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Round Table 3: HIV

Presentation by
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The subject of my remarks today focuses on HIV, Women and Violence and the "feminization of the HIV epidemic" and Local Governance

Why a focus on women?

Let me share just a few figures with you.

According to UNAIDS 2007 data:

- Women comprise 59% of the adults, aged 15-49, living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa;
- 75% of all young people living with HIV in the region are female;
- 75% of all adult women living with HIV in the world reside in sub-Saharan Africa.

In my country, Cote d'Ivoire, the HIV prevalence rate among women is 6.4%, versus 2.9% among men.

This is why we should focus on women.

What is driving the feminization of the HIV epidemic in Africa?

According to UNAIDS, the feminization of the HIV epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa is fuelled by several factors: the higher biological vulnerability of women and girls, as well as the legal, social and economic disadvantages faced by women and girls in these societies.

Studies from Rwanda, Tanzania and South Africa show up to a three-fold increase in risk of HIV among women who have experienced violence compared

to those who have not (*American Journal of Public Health, AIDS and Behavior and The Lancet*).

Violence against women and girls takes many forms... from domestic violence, to violence against women in conflict settings to depriving women from accessing information and services. This includes physical violence, sexual violence and psychological violence.

There is also “political” violence against women which most governments have not addressed. This has resulted in the under-representation and limited participation of women who can articulate the “gender agenda.”

Most locally elected officials are men.

Traditional leadership in Africa still plays an important role and often these leaders are the men.

Traditional leaders have power and influence over communities and should encourage other men to become actively involved in supporting women, and to help change the cultural norms which negatively impact women.

Here is a quote from a World Bank study on women and HIV:

“Lasting changes in gender norms will be possible only when it is widely recognized that gender is relational, that it is short-sighted to empower women without engaging men, and that it is difficult if not impossible to change what manhood means without also engaging young women”.

A recent UN report *on all forms of violence against women* stated that “...as long as violence against women continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace”. It concludes by saying that although the international community has committed itself to protecting the rights and dignity of women and men through numerous treaties and declarations, ***when it comes to women’s rights, there has been little progress in reducing violence against women.***

We all have a role to play to create an environment where women and girls can live free from gender-based violence. States and those representing the state, can no longer tolerate gender based violence – violence that affects the health and well-being of women and girls, and destroys a critical resource for development.

Furthermore, violence against women and girls is a form of discrimination and a violation of basic human rights.

Why Local Government?

Local government is the sphere of government which is closest to the people. Local government has a core mandate of service delivery - providing housing, electricity, water and sanitation, roads and infrastructure. In some countries, this also includes education and health.

We know in many places local governments are unable to provide quality basic services. We know that local government authorities are also accused of corruption. We know that sometimes local government budgets are either overspent or underspent. We know that local governments often do not have regular access to needed information to respond to existing challenges. We also know that for local government authorities, and their basic services to be relevant, they must respond to community needs and realities. This involves establishing priorities and undertaking inclusive planning. Developing good local governance is an on-going process.

Local government today, unfortunately, is challenged with an ever changing mandate, coupled with insufficient human and financial resources.

What can local government do about violence against women and the feminization of the HIV epidemic?

Our collective challenge is both personal and societal. At the personal level, as husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles, and grandfathers, we must set an example in our homes and communities – and speak out. As men and as leaders, we must speak out against all forms of violence against women, uphold human rights and take steps to de-stigmatize HIV.

At a societal level, we must become more involved in creating public awareness and challenge harmful beliefs, attitudes and laws. We must stop all forms of violence against women. We must review municipal services with a gender lens. And we must listen to women and girls to better understand their day-to-day realities.

As a mayor and the Alliance Coordinator, I urge all fellow local government Mayors and Administrators to include gender and HIV in the planning, budgeting, implementation and reporting in every local government programme.

Here is a short story to explain this point:

A village had just completed rural electrification. One woman was asked about improvement to the quality of life. She responded by explaining that women still remained vulnerable to social crime and violence.

The electricity, she noted, is inside houses, not outside in the streets. Women walking from the bus stop to the settlement in the evening are often victims of crime – rape or robbery. Often times, during these incidents, men are sitting in settlement bars or sitting in their homes watching television.

The story demonstrates a lack of understanding, often by men, of the needs of women.

It illustrates what happens when local government practitioners, or decision makers, exclude women from community planning; women, who often comprise the majority of the local population, and use local government services.

This story also demonstrates how local government services can either contribute to or hinder the safety and well being of women.

I want to provide some additional examples of linking local government's core mandate with important social development programmes - especially gender and HIV.

Housing: Housing should be more than a shelter over a head, rather it should be a safe shelter, providing dignity to its occupants. The quality of life and this includes the safety and well being of women and girls, is improved by delivering quality services such as decent housing.

Water and sanitation: This is a particular problem in informal or overcrowded urban or peri urban areas. Often these settlements have communal taps and lavatories. They should be built in safe locations, not too far from the settlements for accessibility by all and to minimize risks of physical abuse of women and children. Their location should also take into account that it is the women and girls who take care of the sick and need easily accessible sources of water and sanitation.

Electricity: The safe location of street lights is important. To improve the quality of life of our communities, we need to work in partnership with other service provider's, such as police, along with communities to better understand and address communities' needs.

Roads and Transport: Infrastructure and transportation services are both important. Service schedules need to be convenient for community activities. For example, buses should not only transport young people to schools and workers

to towns, but should also run during the day to transport care-givers and sickly relatives to clinics and hospitals.

I will just speak briefly about how decentralization is working. We know that it is mixed. Local governments function well under some circumstances and quite poorly in others. But, in general, local government and local governance need to be strengthened in Africa to ensure that local government's increased mandates are coupled with increased resources. Local governments need these resources for their growing responsibilities.

However, we know that "institutions are not finished products" and local government, as an institution, needs to adapt to circumstances which do change, given that human needs and the means to satisfy them also change. Specifically, local governments need to be constantly revitalized and kept relevant. Leadership, commitment, responsive policies and services, therefore, must be established so that local government remains relevant to the people it serves.

The Alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders on HIV in Africa is an effort to mobilise African Mayors to tackle the HIV crisis. It reflects mayoral and local leadership and commitment, along with an understanding that local governments do have a responsibility and a key role to play. HIV is both an immediate crisis and a collective longer-term challenge – a challenge to survival and development.

We also recognize that local government alone is not the answer. As I said, HIV is a collective challenge and it is a complex issue. This means that we need to identify ways of working together especially with communities and civil society organizations. And develop our capacity to complement work at the national government level.

We developed, in collaboration with UNDP and UNAIDS, a "roadmap" called AMICAALL – Alliance of Mayors' Initiative for Community Action on AIDS at the Local Level. This "roadmap" outlines key strategic areas for action on AIDS at the local level, based on good local governance.

These include:

- Mayoral and municipal leadership that is visible and vocal;
- Leadership by example – such as encouraging the development and implementation of HIV policies and programmes in the municipal workplace;

- Collaboration and operational mechanisms in support of a local AIDS response – working with all levels of government and civil society and communities;
- Participatory analysis, planning and monitoring so that the needs, concerns and realities of the communities we serve are reflected in municipal AIDS plans and actions;
- Respect for human rights – helping to create a more enabling environment for people living with HIV and those affected; and
- Gender sensitivity – understanding the realities of women and men and reflecting these in our services.

Though I have focused here on women, I want to emphasize that gender is about both women and men. I would like to share one point about men who have sex with men. In many places, this is a taboo subject. But, in reality this population suffers from discrimination and lack of access to services, thus undermining efforts to effectively tackle the HIV epidemic. It is also a human rights issue.

In any society where a community is the subject of discrimination and exclusion, it is NOT ONLY the problem of that community, it is a problem for the entire society; it is a collective challenge and the state must take responsibility to ensure that the human rights of all its citizens are respected. And locally elected officials share this responsibility.

The AMICAALL approach is based on an understanding that the HIV epidemic differs from one country to another - how it spreads, prevalence rates, its impact as well as national responses to HIV. Countries need to tackle this challenge in each community and municipality in ways that respond to local needs and realities.

Today, the Alliance has national chapters in 13 countries. National AMICAALL Programmes are working with many partners at all levels and facilitating collective action at the municipal and community levels. Today hundreds of African municipalities are responding to HIV and bringing together all local stakeholders. They are ensuring that people and communities are heard and that their concerns are reflected in our collective planning and implementation efforts.

I am proud that, at its 2005 Founding Congress, the United Cities of Local Governments in Africa adopted AMICAALL as their strategy for local governments implementing HIV programmes.

In December 2007, the Alliance members adopted a declaration on *No Violence against Women* which reads as follows:

READING THE DECLARATION...

We have made a start... we still have a long way to go but we are making progress.

I will end today with a CALL FOR ENGAGEMENT AND ACTION. I urge all my fellow mayors and locally elected officials, to take up this challenge on both a personal and professional level. Come and join with the Alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders on HIV and AIDS in Africa and commit to the elimination of violence against women and unite in the fight against HIV and AIDS in Africa.

I thank you