

WORLD AIDS DAY 2020: CELEBRATING OUR RESILIENCE

2020 has been a challenging year. COVID-19, and the related restrictions have had substantial impact on the lives of women, including Women4GlobalFund (W4GF) Advocates, in their work, communities and organisations and for us as individuals. This has been more profound for those of us living with and affected by HIV, TB and malaria, and those among us who have become unwell with COVID-19. In addition to the stress of loss of livelihoods - many women have had to battle uneven vulnerabilities and violence that put their safety at risk and this has threatened their sexual and reproductive health as well as their ability to continue to access HIV medication. This has been a harsher reality for women living with HIV who are criminalised and marginalised such as sex workers and women who use drugs.

Despite these challenges - **this year again revealed the great resilience of women and girls**. We have heard many stories of women living with HIV who ensured that those without got food, those who needed medication got medication and those afraid and worried had a shoulder to lean on. It is our community systems that have carried us through. We celebrate W4GF Advocates who continued, some even with COVID-19, to influence national Global Fund processes and at the Global Fund to ensure that women and girls, gender equality, equity and human rights are not side-lined. We celebrate women, especially those living with HIV, who have supported each other, stood for justice and demanded accountability and better services.

The W4GF movement reaffirms our commitment to continue to advocate for HIV, TB and malaria services that meet the needs and rights of women in all of our diversity. Impact can only be felt if the Global Fund commits to:

- support countries to move towards gender equality. Whilst gains have been made there are structural barriers that continue to stop women from accessing services and keep women and girls at heightened risk and experiencing inequalities;
- ensure that all of its interventions related to COVID-19 redress the unequal impact on women's rights and wellbeing, including the alarming increases in gender based violence, and the diminished access to sexual and reproductive health services;
- ensure women are able to access new prevention technologies such as Cabotegravir - as a long-acting (LA) injectable pre exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for women and girls who are at risk of HIV - to continue to lower HIV incidence, especially among adolescent girls and young women;
- Provide more clarity and leadership on the Global Fund strategy to deliver gender equality for women and girls in all our diversity beyond its focus on adolescent girls and young women in 13 countries. It is clear from the TRP reports (windows 1 & 2) and from Strategic Review 2020 that much more leadership is required from the Global Fund.

What do we mean by diversity? Women are not homogenous. We define diversity as women who are engaged at global, regional and national levels in Global Fund processes and structures in key regions most affected by HIV, TB and malaria. We are not homogenous, & we include women living HIV, affected by TB and malaria; heterosexual; lesbian & bisexual; transgender; intersex and non-binary; women who use drugs; sex workers over 18 years old; adolescent girls & young women; Indigenous women; women who are sometimes displaced; migrants & are/have been incarcerated; & women with visible & invisible disabilities.

Now more than ever we must not forget that the HIV agenda is far from over. We must remember that HIV is more than a health issue. We must not forget that 12 million people still do not have access to HIV medication and in 2019, 1.7 million people contracted HIV because they could not access essential services (UNAIDS). Now more than ever we must remember that efforts to end the epidemic are intertwined with social, economic, gender justice and human rights for all.

Women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 59% of all new HIV in the region in 2019, with 4500 adolescent girls and young women between 15 and 24 years old contracting HIV every week. (UNAIDS)

W4GF Advocates call on the Global Fund to make sure that all its actions fully align with its Strategic Objective 3, to promote and protect human

rights and gender equality and that the Global Fund operates with community voices at its heart, and responds fully to the rights, needs and health of women and girls.