

Aug 17, 2021

Re: PEPFAR's strategy

My name is Keren Dunaway, a Young activist from Latin America. I have grown up with HIV and am now working as ICW Global's Gender Equality Officer.

I would like to use this space to address the importance of this strategy to have a gender-equitable approach, as networks of women living with HIV, have now been calling for, for 30 years, since ICW began. There have been decades of silence from states, donors and the UN on the gender aspects of these epidemics. Yet there is a large and ever growing body of evidence on the importance of addressing gender within the HIV pandemic & how best to do so. At last, UNAIDS' new strategy has this year adopted the gender objective, specifically the Goal 5 of the SDGs, thanks to much organising and advocacy by us women's rights organisations. And thanks again to women's rights advocates, the Global Fund has at last adopted gender equality as one of its 3 main objectives. So we now call on PEPFAR to seize this opportunity, to align its strategy with these others AND, more importantly, with what women living with HIV have been calling for since before I was born: to prioritise what WE need and want at last, instead of what OTHERS think we need. Because as we have seen, the priorities of women living with HIV in all our diversity goes far beyond the biomedical agenda, and the multiple complex challenges we face have been intensified and aggravated by the crises brought on by the COVID19 pandemic.

It's troubling that these concerns are *still* not being tackled after 30 years, and it's *also* essential that the Strategy seeks to address the underlying structural inequities that are widely documented to lead to girls', adolescents', and women's vulnerability, to HIV, to early child marriage, to other forms of violence, s and other sexual and reproductive rights violations, like Obstetric violence and coercive practice and all their consequences. The Strategy also needs to advance multisectoral, rights-based, gender-transformative policies, adopting a women-centred HIV care (WCHC)¹ approach, as promoted in WHO's own Guideline on SRHR in 2017, and related initiatives, that reflect and respond effectively to the comprehensive and multifaceted character of women's lives. In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to a recent article in [AIDS Care Journal](#), by Canadian researchers, about healthcare quality issues facing women living with HIV, which highlights how little our own priorities are met.

Last week over 26 feminist and global, regional and national organisations and networks of women living with HIV sent a statement to the WHO Department of Global HIV, Hepatitis and STI Programmes, It stated the [Approaches to Improve the WHO Global Health Sector Strategies for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and STIs through a Gender Equity Lens](#). At the heart of our recommendations was the call once again for our meaningful involvement in the development of ALL strategies and policies that affect our lives, and that includes PEPFAR's now. So we look forward to the opportunity to set up a call with the PEPFAR team and all the women who signed that statement from around the world, to discuss your Strategy too.

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¹ Medeiros, P (2020) Women-centred HIV care: a scoping review to understand the current state of service delivery for women living with HIV globally. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09540121.2021.1948498>