

The German BACKUP Initiative's approach to supporting gender-responsive HIV programming

The global context

Globally, the HIV epidemic is influenced by social, political and economic inequalities which render certain population groups more vulnerable to infection and less likely, once infected, to access the care and services they need. In many parts of the world women and girls experience higher rates of HIV prevalence and incidence than their male counterparts, linked to patterns of gender inequality and unequal power relations between men and women. Sexual minorities,¹ sex workers and other marginalised groups are also disproportionately affected by HIV. Governments, international agencies and non-governmental organisations are paying increasing attention to gender and human rights aspects of the HIV epidemic, including the need for gender-sensitive programming which responds to the specific risks and vulnerabilities of women and girls, as well as those of men, boys, and marginalised groups.

In sub-Saharan Africa, home to two-thirds of all people living with HIV, 60% are now women. Girls in the region are between 2 and 4.5 times more likely than boys to become infected with HIV.² Gender-related structural factors, such as low levels of education, the denial of property and inheritance rights, the persistence of harmful cultural practices, gender-based violence, and the gendered burden of care, are often cited to explain the differential risks and impacts of HIV on women and girls, men and boys. However, women and girls are not simply disempowered victims of HIV: evidence shows that women as well as men are engaging in risky sexual behaviours, such as multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships and intergenerational sexual relationships, which drive the spread of HIV in high prevalence countries in sub-Saharan Africa.³ Cross-national comparative surveys, which show that wealthier and more educated women in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa are more likely to be HIV positive than poorer, less educated women, has challenged earlier assumptions about the links between HIV, gender, education and poverty.⁴

What are gender-sensitive and gender-transformative responses to HIV?

Gender-sensitive programmes attempt to redress existing gender inequalities by addressing gender norms, roles and access to resources in so far as needed to reach project goals.

Gender-transformative programmes aim to re-define women and men's gender roles and relations by transforming unequal gender relations to promote shared power, control of resources, decision-making, and support for women's empowerment.

This complex interplay between gender and HIV has become more apparent with the availability of better, more nuanced HIV epidemiological data – such as that generated through modes of transmission studies – and important qualitative research which has explored the cultural norms and values underpinning sexual relationships in high-prevalence countries.⁵ While this has led to calls for better targeted evidence-based strategies which respond to the needs and challenges facing particular population groups, there is also a growing awareness that it is not enough for HIV strategies to be merely gender-sensitive: if women and men are to share equal rights to sexual and reproductive health, and to share the burden of HIV more equally, strategies must also attempt to be gender-transformative (*see box for definitions*). This requires the involvement of both men and women in changing entrenched gender norms, including helping men to assume greater responsibility for care and support, and for their own behaviour and its impact on others.

¹ Including men who have sex with men (MSM), transsexual, transgender, and intersex people, and others such as sex workers whose sexual behaviours do not conform to majority norms and values

² UNAIDS (2009). *Action Framework: Addressing Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV*. Geneva.

³ Leclerc-Madlala, S. (2008). Age-disparate and intergenerational sex in southern Africa: the dynamics of hypervulnerability, *AIDS* 22(4):S17-S25. Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa.

⁴ Mishra, V. et al (2009). *Levels and Spread of HIV Seroprevalence and Associated Factors: Evidence from National Household Surveys*. DHS Comparative Reports No. 22. Calverton, Maryland, USA: Macro International Inc.

⁵ Leclerc-Madlala, S. (2010). *AIDS in Southern Africa: A socio-cultural perspective*. Presentation at the World Bank, Washington DC.

Many governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations are keenly aware of the need to address gender and the needs of vulnerable populations in HIV programming. Since 2008 both UNAIDS and the Global Fund have released gender equality strategies and frameworks, and parallel strategies to address needs of sexual minorities.⁶ The growing number of gender-sensitive HIV programmes reflects this shift in emphasis, as does the greater attention to gender and sexual minorities in national-level strategies and plans. Nevertheless, much more needs to be done in reallocating financial and human resources, and in building the technical and programmatic capacity to scale up and sustain gender-sensitive HIV programmes and services⁷. HIV planning and programming also needs to be better informed by sex- and age-disaggregated data and other evidence which allows for nuanced understandings of the needs of particular population groups.

Germany's commitment

The German government, in line with current international dialogues on gender-sensitive programming and improving the performance and implementation of Global Fund grants, aims to promote two beneficial trends:

- Gender mainstreaming in Global Fund procedures, operations and instruments; and
- Increasing country-level demand for Global Fund resources for gender-sensitive HIV and AIDS programmes.

This second element, aimed at increasing country-level demand for resources for gender-sensitive HIV programmes, is supported through the German BACKUP Initiative. The German BACKUP Initiative seeks to enable government and civil society partners to use global financing more efficiently in order to implement measures for the effective and sustainable control of HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

In 2009, the German BACKUP Initiative introduced a special focus on gender-oriented HIV programming and now works with civil society and government partner organisations in selected cooperation countries to increase their capacity to plan, implement and monitor gender-oriented HIV and AIDS programmes, as well as to advocate for such programming and the resources to fund it.

The German BACKUP Initiative's approach to gender was shaped by a one-year exploratory project conducted by GTZ and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) in Malawi and Uganda during 2008,⁸ focusing on ways in which civil society organisations can be supported to design and gain funding for gender-sensitive programmes. Consultations with national and international agencies, NGOs and experts in civil society capacity building have also contributed to the programme approach.

Objective and expected outcomes

Through its special focus on gender, the German BACKUP Initiative aims at an increased allocation of global resources for gender-sensitive and gender-transformative HIV and AIDS programmes in selected cooperation countries.

It strives for:

- Increased action of national and decentralised AIDS decision-making bodies to realise gender-responsive HIV policies and strategies.
- Increased capacity and access to resources for civil society organizations to design, implement and monitor gender-responsive HIV programmes.
- Improved quality and consistent generation of gender-specific data through monitoring and evaluation systems.
- Improved quality of gender-responsive HIV services in the health sector.

Beneficiaries and partners

In its approach to gender-responsive HIV programming, the German BACKUP Initiative takes a broad view of gender, focusing not only on women and girls, and issues of gender equality, but also addressing men and boys, and vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSM), and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. Support is provided in line with the Gender Equality Strategy and

⁶ UNAIDS (2009). *Action Framework on Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV*, Geneva; UNAIDS (2009). *Operational plan for UNAIDS Action Framework: addressing women, girls, gender equality and HIV*, Geneva; Global Fund (2008). *Gender Equality Strategy*, Geneva; Global Fund (2009). *Strategy in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities*, Geneva; UNAIDS (2009). *Action Framework: Universal Access for Men who have Sex with Men and Transgender People*, Geneva.

⁷ UNAIDS (2009). *Operational plan for UNAIDS Action Framework: addressing women, girls, gender equality and HIV*, Geneva; UNAIDS (2009). *Action Framework: Universal Access for Men who have Sex with Men and Transgender People*, Geneva.

⁸ GTZ (2009). *Getting sensitive: Helping civil society groups gain funding for gender-sensitive HIV programmes. An Exploratory Project in Malawi and Uganda*. Eschborn.

the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities (SOGI) Strategy of the Global Fund, which is committed to ensuring that its grants support the equal and equitable access to prevention, treatment, care and support for all those who need it. While women and girls are the primary beneficiaries of gender-oriented projects supported by the German BACKUP Initiative, other population groups will also be reached through supported projects.

The German BACKUP Initiative is providing comprehensive support for gender-responsive HIV programming to partners in five countries in sub-Saharan Africa – Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi and Tanzania.

At **country level**, the German BACKUP Initiative is working with the following partners in support of gender-responsive programming:

- National and decentralized decision-making and coordinating bodies (e.g. NAC, District AIDS Committees) and relevant line ministries (e.g. Ministry of Health, Ministry of Gender)
- National and local civil society organisations, networks and umbrella organizations representing the interests of marginalized groups, in particular of women and girls, sexual minorities and other vulnerable key populations
- Governmental and non-governmental (NGO, FBO) health care providers

At **global level**, the German BACKUP Initiative works in strategic partnerships with UN organisations (WHO, UNAIDS) and international NGOs and initiatives such as the Global Fund, the International Planned Parenthood Federation, and the International Council of AIDS Service Organizations, in order to create synergies and share experiences and best practices in the area of gender-responsive programming.

Areas of support

The German BACKUP Initiative provides technical support for capacity development to the following areas of the national response to HIV and AIDS:

- Advocacy for gender-responsive policies, strategies and programmes
- Designing, implementing and monitoring of gender-responsive HIV programmes
- Improving HIV M&E systems in relation to gender dimensions, i.e. sex- and age-disaggregated data, gender-specific indicators
- Addressing gender dimensions in HIV and AIDS services in the health sector

In the five cooperation countries, the German BACKUP Initiative currently provides **technical support** for the following capacity-building initiatives in support of gender-responsive programming:

- Coalition-building of NGOs advocating for gender-sensitive and gender-transformative HIV programming at national level
- Advocacy for gender-specific policies and strategies for sexual minorities
- Development of revised HIV and AIDS response frameworks containing gender-related objectives, priorities and indicators
- Capacity development of CSOs in gender-oriented HIV programming and documentation of best practice
- Integration of HIV and Sexual and Reproductive Health services which are sensitive to the needs of men and women

These initiatives are implemented in cooperation with GTZ country programmes and their political partners, in order to ensure that they are aligned with national priorities and frameworks.

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