005 launched an HIV/AIDS Fund in order to increase the amount of resources available to women's groups in Africa working on the response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The purpose of the HIV/AIDS fund therefore is to mobilise dedicated resources to support women's organisations in the fight against HIV/AIDS. To enhance the



mobilisation of resources into the HIV/AIDS Fund, a fundraising campaign called the 13 Campaign was launched. Since the launch of the HIV/AIDS fund over U\$2, 000,000 in grants have been disbursed to 107 African women's organisations in 25 countries

The fund supports programmes that enhance the status of women and girls and protects their rights; programmes that create opportunities for women and girls to make empowering choices and programmes that address women's needs and circumstances in prevention, treatment, support and community care.

## Achievements of the HIV/AIDS Fund

The HIV/AIDS fund has succeeded in achieving among others the following:

- Strengthening local, national and regional women's voices on HIV/AIDS issues through its support for women to participate in key platforms and spaces for discussing HIV/AIDS issues as in the platform that led to the issuance of the Johannesburg position paper on HIV/AIDS.
- Continued support in the areas of prevention education, care, support and treatment.
- Empowered women, especially women living with HIV/AIDS to overcome societal challenges and live positively through support of networks of women living with HIV/AIDS and supporting women living

with HIV/AIDS to make their voices heard. For example AWDF supported five women living with HIV to attend the positive women's forum at the International Women's Summit held in Nairobi Kenya in July 2007.

- The 13 Campaign, AWDF's flagship campaign to raise funds for the HIV/AIDS Fund has been introduced in four countries.
- Institution of the Fighting Spirit Award to honour women who have distinguished themselves in the fight against HIV/AIDS.
- Strengthened the institutional capacities of some women's organisations working on HIV/AIDS issues
- Book on the life stories of some women living with HIV.

## Workshop Context

AWDF is committed to supporting the enhancement of the capacity of women's organisation to ensure strong viable and sustainable organisations which are capable of influencing key deliberative processes to push the women's rights agenda to the forefront. Again, building strategic partnerships and encouraging similar partnerships among women's rights organisations enhances the mobilisation of resources, increases visibility and movement building. AWDF thus convened its partners to deliberate on some key issues hindering the work of women's organizations in Africa working on HIV/AIDS interventions and to strategise on how to overcome these challenges.



AWDF organized a one day workshop for grantees and partners working on HIV & AIDS issues on July 7, 2007 at the Intercontinental Hotel in Nairobi, Kenya during the International Women's Summit; Women's Leadership On HIV/AIDS. With a call on women to show leadership in the response to the HIV & AIDS pandemic, the workshop brought together some key women's organisations working at local, national and regional levels being supported by the AWDF as well as potential grantees. Forty seven participants from 38 organizations from 10 countries attended the workshop.

The workshop was opened by the Executive Director of AWDF, Ms. Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi and facilitated by the HIV/AIDS programme officer, Ms. Beatrice Boakye-Yiadom. Also present were AWDF's Senior Manager for Special Programmes, Ms Abigail Burgessson and Information and Documentation Officer, Ms. Nuna Senaya.

## Opening Remarks

In her opening statement the Executive Director of AWDF welcomed participants and spoke on activities of AWDF. She said the purpose of the meeting is for AWDF to learn more about what the various organisations are doing and discuss how AWDF can support them. She challenged them to strengthen their advocacy and engagement with strategic partners to enable them make the necessary impact that will result in lessening the burden that the HIV/AIDS pandemic has placed on women.



## Objectives of the Workshop

The strategic objective of the workshop was to strengthen the work of the women's movement around HIV/AIDS issues.

The specific objectives of the workshop were:

- To create a platform for AWDF partners to share ideas and field experiences
- To ascertain some of the challenges and best practices in the field
- To serve as a consultative forum to direct the HIV/AIDS grant making portfolio
- To foster partnership and networking among AWDF grantees

## Workshop Process

The workshop comprised of plenary and breakout sessions. Participants outlined the challenges women's organisations face in the field and suggested some strategies for overcoming those challenges. Thereafter there were group presentations in a plenary, followed by discussions on issues raised and other issues of concern to women organisations working on HIV/AIDS issues. There was also an informal session of interacting and networking which enabled the participants to get to know each other better and explore opportunities for working together.

The four thematic areas that were deliberated upon were:

- Treatment, care and support and nutrition
- Policy and advocacy including food security, property and land rights, and violence
- Economic empowerment in the area of livelihood and food security
- HIV prevention

## Outcomes of Deliberations

The four thematic groups came up with the following challenges and strategies after the brainstorming sessions:

### Treatment, Care & Support & Nutrition

Among the challenges faced by women's organisations providing direct service in the areas of care and support for people living with HIV & AID or affected by HIV & AIDS are the following:

- Finance, including the lack of
  - Transport for care givers and transporting the sick
  - Home based care kits for treating people living with AIDS
  - Food supplements for women living with HIV & AIDS
  - Nutrition especially for women on treatment
  - Adequate funding to motivate care givers

- High volunteer turnover as a result lack of motivation and the absence of incentives for volunteers who in many instances are themselves struggling to make ends meet.
- Lack of skills for volunteers and service providers
- Stigma and rejection by family and community
- Denial by people living with HIV/AIDS
- Lack of support for care givers

## Treatment Challenges

- Lack of adherence to treatment
- Inaccessibility of treatment centers due to distance
- High cost of drugs for opportunistic infections
- Negative attitudes of health providers
- Lack of Information, Education and Campaign (IEC) treatment literature for both people living with HIV and service providers
- Absence of participatory monitoring and evaluation system at health care facilities to assess impact of interventions.
- Lack of food and nutrition
- Sustainability of treatment programmes due to the high cost involved
- Lack of funding for personnel involved in the implementation of the programme



## Suggested Strategies for Mitigating the Challenges

- Increase funding for care and support programmes
- Sustained support for IEC activities, advocacy and awareness creation
- Integration of HIV & AIDS services into the health care system
- Institutional and community capacity building on treatment care and support of people living with HIV & AIDS
- Economic empowerment of people living with HIV & AIDS
- Ensure food security
- Increased accessibility to treatment

## Policy and Advocacy

In the area of policy and advocacy on HIV & AIDS, the different countries are at different stages of progress. Some African countries have no policy on HIV/AIDS, for example Swaziland. Others such as South Africa have very good policies. In addition, South Africa has an Office of Disability and HIV/AIDS with specific people in charge. Other countries such as Kenya have policies on HIV & AIDS but lack the institutions that will support the implementation of the policy.

Participants also noted that whilst there were a number of advocacy activities at regional level, it was difficult to replicate these at the local and community levels. Also, it was difficult to hold authorities and leaders accountable for policies

formulated because, women's organisation working in the communities usually lack the capacity to do so.

For example, in Swaziland, the coalition of civil society organisations working on HIV & AID is not strong enough to advocate for a policy on HIV & AIDS. In addition, the women's movement on HIV & AIDS is fragmented, making it impossible to have an effective and coordinated force for advocacy.

## Suggested Strategies

- Capacity building for undertaking advocacy through;
  - Professional development
  - Enhanced exchange programs
  - Networking and information sharing at all levels
  - Increased collaboration and partnership – and linking of organisations that work in various areas.
- Advocating for a conducive environment
  - Lobby and agitate for policies to be implemented. Policies have to be popularised and not just exist on record.
  - International and Regional Standards on women's rights that all African countries have ratified should be pushed so that policies are drafted to back their implementation.



- Advocating for food security & livelihoods:
  - Availability of nutritious food for people living with HIV & AIDS
  - Establishing and maintaining cooperatives
  - Capacity building and skills training

## Preventing Infection

In the session dealing with prevention, participants outlined certain challenges and ways of dealing with those challenges. Participants were unanimous in their discussion that prevention activities were important in the fight against HIV & AIDS and therefore there was the need for greater commitment to these intervention activities.

## Challenges

- Message packaging through IEC:

The ABC approach to prevention education does not favour the African woman and thus, the strategy which is widely used, is not working effectively, since it assumes that the African women has control over her sexuality. For example, an African women could abstain but get raped or she could choose to be faithful yet her partner is not obliged to be do the same.

The ABC message operates under some assumptions:



The 'Abstain' message assumes that women have a choice in sexual matters it does not consider rape and incest among others issues. The 'Be Faithful' message assumes that even as women are faithful, their partners are also being faithful. The 'Condom use' message also assumes that women have the ability to negotiate safer sex and can negotiate the use of the condom. African women proposing condom use, especially in relationships like marriages is considered unacceptable due to traditional beliefs and patriarchy. Again though condom use is an effective prevention mechanism it is not promoted fully.

- Context in which HIV is fuelled includes:
  - Poverty
  - Patriarchal culture
  - Lack of access to information
- Wholesale messages that do not address the needs of the different age groups: advocacy and awareness creation messages tend to be generic with no consideration for age, status, profession etc. thus rendering them ineffectual.

Group sensitivity or specific messages need to be coined to suit the needs of different groups. For example specific messages for in-school youth and out-of-school youth, older generation and the disabled.

- The considerable decrease in funding for prevention education in the wake of the focus on treatment and Antiretroviral is a

major challenge in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

## Suggested Strategies for Boosting Prevention

- Context of HIV/AIDS
  - The family should play a key role in the fight against HIV/AIDS
  - There is the need to address all the underlying vulnerability issues fuelling the pandemic such as:
    - Poverty
    - Economic empowerment
    - Gender and vulnerability
    - Improved women's literacy
- Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT)
  - VCT should be promoted, since it is a gateway to prevention, treatment, care and support.
  - VCT should be emphasized and promoted for all age groups irrespective of social status.
- Bonding should begin at home to fight against stigma and discrimination.
- Strengthening the family structure. The family should take primary responsibility for the care of people living with HIV/AIDS. This will reduce the care burden on women as male members of the households will also

offer support for family members living with HIV/AIDS.

## Economic Empowerment

Economic dependence of women was identified as a major factor that exposes women to the risk of contracting HIV and their ability to live positively, when they are infected by the virus.

## Challenges

- Finance – Lack of start up capital for income generation activities
- Large number of members in the various groups in the various care and support groups that are providing economic empowerment support for those infected by the virus.
- Lack of capacity; business skills, entrepreneurship skills
- Sickness as a result of poor health which drains the human resource capacity base
- Disinheritance as a result of gender discriminatory cultural practices
- Diversion of funds as a result of other pressing need as in food and medication
- Illiteracy



## Strategies

- Local resource mobilisation; savings schemes, soliciting for funds from donors
- Entrepreneurship skills; simple business management
- Direct monitoring of beneficiaries with clearly stated criteria
- Adult education
- Educating groups on their rights, policy and advocacy
- Encouraging people living with HIV/AIDS to join support groups
- Encouraging people living with HIV/AIDS to seek treatment and
- Ensuring food security and good nutrition

## Recommendations

Participants recommended that AWDF should facilitate packaging and dissemination of prevention methods that are gender responsive.

In addition, there is the need to focus on the family as a unit of prevention. The family should bond with, take care of and support those who are HIV positive. The family must also be responsible for eliminating women's negative status by ending dehumanising practices that violate the rights of women and girls such as incest, early marriage and female genital mutilation.

There is also the need to address the underlying factors that drive the spread of such as poverty,

socio-cultural issues, economic issues, literacy, gender and power imbalances.

Participants also recommended the design of holistic approaches to geographic and demographic coverage of the population and the need to focus on 15 – 24 year old females/young women, not excluding those out of school.

## AWDF's Response

What will AWDF do as a result of this meeting?

- Mobilise more resources to support women's initiatives at the local level to prevent the spread of HIV and also support women living with HIV.
- Support women led initiatives that seek the development of technologies and prevention messages that are gender responsive.
- Support initiatives that seek to advance the rights of women living with HIV/AIDS.
- Highlight the work of AWDF grantees and the work they are doing to support communities in extremely difficult circumstances.
- Strengthen support for initiatives that ensure access to treatment, ARVs and care for African women living with HIV/AIDS.
- Network and develop partnerships to ensure adequate resourcing and policy development for women living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.
- Strengthen support for community led



initiatives to support women living with HIV/AIDS.

## Conclusion

It was a stimulating interaction between the diverse groups of women from different geographical and socio-political backgrounds. The forum provided an opportunity for the participants to know themselves and the diverse women's organisations working on HIV/AIDS issues on the continent.



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**It was a  
stimulating  
interaction  
between the  
diverse groups  
of women  
from different  
geographical and  
socio-political  
backgrounds.**







**“Support  
initiatives  
that seek to  
advance the  
rights of  
women  
living with  
HIV/AIDS.”**

