

Jamaica Webinar Notes: The Global Partnership to end all forms of HIV-related stigma and discrimination: Are the rights of women and girls addressed?

1. Introduction

On Monday 22 November 2021, 34 participants joined the Women4GlobalFund (W4GF) webinar to learn more about how the [Global Partnership to end all forms of HIV-related Stigma and Discrimination \(the Global Partnership\)](#) is addressing the rights of women and girls – in all their diversity – in Jamaica.

The Global Partnership was established in 2018 in response to a call by Non-Governmental Organisations on the UNAIDS Programme Coordination Board. They called for greater efforts to address the negative effects of stigma and discrimination in the lives of people living with and vulnerable to HIV. By raising awareness about these barriers to health and well-being, the Global Partnership aims to encourage countries to take action to understand and confront them.

The Global Partnership recognises that the key to ending stigma is the work of communities and civil society leading interventions in six different settings and areas of people's lives, namely: households, workplaces, education, justice systems, health settings and emergency and humanitarian settings. Countries do this work over five years and commit to three settings in the first year.

The participants reflected on the status of activities funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria (Global Fund) in Jamaica and the extent to which such activities focus on women, and to expand the dialogue on change needed.

2. Agenda and speaker

- *Introduction and Welcome* – Sophie Dilmitis, W4GF
- *What is the Global Partnership?* – Richard Plummer, Project and Community Engagement Officer, Jamaican Network of Seropositive (JN+), Jamaica ([Slides](#))
- *Overview of the work in Jamaica* – Rubén Pagés Ramos, UNAIDS Community Support Adviser, Jamaica ([Slides](#))
- *What is the Global Fund supporting on women and girls?* – Nicola Skyers, Jamaica Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) ([Slides](#))
- Community Research – representatives from the Jamaica Community of Positive Women (JCW+) – Olive Edwards ([Slides](#)) and Renae Green Executive Director of TransWave
- *Discussion and questions*
- *Closure and next steps.*

These notes highlight key interventions from speakers and participants ([webinar recording](#)).

3. Presentations

Richard Plummer. The Jamaican Network of Seropositive (JN+) and Jamaica Community of Positive Women (JCW+) are the Focal Points on the Global Partnership in Jamaica. To date, JCW+ has developed a national plan of action with 13 women living with HIV to promote the understanding of stigma and discrimination. They recommended that Positive Health and Dignity Sessions be held to fully explain internalised stigma and also to conduct research into HIV-related stigma.

While COVID-19 limited certain activities, a total of 30 women and nine families were familiarised on stigma and discrimination. More people need to be reached which will then enable women to

implement the actions. The JCW+ plans to conduct a survey to assess the perceptions of stigma amongst women living with HIV and then will host a webinar to share the findings. They also plan to review the Positive Health and Dignity Curriculum which has been developed by people living with HIV to understand if this is achieving its objectives and how it contributes to the Stigma Index (where community workers would be trained as researchers) and also to review the Jamaican Anti-Discrimination System for HIV (JADS). The constituencies aim to use data from JADS as an advocacy tool and encourage involvement from international donors and governments by informing them clearly of the current situation in Jamaica.

Findings from the JADS show that six out of ten women who report HIV-related stigma and discrimination have also experienced gender-based violence (GBV) in Jamaica. This data and that of the Stigma Index has informed JN+'s work. Most recently, a workshop funded by UN Women was convened so that women could be fully informed on what GBV is and how they can seek help. A support group and WhatsApp group have been set up. Social media, including Twitter spaces, were leveraged and the group engaged lawyers, academia, UN partners and other civil organisations to bring visibility to GBV. Leading up to World AIDS Day, the JN+ and partners planned to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November), to participate in a global GBV public forum (26 November) and to launch Stigma-Free Spaces (29 November) with support from UNAIDS. The Stigma-Free Spaces aim to sensitise private and public sector organisations on stigma and discrimination, to encourage the development of policies within their institutions to end all forms of HIV-related stigma and discrimination and GBV. Finally, a motivational interview and GBV advocacy training session (8 to 11 December) will address GBV issues and create advocacy plans to end GBV and all forms of HIV-related stigma and discrimination.

Rubén Pagés Ramos, UNAIDS. Initial work conducted was to understand how the Global Partnership could contribute to the vast amount of work that civil society, communities and partners had done prior to Jamaica's commitment to the Global Partnership.

In January 2020, Jamaica was one of the first countries to endorse the Partnership. To set up the Global Partnership, UNAIDS embarked on a five-stage process which included community engagement, cosponsor engagement, securing political commitment, promoting government ownership and convening the partners (MoH, UNAIDS, UNDP, UN Women, JN+, Global Fund and PEPFAR).

The current context includes criminalisation of same sex intimacy and sex work, lack of anti-discrimination legislation, no gender recognition, high levels of discrimination against key populations and GBV. The latest Stigma Index found about 53% of people living with HIV report self-stigma. This, together with gaps in legislature, impacts the lives of women and people living with HIV.

This process involved courageous civil society networks that reviewed what was already in place to avoid duplication and to reinforce efforts. The efforts include the Government's role in facilitating an enabling environment and a human rights technical working group, the JADS, civil society forum and Global Fund national process including matching funds on human rights activities. Opportunities included the new National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2020-2025, which includes a component for human rights and the Global Fund country dialogues as another source of funding.

Achievements of the Partnership to date include a five-year operational plan which includes the development of an online monitoring dashboard used by all partners to track progress, a case for new Global Fund grant for Jamaica, the formation of a Reactive Technical Working Group on Enabling Environment and Human Rights (EEHR) and Legal and Policy Review Committee and the mobilisation of political commitment. A score card has also been developed and this is available [here](#). The

Partnership in Jamaica is chaired by the Minister of State for Health and Wellness. Additionally, the Partnership has embarked on a process for a political declaration to be signed by the Prime Minister and leader of the opposition which could provide the necessary message to the community at large

Nicola Skyers, CCM. The slides presented are either specific to women or cross-cutting and essential for all communities. Jamaica is approaching the end of the grant that covers 2019 to 2021, the Global Fund supported activities under its *Breaking Down Barriers* Catalytic Funding.

Activities aligned to *Legal Literacy (Know your Rights)* include the training of community development groups on Positive Health Dignity and Prevention (PHDP) and stigma and discrimination, confidentiality, sexual and reproductive health and rights training and sensitisation and training on human rights, gender inequality and GBV and social media. Activities aligned to *Stigma and Discrimination reduction* include training of union representatives and employers to address challenges faced by people affected and living with HIV in the workplace, sensitisation amongst faith based organisations (FBOs) and leaders and, finally ensure that community members are engaged in various decision-making processes with policy makers and community-led monitoring.

The work includes the *sensitisation of law makers and law enforcement agents* and the provision of resource materials, training of police and support staff, sensitisation of judicial stakeholders and other duty bearers in public and private sectors. Additional activities included supporting lawyers and paralegals to manage cases and to provide legal representation to affected persons.

While these are not specific to women and girls, they are avenues accessible to all. They also provide counselling and psycho-social support, socio-economic approaches, such as educational grants and entrepreneurial support and certified local skills training. Treatment and literacy adherence included the implementation of care for key and vulnerable populations (of which women and girls are one), while capacity building for health workers provided training in human rights, stigma and discrimination reduction, GBV and mental health.

Between 2022 and 2024, to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, civil society and community representatives were trained in pandemic response management. In addition, activities responded to human rights and GBV-related barriers during the pandemic. Other activities included the following: training community members to represent and discuss the issues at the parish council meetings and other government mechanisms responsible for disaster and emergency response, refresher training of CSO staff and community members on safe identity needs and how to make referrals and linkages, increase treatment literacy, offer adherence counselling with individuals and family, conduct pill counts at treatment sites/in the home to include clients on medication for comorbidities and encourage disclosure, conduct case conferencing (viral load/suppression monitoring, psycho-social needs/interventions) and conducting training in community-based monitoring.

With regard to GBV, Jamaica is rolling out training on GBV guidelines and research is planned to assess the judicial decisions that relate to GBV to inform legislative reform and develop a GBV response framework under the Spotlight Initiative. There is also a curriculum being developed for women and girls who are deaf regarding sexual violence, healthy relationships, healthy sexuality and sexual violence and risk reduction. Community-led monitoring efforts include capacity building and mentorship of community organisations and networks in a range of areas necessary for them to fulfil their roles in social mobilisation, community-based monitoring and advocacy during COVID-19.

There is also reporting human rights online training and the establishment of a treatment observatory to collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data on treatment establishing a treatment

observatory to systematically and routinely collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data on treatment cascade in treatment sites across the island.

Community research: Renea Green: The trans population in Jamaica has some of the highest HIV prevalence rates, this population faces homelessness and there are high rates of unemployment. There is a need to address these socio-economic issues that affect the community to a greater degree than other marginalised communities. Efforts need to focus on the existing gaps such as access to trans-specific healthcare services, particularly for transwomen. [TransWave](#) Jamaica is working on a gender identity framework that aims to determine a gender identity policy for the trans community in Jamaica. This is critical for trans people to assert their identity. So much more work needs to be done on institutional structures in public and private spaces so that trans people can feel safe.

Community research: Olive Edwards: Women are diverse and have different needs but we all relate to stigma and discrimination as a constant barrier to accessing the services. A study conducted by JCW+ found that women feel they are represented as targets and not as people in HIV response programmes. The issue of internalised stigma is a concern amongst people living with HIV as shown in the Stigma Index findings. While with age, some people living with HIV may find ways to challenge stigma to access services they deserve, others find it challenging to do so. The stigma just does not go away. The survey showed that women feel more needs to be done all the time and not only on special occasions. We need to understand how the JADS data is being used and for what? Women need more support for community research so that our voice is not dismissed as anecdotal.

Sensitisation is needed to ensure that the prevention programme for women living with HIV is working. With the support of UNFPA, UNAIDS, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, women have been looking at focused intervention around their sexual and reproductive health to advance conversations. COVID-19 has made life very challenging and it is not just the handouts that will work. Efforts related to community-led monitoring will facilitate community engagement not merely for purposes of data but will provide a voice for affected populations.

4. Final reflections

Women are afraid to speak out about their HIV status because of the stigma and discrimination they face. More information and support need to be provided. “What enabled me to be a brave woman was being bold enough to accept that I am HIV positive. That being HIV positive is not a life sentence and it is not something I went to a shop and purchased. It has not stopped me from doing anything that I want to do. Having a strong support system helped me to be as brave as I am.”

“As women, we need to stand up for ourselves – we need to build our self-esteem. We need to be able to negotiate condom use, to say no, to empower and educate ourselves. While not all of us can read and write - let us listen and find support systems, have conversations, get involved and speak out”

Life is already complex for many and HIV adds to the difficulties people living with HIV face. Women want to see change to witness equality and no discrimination. With the right support systems, women can accept their HIV status and live strong and healthy lives.

Key messages from the reflections by women include a need for increased access to information, strong support systems to build resilience against stigma and discrimination and the inclusion of women in research.