ICPD+25: Time for Gender Equality now at the Global Fund

Women4GlobalFund (W4GF) congratulates the Global Fund Board on its dynamic 42nd Board meeting (held in Geneva, 14-15 November). At the same time, women’s activists from all over the world met in Nairobi at the Summit marking the 25th anniversary of ICPD (the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994). ICPD’s landmark Program of Action set out to empower women and girls. Decades later – many of us remain left behind and continue to lack autonomy over our bodies; our basic human rights are not respected.

At the 42nd Global Fund Board Meeting there were constant reminders that the Strategic Objective (SO) 3 priorities of gender equality and human rights must be prioritized across all the work of the Global Fund. Board members asked for the secretariat to take action on the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) advisory on human rights, which include actions to advance gender equity.

While no-one is suggesting that the Nairobi ICPD+25 summit was convened to deliberately clash with the (regular) Global Fund Board meeting, it highlights the need for even more action to build deeper and stronger connection between the ambitions of women’s rights and the ambitions of the Global Fund. It is beyond doubt that there is a strong overlap between the goals of the Global Fund and the women’s rights agenda. As the Global Fund moves into developing the new strategy, this is a perfect time to take on board the unfinished agenda from ICPD to acknowledge that women and girls are still disproportionately affected by the three diseases, and to build on the recommendations from ICPD+25. This is an important agenda for the future strategy and more immediately for the actions that will be taken to deliver gender-transformative programmes through this next allocation cycle.

The Nairobi ICPD+25 summit opened with talk of its own 3 Zeros. The HIV world is familiar with its own 3 Zeros: Zero new HIV infections. Zero AIDS-related deaths, Zero discrimination. The price tag to achieve zero maternal deaths, zero unmet need for family planning, and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices - “three transformative results” - within the next decade has been costed at $264 billion (globally1). A striking ask when set against the – very impressive - results of the Global Fund 6th replenishment with US$14.02 billion now available to step up the response to HIV, TB and malaria for the next three years.

This is one of many reasons why the Global Fund can be a vital engine for investment in women’s health and rights, particularly for women living with and directly affected by HIV, TB and malaria – as well as to end the three diseases. Yet, despite the long-standing commitment of the Global Fund, almost three years into its six-year strategy Investing to End Epidemics - this full potential and impact have yet to be achieved. According to the Global Fund’s Technical Review Panel (TRP) the response to date of the Global Fund is inadequate from a gender perspective. Their recent report (October 2019) states:

“Gender analysis is frequently missing, particularly with respect to TB and malaria. Though there has been some progress on sex disaggregation of data, countries need a broader range of data disaggregated according to age, sex, gender and key population status. Attention is inadequate to the intersectional needs of women, girls and transgender persons who are also members of other key populations. Legal and policy frameworks that disadvantage women, adolescents, transgender persons and men who have sex with men are often not well analyzed, and measures to reform them are missing. In addition, there are gaps in other areas of programming that are particularly critical for women as well as tied to the three diseases, for example cervical cancer screening, a key issue for HIV positive women.”

1 Analysis by UNFPA and the Johns Hopkins University, in collaboration with Victoria University, the University of Washington and Avenir Health
It also goes on to say...

“While funding requests show modest efforts in addressing the needs of adolescent girls and young women, using matching funds and in addressing human rights challenges for key populations, much more must be done to ensure prevention is available for those who are at the highest risk of infection, groups who are often highly marginalized, which lack basic human protection under the law and those for whom accessing services can be very risky, including young adolescent girls, recently released prisoners, people who inject drugs or young male sex workers. Achieving the necessary inroads will only be possible if civil society is fully included in programming and becomes an inherent part of the health systems response to epidemics.”

The Global Fund Board meeting took several key decisions related to how the $14billion will be made available (the allocation methodology for 2020-2022) and after 20 months in office, Global Fund Executive Director Peter Sands looked back and highlighted key areas for the future, including how to accelerate progress towards SDG3 (ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages). Yet there was little discussion of SDG 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls). The Global Fund must still do more across the SDGs – action to deliver on SDG 5 as well as SDG 3 underpins the potential for the Global Fund’s future success.

In his report to the Board, Global Fund ED Peter Sands highlights that whilst we have a long way to go, in the long run there are massive dividends to reducing gender and human-rights related barriers to health even though they are more expensive to operate than pure commodity-based grants. As we move forward to the new allocation cycle, Women4GlobalFund calls on all partners to deliver on the full Global Fund Strategy, and especially to deliver on SO 3: “to promote gender equality and human rights”. This includes addressing TRP recommendations to:

- Invest in community-led responses for women and girls as key to accelerating greater impact;
- Strengthen funding requests to support prevention of violence and services for survivors;
- Insist that countries report on a comprehensive data set that includes sex- and age- and gender disaggregated data on key indicators for the three diseases [The TRP asks that the Global Fund should require (not recommend) that such data be reported. Without this it is not possible to track implementation and needs, to ensure that gender-sensitive and gender-transformative activities are supported in Global Fund grants, and to raise awareness of gender-related concerns].

And in addition to:

- Ensure that all countries (not only the 13 countries that receive matching funds for adolescent girls and young women) address gender inequities: going beyond biomedical approaches to address gender-related risks, human rights abuses, and to remove all barriers that prevent women from accessing health services;
- Continue to push governments – with guidance from the Global Fund secretariat, technical partners and the TRP - to ensure women-centred and human rights-based approaches that uphold the right to health as a fundamental principle;
- Bring more focused allocation (as part of catalytic funding) to support women-led community networks and organisations responding to HIV, TB and malaria to engage in community based monitoring to collect community data on the development of baseline, quarterly, and end of programme evaluations that track the implementation of programmes for women and adolescent girls and young women in all our diversity.

W4GF is a dynamic global platform of women and gender equality advocates who share a deep commitment to ensuring that Global Fund programmes are gender-transformative to meet the rights and specific priorities of women and girls in all our diversity. For more information, please contact Sophie Dilmitis, Global Coordinator, Women4GlobalFund (W4GF) – sophie@women4gf.org www.women4gf.org or https://www.facebook.com/women4globalfund/