

NEW SCORECARD SHOWS GOVERNMENTS ARE FAILING WOMEN IN THE GLOBAL AIDS RESPONSE

-- 75% of countries fail to report basic information on services for women and girls, says AIDS Accountability International --

Stockholm, 23 November 2009 – Three-quarters of the world's nations are failing to report basic information to the United Nations about their domestic responses to the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on women, according to the new AIDS Accountability Scorecard on Women released today by the independent, non-profit organization AIDS Accountability International (AAI). The Scorecard also found that countries with higher AIDS burdens are doing a far better job overall at reporting how their AIDS responses address the needs of women than are countries less severely impacted by the epidemic.

The Scorecard is the first-ever independent assessment of how well governments respond to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women in the context of the AIDS epidemic. It evaluates the latest data that UN Member States have provided to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) as part of their unanimous adoption of the United Nations 2001 *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS*.

Increased reporting on AIDS responses from all nations, regardless of relative AIDS burdens, is essential to holding countries accountable for the impact of their domestic AIDS programmes. Nevertheless, despite specific commitments to regularly report data to the UN, 10 countries (of 192 monitored) submitted no data at all on progress towards the targets set out in the *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS*.

An additional 52 countries (28%) received the Scorecard's lowest rating of "unfocused" on women's issues because they submitted little or no data with specific reference to women or gender issues. These included countries as varied as Austria, host to the upcoming AIDS 2010 conference; Jordan, which failed to report on several aspects of the impact of AIDS on women there despite a high international profile in the promotion of women's rights; Liberia, where the election of Africa's first female head of state has yet to translate into gains for women affected by AIDS; and the United States, which, in contrast to its significant contribution in the global AIDS response, reported no data on women with regard to its own epidemic. The study authors also noted a near total lack of data from the participating nations related to the vulnerabilities and treatment obstacles faced specifically by young girls.

"Governments have committed to prioritizing women in the AIDS response, but we still lack a clear picture of whether they are meeting their promises to women or not," said AAI Founder and Executive Director Rodrigo Garay. "Without greater accountability, we cannot be sure that funds are being well used or that women are getting their fair share of attention and support. Nor will we be able to say whether we have reached our global AIDS targets for 2010 and beyond."

The Scorecard on Women was developed with the input of experts from the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, the UN Development Fund for Women, the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the Ford Foundation, the University of Cape Town and the Cape Town-based Sonke Gender Justice Network, among others.

Of the nations evaluated in the Scorecard, 42% were classified as "aware" of the need to monitor and report women-specific data, although many of these did not report findings

systematically across all elements evaluated. Only 25% of nations received the Scorecard's highest rating – “responsive” – for reporting sufficient data detailing their domestic responses to the needs of women. Among countries with high HIV burdens, however, a full 67% earned the “responsive” rating, as did all seven countries with the largest HIV burdens. But because country reports to the UN only reflect how governments rate their own responses to AIDS, a high score on reporting does not necessarily correlate with actual performance. For example, the relatively good reporting by South Africa contrasts with its uneven performance in the delivery of services and maternal mortality rates that are ten times higher for HIV-positive than for HIV-negative women.

Globally, HIV is the leading cause of death and disease in women of reproductive age. Some 50% of adults living with HIV are women, the vast majority of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa. In the most severely affected nations, three young women are infected for every young man. Most women who become infected with HIV do not voluntarily engage in high-risk behaviour, however. Instead, they are made vulnerable by social norms that keep them from taking control of their lives and defining the conditions of their sexual relationships. Often they lack the tools, information and resources needed to protect themselves. Turning the tide of HIV infection will require measures to address these specific vulnerabilities of women in different contexts.

“We are losing too many women to this disease by not focusing on the practical interventions that really help them protect themselves from HIV infection. Nor are we holding governments accountable for their lack of action,” said Elizabeth Mataka, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy on AIDS in Africa. “Women matter, and it is time all governments acted on their commitments to protect women and girls from HIV/AIDS.”

“The findings of the Scorecard show that we know very little about what many countries are doing to reduce women's vulnerability to HIV infection or increase their access to essential services,” said Sigrun Mogedal, the Norwegian HIV/AIDS Ambassador. “Even more troublesome is the almost total absence of data on young girls, who are perhaps more vulnerable to HIV than any other population. Where is the accountability for them?”

Elements of the Scorecard on Women

The AIDS Accountability Scorecard on Women rates countries on their reporting on six key elements of an effective national response for women, and analyzes additional information provided by governments in their narrative reports.

The Scorecard's Women Reporting Index assesses the overall quality and completeness of country reporting on relevant data. Countries are characterized as **responsive** if they report the data needed for an effective response to women in the context of AIDS; **aware** if their reporting reflects awareness of the need to monitor and report data specific to women, even if in practice they do not always do so systematically; or as **unfocused** on women's needs and vulnerabilities if they have failed to acknowledge these or do not report on these aspects. Countries that have not reported on any aspects of their AIDS response are noted as having provided 'no data'.

The six elements measured by the Scorecard on Women are:

- **Data Collection.** This element reflects whether or not countries have provided data specific to women on 17 key epidemiological and behavioural indicators and in response to 11 questions on women and gender issues, as well as in their narrative reports. Countries facing more severe epidemics provided far more complete data than those where AIDS is less of a problem: 19 of the 25 countries that received an 'A' grade for

this element were in sub-Saharan Africa. Hyperendemic countries, where 15% or more of the adult population are living with HIV, achieved an average score of 4.0 out of a possible maximum of 5.0, while the average score of countries with low or concentrated epidemics was just 1.8.

- **Gender mainstreaming.** This element captures the degree to which countries have mainstreamed the gender dimension to AIDS in their HIV and development planning and are implementing interventions to improve gender equity. More than 25% of all countries failed to report any data on this element, including 13% of high-burden countries.
- **Policy and Legal Environment.** This element reflects progress in ensuring that men and women have equal access to prevention, treatment, care and support, protection of their rights and protection against discrimination. Less than half of all countries reported that their laws provided special protection to women in the context of AIDS, and only 37% had an earmarked budget for such interventions. Fifty-seven percent of countries with generalized epidemics had made such a budget provision, but only 3% of countries in Western and Central Europe had done so.
- **National Programmes.** This element is based on country reporting of sex-specific data on five key indicators that relate to coverage of treatment and prevention programmes. As many as 71% of countries reported some data on women on this element, but most reports were incomplete. Eastern Europe and Central Asia and the sub-Saharan African region had the highest average scores.
- **Knowledge and Behaviour.** This element tracks what women know about HIV and how to prevent its transmission, and the extent to which they have adopted behaviours that reduce their risk of infection. Only 31% of countries in Western and Central Europe reported any data on women on this element, in contrast to 83% of high-burden countries.
- **Impact.** Among the main goals of any HIV response must be the reduction of new HIV infections and facilitating access to treatment for those in need. As many as 44% of countries reported no data on women on this element, and only 10% of countries reported all the requested data.

In addition to the quantitative reporting of country-level progress, narrative reports provide countries with the opportunity to provide crucial contextual information that can greatly add to the understanding of issues they are facing in the response to AIDS. However, the Scorecard analysis of these reports showed that 83 out of 145 countries that submitted such reports (57%) failed to discuss gender at all.

Three critical priorities

AAI is calling for attention to three critical priorities that will improve evaluation of country progress on women and AIDS:

- **Need for more complete reporting.** While reporting through the UN process has improved in recent years, major gaps remain in our knowledge of how countries are responding to the situation of women in the context of AIDS. Without better monitoring, the international community will be unable to assess whether the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed targets for the response to AIDS have been met.
- **Need for more relevant indicators on women's vulnerability and prevention.** Current monitoring of the situation of women does not capture many of the underlying factors that contribute to women's HIV risk. In particular, there is an almost total lack of data on the situation of young and adolescent girls, one of the most vulnerable groups in countries with generalized epidemics.

- **Need for better narrative reporting.** Future reporting requirements in the global monitoring of AIDS should aim to generate better contextual analyses of the epidemic and how it is affecting women. These analyses are critical for generating greater debate and learning.

“We need to ensure that the social, political and economic rights of women are enshrined in law and protected,” said Mo Ibrahim, business leader and Chair of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, an African initiative that aims to stimulate debate about governance. “Holding governments and other key players accountable for women’s and girls’ rights is essential to protecting them from HIV infection and getting them the health care they lack in so many of the world’s countries.”

About AIDS Accountability International

AAI is an independent non-profit organization established to increase accountability and inspire bolder leadership in the response to the AIDS epidemic. It does this by comparing and rating the degree to which public, private and civil society actors are fulfilling the commitments they have made to respond to the epidemic. AAI aims to build bridges between actors and institutions that collect and analyze primary data in the field of HIV/AIDS and those who make use of this data in different contexts, such as policymaking and advocacy. Through its rating tools, AAI provides these actors with a compass that points to new policy and programmatic directions, and which aims to stimulate debate on the need for greater accountability, leadership, and transparency.

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