

## POINT OF VIEW

### Women, development and HIV/AIDS

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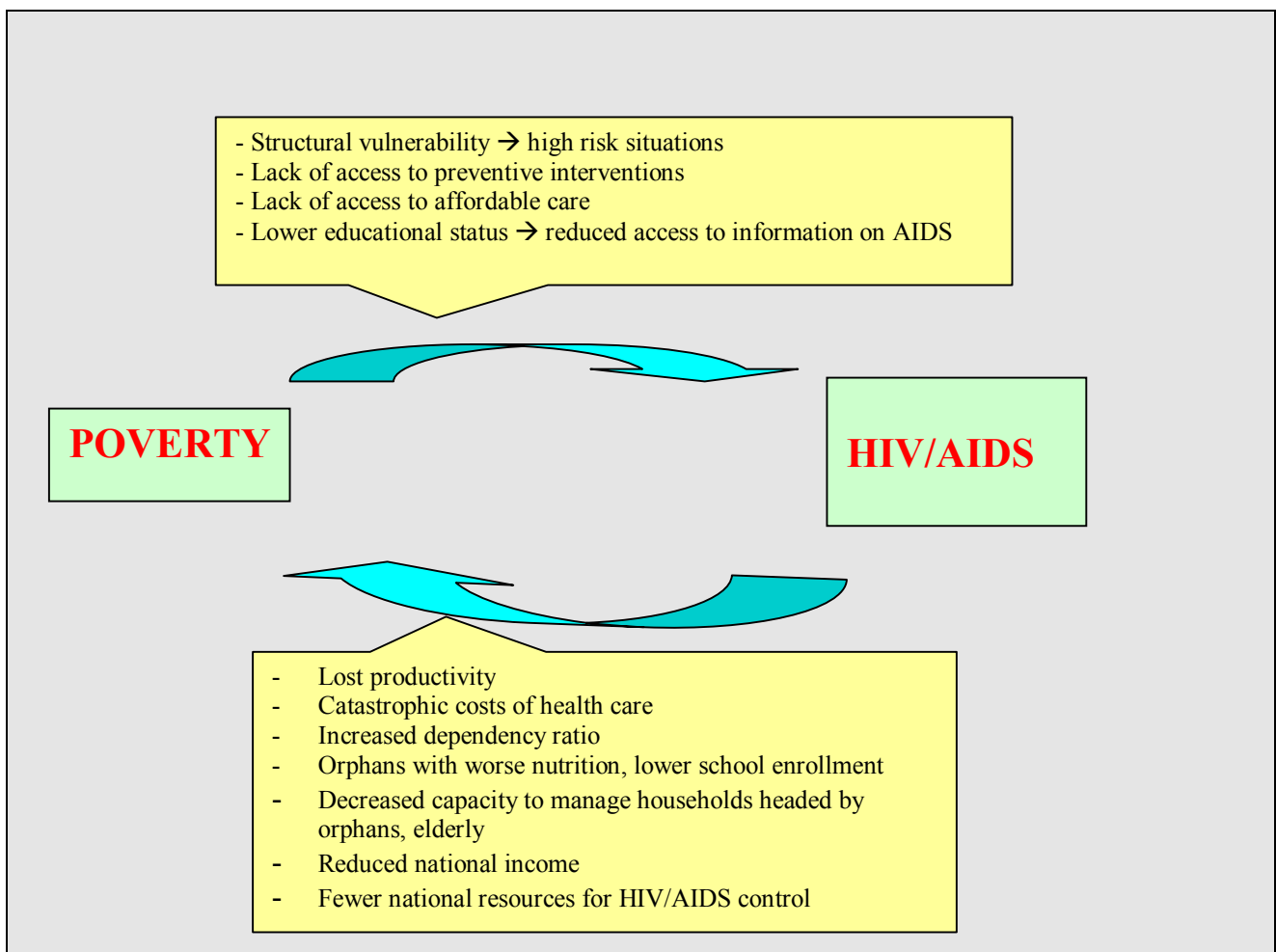
## Women, development and HIV/AIDS

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### Introduction

Since poverty and AIDS are interlinked intensified poverty reduction strategies are important HIV prevention strategies. In countries with high HIV prevalence and high levels of poverty such as is the case in Uganda, Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique linking HIV/AIDS and development is crucial to break the curve of the epidemic.

**Figure 1. The link between HIV/AIDS and poverty**



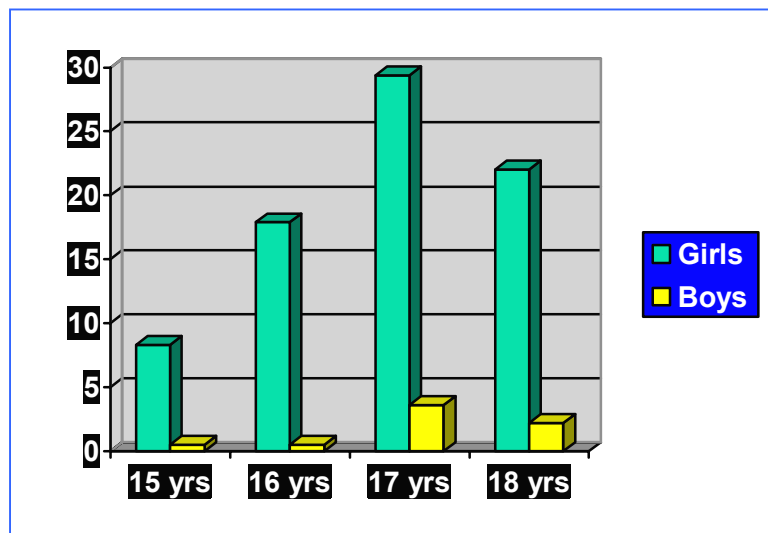
Relationship between Poverty and HIV/AIDS: a simplified view: There are two sets of issues. One is that of AIDS causing or deepening poverty. The other is the combined effect of poverty and income inequalities on social transactions, including sex, patterns of vulnerability and patterns of risky behavior in relation to HIV infection and AIDS.

Source: UNAIDS, 2001

Until recently the recognition of HIV as a development issue is the incorporation of HIV/AIDS into the Poverty Reduction Strategies in countries being considered for debt relief (AIDS, Poverty Reduction and Debt Relief, UNAIDS 2001). This left some low and- lower middle-income developing countries with an HIV/AIDS epidemic and stagnating or even decreasing development in a worse situation than those with debt – as far as massive aid/debt relief for HIV/AIDS is concerned. The issue has been dealt with in the UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, June 2001; by setting the goal that by 2003 the national Poverty Eradication Strategies must address the impact of HIV/AIDS and impact mitigation priorities must be mainstreamed into development planning generally. The UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS further includes the goal that by 2003 countries will adjust and adapt economic and social development policies, including social protection policies, to address the impact of HIV/AIDS on economic growth, provision of essential economic services, labour productivity, government revenues, and deficit-creating pressures on public resources.

In Africa today young women are 4-6 times as infected as young men – see figure 2. The sad fact is that the epidemic in Africa today is being passed on from generation to generation primarily through sex between older men and young girls. Until now it has not been possible to change this deep rooted gender related behavioural pattern.

**Figure 2. HIV prevalence among teenagers, Kisumu, Kenya**



Source: UNAIDS, 2000

Women bear the brunt of the epidemic. Young women are more vulnerable to HIV than young men, and girls are the first to be taken out of schools when income is decimated and an extra hand for caring is needed at home. Women are the AIDS carers both in the families and as the volunteers in the much demanded home based care initiatives and finally most orphans are fostered by an elderly

woman whose main survival strategy is informal work (Mutangadura, 2000). For these women very few job opportunities exist and micro finance targeted to poor communities and women is undeveloped in sub-Saharan Africa.

UN is strongly advocating for poverty reduction programmes to include women and HIV/AIDS arguing that HIV prevention programmes must include economic and educational initiatives for women. In the UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, June 2001; is stated that the empowerment of women is essential for reducing vulnerability and target should be set for achievement. A study carried out by UNICEF in 2000 revealed that 45% of women in sub-Saharan Africa with no education did not know about HIV/AIDS, for women with primary education this percentage was halved and for women with post primary education only 8% did not know about HIV/AIDS This finding can be complemented with a recent World Bank study (Bonnell, 2000) revealing that empowerment of women through greater economic independence is associated with a lower HIV prevalence rate.

The need to initiate and mainstream poverty reduction activities with due emphasis on women has never been greater. The economic impact of HIV/AIDS and the epidemic still on the increase makes many National Strategic Plans concentrating on HIV prevention and care inadequate although very important mechanism in its own right. For these plans to have sufficient impact on the epidemic they need to be strongly supported by development strategies and poverty reduction means to be sustainable. Very poor people who do not perceive themselves as having a future or a very bleak one do not have the incentive or the resources to change sexual behaviour and they may not even understand the messages being campaigned. Ensuring access for poor people to scarce resources such as land, capital, education and health care with emphasis on women will go a long way in fighting the AIDS epidemic. The National Strategic Plans – if fully implemented – will go some of the way. Ensuring general development at the same time will break the curve.

Important links and key references:

UNAIDS and the World Bank: Poverty Reduction and Debt Relief, Geneva, March 2001

UNGASS: Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. Global Crisis – Global Action, New York, July 2001

<http://www.unaids.org>

<http://www.undp.org>

<http://www.icrw.org>

<http://www.iaen.org>