

International Women's Day, 2007

March 2007, Issue n°2

Southern Africa
HIV/AIDS Information
Dissemination Service



Inside this issue:

<i>Equality, Development and Peace Means Ending Violence against Women</i>	1
<i>Harnessing New Technologies to Enhance</i>	2
<i>International Women's Day – A Day of Note or Not?</i>	3
<i>Women's rights groups push for more AIDS funding</i>	4
<i>Speakers Not Deterred by Poorly Attended Women's Day</i>	5
<i>Female facts</i>	6
<i>Trafficking of Women And Girls a Concern for SADC</i>	6
<i>International Women's Day – Message by SAfAIDS Executive Director Mrs. Lois Chingandu</i>	7

Equality, Development and Peace Means Ending Violence against Women

Message by Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM

International Women's Day is the story of women's organizing for equality, justice and peace. Marked by women's groups around the world, it is rooted in the centuries-old struggle of women to bring about a better world. Its commemoration began in 1911 in Europe with a March 19 rally for women's right to vote and took on new momentum after more than 140 working women lost their lives in a fire in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City a week later. It grew in following years as women held rallies each year to protest the devastation of World War I.

This year as always the day is an opportunity for reflection and renewal. In the 12 years since the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, the signs of progress are many. There is global recognition that gender equality is central to human development and human security, as stated in the Millennium Declaration. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is now seen as a gender issue as well as a

health issue; rape has been recognized as a weapon of war and a crime against humanity. Women's human rights — monitored and upheld by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), now ratified by 185 countries— are now on every major agenda, national, regional and international.

At the country level too, there is much to celebrate. Laws and policies are being adopted to strengthen women's economic security in such vital areas as land, property and inheritance rights, decent employment, and access to credit and markets. Quotas or other affirmative measures have been adopted to increase women's representation in political decision-making in at least 95 countries, including many countries emerging from conflict.

But all of this progress can be destroyed through continuing violence against women. Violence against women is deeply rooted in structures of gender inequality. It fuels the spread of HIV/AIDS and destroys women's ability to break through inter-generational

cycles of poverty. Such violence, already horrific in times of peace, intensifies during armed conflict as legal and justice systems break down along with systems of social and community support. Whether in peace or in war, violence against women takes a huge toll— from individuals and societies both.

Fortunately, more and more countries are recognizing these links, acknowledging that until they eliminate persistent gender inequalities and discrimination, both human security and human development will remain a distant dream—along with all of the Millennium Development Goals. Governments are beginning to act: according to the Secretary-General's recent report, 89 states have legislative provisions on domestic violence, 104 countries have made marital rape a crime and 93 states prohibit trafficking in human beings. What is urgently needed is implementation.

UNIFEM has worked with women's groups and governments for over two

decades to end the multiple forms of violence in women's lives. What we have learned is that ending violence against women requires multiple strategies working across sectors and at different levels. Laws must be accompanied by resource allocations, institutional regulations and guidelines and systematic training for officials who will monitor and enforce them—including police and judiciary, health and social service providers. Ending violence against women also requires changing public perceptions and breaking through barriers of culture and tradition to find non-violent ways to resolve conflicts in personal and public life.

In the last decade, UNIFEM has spearheaded a set of regional and global advocacy campaigns, working with governments, women's groups and the media to change

laws, develop national action plans and scale up community-based interventions to end violence against women and girls. Since 2005, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, which UNIFEM manages, has supported Governments and NGOs to implement these laws, policies and action plans. Now we are taking this struggle to the next stage—to institutionalize the strategic, practical actions that can bring about change, and incorporate them into national development planning, and state accountability mechanisms.

This year marks the 10th Anniversary of the UN Trust Fund. Ten years of innovation, experience and activism have shown that ending violence against women is possible. What is needed now is a serious strategy and resources to upscale

the work through a strong gender entity within the UN system, bringing the system together to promote the strategies and practices that have worked. Only then can the UN, in partnership with Member States and the women's movement, be at the forefront of efforts to end this scourge. Only then will violence against women become a rare occurrence rather than a global pandemic.

On this International Women's Day we owe it to women around the world to take this challenge seriously—to end violence against women, and strike a blow for equality, development and peace.

Source: http://www.unifem.org/news_events/story_detail.php?StoryID=564

Harnessing New Technologies to Enhance Women's Health

By Graca Machel And Mary Robinson
KENYA, 8 March 2007 - The International Women's Day is a time when we take stock each year of the progress, or lack of it, on women's rights. This stock-taking happens all over the world, involving both women and men, and it reveals some progress.

Sadly, it also suggests that we still have a long way to go. Women and young girls continue to lack sufficient access to health, education, and wealth, particularly in the poorest countries. Socially unjust disparities between women in rich and poor countries are an additional grim reminder of how much remains to be done.

Increasingly, however, we are being provided with the tools to make a powerful and positive impact on women's health. New technologies offer the potential for major advances. Researchers are working hard to develop new technologies.

They have already developed mammograms and pap smear tests, which are part of women's regular health checks in developed countries.

We now also have the first vaccine to be developed specifically for women, a vaccine against the human papilloma virus (HPV), which causes most of the half-million cervical cancer cases diagnosed each year. The first of two HPV vaccines is already licensed in 38 countries.

This vaccine must be made available to women and young girls, especially those who live in the poorest countries.

Studies show that it is cost-effective to invest in prevention as opposed to treatment. Some diseases, like cancer, cannot be successfully treated once they progress beyond a certain stage. Therefore, prevention is vital. Women's health indicators show that insufficient progress has been made on women's health, particularly in developing countries.

We also know that little progress has been made in recognising a woman's right to sexual and reproductive health - in part because women lack the means to protect themselves.

Rich countries' health systems offer screening, which often detects HPV early enough to prevent progression into cervical cancer. However, for most women in developing countries, pap smears are out of reach or unavailable.

The consequences for women's health are disastrous, especially in combination with the HIV/Aids pandemic. Therefore, cervical cancer mainly takes its toll in the poorest nations: of the 270,000 cervical cancer deaths worldwide, 85 per cent are in developing countries.

New technologies such as the HPV vaccine should be made available, accessible and affordable for developing countries.

cont...pg3

We should not allow the example of the hepatitis B vaccine to be repeated. It had been readily available in the developed world for more than 18 years, before it was introduced in the poorest countries with the world's highest incidence of liver cancer.

The recent experience of global health organisations such as the GAVI Alliance shows that new and innovative financing models can facilitate the introduction and affordability of new vaccines and technologies, with dramatic effects on the number of lives saved.

The GAVI Alliance could potentially play a similar role to fund the introduction of the vaccine against HPV. If no such concerted effort is made and if current trends in women's health continue, there are projected to be over a million new cases of HPV annually by the year 2050.

The international community must address this glaring inequity between women in poor countries and those in the developed countries. Mammograms and pap smear tests have saved the lives of women in the wealthy countries.

We know a global effort to make a new life-saving vaccine such as the HPV vaccine widely available and affordable could play an important role in curtailing millions of unnecessary deaths of women and girls in the poorest regions. This is a compelling case for action and we need women power to drive it home!

Ms Machel is president of the Foundation for Community Development and Ms Robinson, president, Realising Rights: The Ethical Globalisation Initiative

Source: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200703071024.html>

International Women's Day – A Day of Note or Not?

Fungai Machirori
HARARE, 6 March 2007 - On Thursday morning, millions of women the world over will awaken to the same activities of their everyday lives, oblivious to the fact that on that day, March 8, a global celebration of women and their economic, political and social achievements will be unfolding in almost every capital in the world. The 8th of March is recognised globally as International Women's Day - an occasion to review the progress women have made in their struggle for equal rights, as well as a day to celebrate their economic, political and social achievements in the past year.

In some nations, March 8 is observed as a public holiday commemorated in much the same way as Mother's Day, or Valentine's Day. And whatever the national activity to mark the day – be it Brazilian women advocating pensions for housewives, or Indian sex workers demanding improved rights, exhibitions of artwork by Iraqi women, or rallies for human rights held by women in Somalia - the theme of solidarity and women's empowerment courses through all the commemorations. But still the day is little known and commemorated in Zimbabwe, a

country where much work has been done, and is still being done to feminise responses to crises such as HIV and AIDS and domestic violence. Zimbabwe is one of the few SADC countries to have elected a female vice-president, and the ruling party has a policy of encouraging female political participation. "I think we leave it too late and get people surprised when the day comes," observed Ms. Evince Mugumbati, the Information Manager at the Women's AIDS Support Network (WASN).

Thus far, there has been very little Zimbabwean media space and air-time devoted to the Day. "At a national level, it's mostly NGOs and civic organisations that know about the commemorations, and not the general public," noted Tapuwa Manyati, the information officer at Padare Men's Forum. He added that lack of publicity around the day was probably as a result of the generally unaffordable costs of flying advertisements in the Zimbabwean media. At the same time, this seems to reflect disinterest within the media fraternity itself to mobilise reportage of the event. "People working in the media should take the initiative and help us to remember this day", observed Ms. Esther Magaramombe, a Programme Offi-

cer with the Zimbabwe Business Coalition on AIDS (ZBCA).

This year's national commemorations, spearheaded by the Ministry of Gender, Women's Affairs and Community Development, will take place on 17 March under the international theme of 'Ending Impunity for Violence Against Women'. Thereafter, the ministry will embark on similar commemorations at provincial, district and ward levels. "Those in the urban areas know about the day, but not many in the communal areas," observed Mr. Christopher Chingosho, the acting permanent secretary in the office of the Ministry. "In this ministry, we have staff as far down as ward level and it is their responsibility to inform communities about this day."

With over 70% of Zimbabwe's population being rural based and mostly dependent upon subsistence activities for survival, the use of complex language such as 'impunity' in the national theme is likely to be a point of confusion for many. "People might not understand that word, and I agree that we need to simplify the language we use in order to create mutual understanding," admitted Chingosho. "But we learn as we go along."

Semantics aside, the theme fits well with Zimbabwe's progress in having the Domestic Violence Bill recently passed into law. Domestic Violence has long been a malignant form of Gender Based Violence (GBV) that has financially and socially disempowered women, as well as aided the spread of HIV through violent and forced sex within the home setting. Cultural practices of granting women and girls secondary status in societies have further fuelled the spread of HIV, with the girl child often being deprived of equal access to education, property and general welfare, resulting in her exposure to high risk activities such as commercial sex work. Nationally, women account for approximately 60% of those living with HIV. They carry the responsibility of ensuring that their unborn offspring do not contract Semantics aside, the theme fits well

with Zimbabwe's progress in having the Domestic Violence Bill recently passed into law. the virus during childbirth and, as nurturers, shoulder the burden of care for sick relatives, and themselves – roles not often appreciated enough.

"HIV remains silent in commemorations such as these," said Mugumbati. "We should go back to the drawing board and say that in whatever we are doing, we shouldn't leave out HIV."

Magaramombe called for clarity on the objectives of the commemorations, stating that there was need to sensitise the public on these in time to begin preparations for the event. Manyati added that ideally, the International Women's Day campaign should run like that of the 16 Days of Activism, with efforts to increase the

profile of the day being concerted and ongoing throughout the year. "We need a system for sustainability and continuity among implementing organisations in order to increase our visibility in advocacy," he noted. "We also need to give the public enough background on why the day exists." Manyati said that preparations and publicity around the day needed to be steered by large women's organisations such as UNIFEM or the Women's Coalition, who could mobilise the necessary resources to allow for the day to finally be recognised fittingly as a celebration of the resilience of Zimbabwean women under often trying circumstances.

Source: <http://www.safaid.org.zw/viewinfo.cfm?id=41&linkid=7&siteid=1>

Women's rights groups push for more AIDS funding

JOHANNESBURG, 8 March (PLUSNEWS) - On International Women's Day, local and international women's and human rights groups urged donors to devote more funding to HIV/AIDS programmes aimed at reducing women's vulnerability to infection.

A report released on Tuesday by 'Women Won't Wait', a new international coalition of women's groups, cited the sexual violence and coercion women experience at the hands of their male partners as a leading factor in the increasing "feminisation" of the AIDS pandemic.

But the report, 'Show Us the Money: Is Violence Against Women on the HIV and AIDS Funding Agenda?', noted that while funding for HIV/AIDS programmes has increased dramatically in recent years, the main donor agencies have failed to address the link between violence against women and HIV infection.

Funding for programmes aimed at promoting women's rights and ac-

cess to reproductive and sexual health services has actually decreased.

After evaluating the funding process and policies of several large donor agencies, including the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR); and UNAIDS, the report's author, Susana Fried, concluded: "For all of the donors this report examines, the scant funding made available for gender-based violence efforts is largely separate from, rather than integral to, programmes to prevent and treat HIV and AIDS."

Despite making strong statements about the links between violence against women and HIV/AIDS, commitments by donor agencies tended to "evaporate" at the level of implementation, making it difficult to track spending on violence against women and hold donors accountable.

A campaign was launched this week by the Johannesburg-based civil so-

ciety organisation, Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), and its international partner, the Open Society Institute (OSI), to increase the flow of Global Fund grants to HIV/AIDS projects for women and girls.

OSISA has called on women's rights and HIV and AIDS organisations in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe to form national coalitions and develop proposals for Global Fund grants. OSISA and OSI will provide funding and technical support to assist the coalitions to develop strong proposals and submit them to the Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs) of the Global Fund.

"If you do an analysis of how much Global Fund money is going to reducing women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, it's not significant," said Sisonke Msimang, HIV/AIDS programme manager for OSISA. "We're also still not seeing enough women's organisations approaching

cont...pg5

the Fund with proposals."

The complex guidelines and rules of CCMs often made them inaccessible to grassroots organisations with limited capacity. "We're encouraging collaborations between AIDS organisations that may not be addressing gender, and women's networks that may not have the technical skills or strong leadership but know the issues," said Msimang.

The 'Women Won't Wait' report congratulated the Global Fund for its efforts to promote country ownership of the funding process, but said the consequence was that CCMs were free to ignore guidelines concerning gender: "The result is a vast disparity among CCMs in terms of gender balance,

and minimal representation of women's organisations."

Dawn Cavanagh, director of the South African-based nongovernmental organisation, Forum for the Empowerment of Women, endorsed the report's findings.

"I think it validates what we, as activists on the ground, have been saying - that we've been battling to get funds."

She believes that in recent years a shift in focus from women's rights to the more general 'gender issues' has negatively affected efforts to address related HIV/AIDS issues.

"It's not an agenda that's come from the grassroots level,"

Cavanagh said. "That backlash has been reinforced by donor thinking at the international level, and that's the thinking that has underpinned where resources are going."

Women account for 59 percent of people living with HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, according to UNAIDS.

To download the report, go to: www.womenwontwait.org
For more information about the OSISA campaign, go to: www.osisa.org
Source: <http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSreport.asp?ReportID=6728&SelectRegion=Africa&SelectCountry=AFRICA>

Speakers Not Deterred by Poorly Attended Women's Day

By Petronella Sibeene
WINDHOEK, 9 March 2007, -The main event in Windhoek yesterday to commemorate International Women's Day was poorly attended despite the fact that the day is significant in the sense that it connects and inspires women around the world to achieve their potential.

This did not, however, discourage speakers from sending the message of the day to the nation.

Celebrated under the theme, "Empowering Women and Girls to Eradicate Gender-Based Violence," Minister of Home Affairs and Immigration and also Acting Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Rosalia Nghidinwa, said women and children are under siege in society.

Reports of incidents of sexual assault, abuse, murder, domestic violence, threat and harassment against women and children, abound. "Reported cases of rape have more than doubled in the past decade, with an alarming increase in rape of children, many as young as five years," said Nghidinwa.

The minister added that surveys have shown that most Namibian men view their partners as their property. "Forty-four per cent of men surveyed in 2000 agreed that wife-beating is justified, while in the Caprivi Region the proportion was an overwhelming 91 percent".

Although legislation exists to protect women and girls from violence, most communities regard this subject as a taboo. Studies by the ministry have shown that 73 percent of gender-based violence is perpetrated by those known to the victim.

Anti-social behaviours are disturbingly high. Children as young as 10 are exposed to alcohol abuse, drugs and gun threats, Nghidinwa stated. While Namibia's combating of Domestic Violence Act, the Combating of Rape Act and the Child Status Act has been heralded internationally as being progressive in protecting women's and children's rights, Nghidinwa suggests that awareness of these provisions should be extended to rural areas as well. She sees a great need for empowering women economically by engaging them in income-generating projects

and to confidently occupy decision-making positions both in government and the private sector.

Girls should also be empowered to take their education seriously. Furthermore, gender-sensitive support programmes should be initiated to ease the burden of care placed on girls and women as a result of HIV/AIDS.

Namibia can also "pat" herself on the back for slowly but successfully making great strides in the area of gender, power and decision-making at the political level.

Statistics indicate an increase in women representation from 22 percent in 2001 to 27 percent in 2005 in the National Assembly. The percentage of women in decision-making in the public service also increased from 24 percent in 2001 to 33 percent in 2005.

United Nations resident coordinator, Simon Nhongo, stated at the same platform that violence against women fuels the spread of HIV/AIDS and destroys women's ability to break

through inter-generational cycles of poverty.

Already horrific in times of peace, violence against women takes a huge toll both on individuals and societies at large. Until persistent gender inequality and discrimination are eliminated, both human security and development will remain a distant dream, he said.

"Let us seize this day to spread the message that gender-based violence is not only a crime perpetrated against our mothers, sisters and daughters, but it is a direct violation of the very fabric of society, and shall not be tolerated in Namibia", he added.

Nhongo also conveyed the message of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon who said empowering women is not only a goal in itself, but a condition for building better lives for everyone on the planet.

Source: <http://www.newera.com.na/archives.php?id=15128&date=2007-03-09>

Female facts

- International Women's Day marks a celebration of the economic, social, cultural and political achievements for women
- The first IWD was held on 28 February 1909 in the USA.
- In 1910, the International Socialist congress in Copenhagen unanimously voted to establish a day in honour of the movement for women's rights.
- In 1911, one million people demonstrated world wide, demanding the right of women to vote, to hold public office, vocational training and an end to discrimination.
- Now IWD is always celebrated on 8 March and is an occasion marked by women's groups around the world.
- This date is also commemorated at the United Nations and is designated in many countries as a national holiday.

Trafficking of Women And Girls a Concern for SADC

HARARE, March 6 2006, This year's theme - Ending Impunity for Violence Against Women - highlights the critical need to create a social and legal environment that does not tolerate violence against women and girls.

While most societies publicly condemn violence against women and girls, the reality is that it is often tacitly condoned by cultural practices and norms.

Ending tolerance for all forms of violence against women - physical, sexual and psychological - is one of the most important challenges facing the world today.

Trafficking of women and girls is among the challenges that continue to hinder women's ability to participate fully in society. It is a form of gender violence that is affecting the progress to achieving development goals in southern Africa.

According to the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organised Crime (the Palermo Protocol), "trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."

In southern Africa, the main reasons for trafficking are promises for better jobs, forced labour, sexual exploitation and educational opportunities. Regional and national strategies are needed to curb this form of gender violence.

An audit commissioned by the SADC Gender Unit and SADC Parliamentary Forum in 2005 on the extent to which the provisions of gender equality in regional and international instruments for gender equality have been implemented noted that "new forms of gender violence, such as trafficking, are on the rise".

Trafficking was highlighted as a new and emerging issue at the 2005 Beijing +10 review in New York. Trafficking in women and girls thus, was one of the 10 resolutions adopted at that meeting.

In southern Africa no country has specific legislation on trafficking of women and children although this is addressed under various laws. It is against this background that the draft SADC Protocol on Gender and Development proposes legislation to prevent trafficking by 2010.

There is however growing acknowledgement of the problem in different laws that are in place in SADC countries and some are using these laws such as Sexual Offences Bills to address issues of trafficking against women and children.

Mozambique is cited as one key source country for women and children trafficked to South Africa according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) 2003 report "Seduction, Sale and Slavery: Trafficking in Women and Children for Sexual Exploitation in Southern Africa".

Other source countries include Malawi, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The scourge of trafficking of women for sexual exploitation in southern Africa continues to pervade the region as police admit that breaking into responsible syndicates is proving difficult, despite intensive efforts by several stakeholders.

While trafficking exists, there is not much information available on the problem as it is a very secretive and hidden activity.

More regional initiatives on how to address trafficking in women and girls need to be established, including harmonisation of legislation on how to prosecute nationals who have committed crimes in other countries.

Source: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200703060874.html>

International Women's Day – Message by SAfAIDS Executive Director Mrs. Lois Chingandu

Although International Women's Day is often seen as a day of celebration, we at SAfAIDS see it as a time for critical reflection – a moment where we stop, take stock of what has been done and what still needs to be done; re-energise, and continue with the battle against gender inequality, and HIV and AIDS. As such, the day provides us an opportunity to strengthen our advocacy calls for the rights of women and girls amidst the feminisation of HIV and AIDS.

At this time, it is fitting that we applaud the efforts of influential leaders, both past and present, such as Peter Piot (UNAIDS Executive Director), Kofi Annan (former UN Secretary General), Bill Clinton, and Graca Machel, among others, who have fought tirelessly to highlight the plight of women and endorse reforms on HIV and AIDS issues, particularly those that have benefited Africa, and its women. We also commend the resilience of Zimbabwean women whose continued advocacy for justice has seen the enactment of a Domestic Violence Act in the country, joining South Africa and Namibia which already have laws specifically dealing with the criminalisation of this form of violence in southern Africa.

Progress for SAfAIDS over the last year



News in Focus is a publication of the SAfAIDS Media Resource Desk (MRD), and is produced to evaluate topical HIV and AIDS events and conferences in southern Africa.

For more information, please contact
Beatrice Tonhodzayi
Media Programme Officer, SAfAIDS
17 Beveridge Road
Avondale, Harare
Zimbabwe
Phone: +263 4 336193/4 307898
Fax: +263 4 336195
Email: mediadesk@saf aids.org.zw

Please visit our website
<http://www.saf aids.org.zw>

**HIV/AIDS Information: The power
to make a difference.**



has come through many successes, which include updating the SADC audit on sexual and reproductive health, which has been used to initiate processes to elevating the SADC Gender Declaration to a Protocol. We have also produced key information tools such as the Eastern and Southern Africa AIDS Monitor – a resource that will assist in monitoring the progress made in achieving targets related to HIV prevention, treatment and care made by African countries at the 2006 Abuja Summit and the UN General Assembly High Level Summit on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS).

But while appreciating and celebrating the gains made in previous years towards meeting the desperate need for HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support interventions in southern Africa, we remain convinced that the battle is far from won. Women, who constitute over 55% of all people infected with, and dying from HIV and AIDS in southern Africa, still face the harsh daily realities of the epidemic. They suffer under the economic burden of poverty and care for their families, while at the same time fighting the stigma and discrimination related to their HIV positive status. This year, we must intensify our work towards prevention with a special focus on women and girls in order to reduce this burden of care that rests upon their shoulders, for if we save the mothers, we reduce orphanhood, and therefore the phenomenon of child-headed households in southern Africa.

Each new year, the International Women's Day provides us with an opportunity to open a new phase and renew our commitment to focus on the linkages between gender and HIV. As such, we must continue to push for women-controlled methods of prevention, and maintain a policy of zero tolerance for any kind of violence against women – a policy that fits well with this year's theme of "Ending Impunity for Violence Against Women". We must address men as key drivers of the epidemic, and engage them in partnerships to create mutual understanding of the roles that each has to play in beginning to reverse the trend of HIV infections.

But we must always bear in mind the need to first seek a stronger force of women with clear intentions and directions towards effecting meaningful changes, prior to seeking our male counterparts' support. We must accept that we, as the socially and economically privileged women in society, are not doing enough to project the voices of grassroots women who need to start participating in the conversations

that we are having on key issues concerning women - only a handful of SADC nations have met the 30 percent quota of female representation in national parliaments while few women in the region are in positions to drive the agenda of important issues such as Violence Against Women (VAW), trafficking of women, and the multitude of cultural, social and legal influences that work together to perpetuate cycles of dependency and subordination that so often fuel the growth of the HIV epidemic.

We therefore should use International Women's Day as an annual launching pad to set agendas for change which will thereafter drive operations, while we monitor our progress at every stage throughout the rest of the year. We should also emphasise the importance of accountability in delivering on the promises made on behalf of women to stem the spread of HIV. As such, it follows that we must challenge our leaders, at all levels, when little or no progress is made in terms of mobilising the necessary resources to act for the betterment of women's lives.

Each year, we must produce progress reports within our communities – at national, regional and global level, as a means of demanding accountability for resources utilised on women's programmes. The AIDS Monitor will go a long way towards assisting advocacy networks, women's groups and AIDS Service Organisations (ASOs) in fulfilling this vital role. And as we identify the resources that we will need in the near future, let us keep in mind that while money is important, it remains irrelevant without leadership and political will to drive its use.

Women need to realise that they are the leaders, and not the led. And with few women understanding the significance of International Women's Day, SAfAIDS heeds the call to continue to play its role of informing the public about the Day's significance in light of women's rights, as well as identifying gaps that still exist in work towards gender and HIV. Only through disseminating such information, building capacity and acting upon all injustices against women and girls can they truly take leadership of their lives. As such, SAfAIDS commits itself to continuing to break cultural barriers that argue against this so that women may be empowered to fight for their own emancipation. Hopefully this will finally see women and men throughout the region, and beyond living out International Women's Day everyday.