

## REGIONAL FORUM

### "Reproductive and sexual health and rights of women living with HIV in Central Asia"

#### Final resolution



December 5-6, 2012, Dushanbe hosted the Regional Forum “Reproductive and sexual health and rights of women living with HIV in Central Asia”, which was attended by about 100 representatives of government, civil society, media, women living with HIV, international community from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

The main objective of the Forum was to attract the attention of politicians, decision-makers, civil society and international partners to gender issues related to HIV infection in Central Asia, including the problems of women living with HIV and develop general recommendations for further actions to strengthen the response to HIV epidemic.

The participants of the Forum **note** that despite the positive trends outlined in the sphere of fight with the spread of HIV at global level in Eastern European and Central Asian countries, the epidemic situation remains tense, that is confirmed by high number of new HIV infections, further development of the epidemic in groups that were subject to high risk of infection (injection drug users, commercial sex workers, men who have sex with men) and other vulnerable groups (youth, women, migrant workers and family members). This endangers the Millennium Development Goal 6, “*Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS*”.

The Forum participants are concerned that the number of women and girls affected by HIV in the Eastern European and Central Asian countries has significantly increased. Generally it accounts for about 35% of adults living with HIV, according to estimated data one third of them were infected through drug injections.

The Forum participants stress that gender inequality, including the unequal legal, economic and social status, limited access to health care and services, as well as all forms of discrimination and violence, including sexual violence and exploitation of women and girls is one of the key factors in the spread of HIV.

The Forum participants **draw attention** to the fact that due to the growth of labour migration in the region the vulnerability to HIV / AIDS is rising. The participants also note that migration is undoubtedly enhances broader use of practices of harmful behaviours. Women migrant families, being in a subordinate position and are not sufficiently knowledgeable, can't insist on safe sex and protect themselves from possible infection.

The Forum participants **express a particular concern** about the increasing cases of HIV transmission from mother to child and the lack of timely application of programs on preventing HIV transmission from mother to child (PMCT).

The Forum participants **are seriously concerned** about the low level of service coverage with regard to treatment of the HIV in the region: according to estimated data, only 25% of people who are prescribed to be treated in connection with HIV, receive such treatment.

The Forum participants are paying particular attention to the inadequate access of women from groups which are most at risk of HIV infection (injection drug users and sex workers) to services in the field of HIV/AIDS in relation to various forms of stigma and discrimination, harassment and violence that exist in the society with respect to them. Under such circumstances women are not able to get adequate access not only to good health care, but also to the services that are vital to them: possibility for temporary residence, assistance in obtaining identification documents, direct support to lawyers during inspection, illegal detention and the ability to care for children who are forced to remain unattended or with random people.

In the context of program on prevention, treatment, care and support in relation to HIV, the most important thing is to address issues of access to provide for injection drug users and sex workers to STI diagnosis and treatment, ensure easy access to methadone, which is now difficult for those who do not have documents and registration. It is also necessary to provide for qualitative pre-test as well as post-test counseling, confidentiality of the fact and the results of testing and basic elements of prevention and protection (condoms, syringes, needles, etc.) that meet the standards of quality.

The Forum participants **note** that among the factors limiting the access of women living with HIV to various social services, the stigma and discrimination are highlighted on the side of society, imperfection of legal and institutional mechanisms, low level of legal literacy and awareness of women living with HIV in the sphere of HIV/AIDS prevention and the existing support programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the range of the abovementioned problems, the Forum participants **call on** governments, civil society, communities of people living with HIV, the media, international community and other stakeholders in Central Asia:

- ✓ To enhance interaction and double the resources aimed to achieve new global targets in the sphere of HIV/AIDS till 2015, as set forth in the Political Declaration of the UN General Assembly in 2011;
- ✓ To ensure the inclusion of objectives aimed at reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS among women into international development goals for the post-2015 and also the inclusion of these issues in the country program on HIV/AIDS and further integration into the main strategies of the region's countries as a priority direction;
- ✓ To develop approaches and provide broad and full implementation of the standard package of measures to ensure the HIV-related needs of women and girls in the sphere of sexual and reproductive health;
- ✓ To pay a special attention to the provision of access and ensure full package of services on the prevention, treatment, care and support for women representing groups at high risk of infection: women - injection drug users and sex workers;
- ✓ To develop programs targeting sex workers and women – drug users, based on the principle of human rights and undertake efforts to remove punitive laws against sex workers and women – drug users, so as to create a favourable environment for the development of programs on prevention, treatment, care and support for HIV infected people;
- ✓ It is necessary to strengthen efforts to provide access to services for the prevention and treatment of HIV infection for women who are sexual partners of injection drug users;
- ✓ Particular attention should be paid to the special needs of women and girls who are in detention, as well as women - partners of male prisoners in the provision of HIV services;

- ✓ To ensure effective interaction of countries of origin and destination of migration for the development of prevention programs among migrant workers, members of their families and the prevention of new cases of infection among migrant workers;
- ✓ To involve actively the local communities in programs on prevention of HIV infection among the population, including migrant workers and their family members;
- ✓ Within a new international development agenda for the post-2015 period to extend the objectives aimed at reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS among migrant workers and their spouses / sexual partners;
- ✓ To use special educational technologies addressed to migrant workers and their family members. To this effect, to adopt the practice of preventive work of mobilizers trained on the principle of “equal to equal”;
- ✓ In the pre-departure training programs for migrant workers to provide components that affect overcoming the gender stereotypes promoting the prevalence of sexual violence and exploitation of women- migrant workers;
- ✓ In order to eliminate the transmission of HIV from mother to child it is recommended to implement a comprehensive approach, including:
  - Prevention of HIV among women of reproductive age;
  - Prevention of undesirable pregnancies among women living with HIV;
  - Prevention of HIV transmission from women living with HIV to their infants;
  - Provision of appropriate treatment, care and support to mothers living with HIV, their children and families.
- ✓ To direct efforts to improve women's access to programs on preventing HIV from mother to child, through:
  - activation of the Country Coordination Mechanism’s operations to attract an additional funding, both from governments and international organizations;
  - regular supply of the primary medical sanitary and specialized agencies with express-tests and appropriate related supplies, with the establishment of logistics system for the efficient allocation of tests, collection and delivery of analyzes to AIDS centers;
  - creation of child’s room in AIDS centers with the proper equipment;
  - development of at least one multi-disciplinary team under the AIDS centers;
  - strengthening the infection control in health care institutions;
  - development and establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system to ensure access to PMT.
- ✓ To increase the level of knowledge about the availability of effective treatment among the key categories of population. To provide information on how it is importance for women to get a treatment in the course of the post-test counselling;
- ✓ To increase public awareness on the issues of prevention, diagnosis and treatment of HIV, establish cross-sectoral cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organizations, religious leaders and civil society through conducting awareness media campaigns with the use of all possible channels of information provision;
- ✓ To provide antiretroviral treatment regimens for women taking into account the reproductive health condition and implementation of reproductive rights.
- ✓ To ensure the widespread introduction of screening, early detection and treatment of neck of womb cancer for women living with HIV.
- ✓ To strengthen the integration of prevention and treatment programs on HIV/AIDS in the general health care system by expanding services in such institutions as family medicine, obstetrical care, dermatologic–venerologic care, tuberculosis (TB), development of system on friendly clinics and trusted physicians, more active use of referrals to specialized institutions.
- ✓ To develop programs to support orphans of AIDS, provide them with a favourable legal environment and identify mechanisms for providing support to orphans in practice.

***With an aim to increase the economic independence of women the following is recommended:***

✓ To develop the package of documents by the government on measures to promote the transition of women from the informal to the formal economy with tax benefits in the first three years of operation, the system of access to loans and micro-loans, provide consulting and information services, etc.;

✓ To develop and adopt the state program to support women - entrepreneurs that provides for forming the system of information and financial support, consulting assistance, development of a network of business schools taking into account the involvement of women living with HIV and women from vulnerable groups, including women - migrant workers;

✓ To expand programs on vocational training for women to specialties which are in demand in the labour market, with a focus on the improvement of women living with HIV, and women from vulnerable groups of population to professional education, skills development and retraining with increasing opportunities provided by the Education Center for Adults at the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

***In order to enhance the prevention of HIV/AIDS and protect the rights of women and other groups the following is recommended:***

- to mobilize the capacity of civil society, clerical and religious leaders and media in order to overcome the most dangerous gender stereotypes in terms of the HIV prevalence;

- to strengthen partnership of religious leaders belonging to different confessions in the countries of origin and destination of migration for joint advocacy work to prevent the growth of the HIV epidemic in the region, based on the promotion of healthy life style and harmonious relations in the family and society;

- to develop mechanisms for placing public service announcements in the media in Tajikistan and the distribution of social advertising the safe behavioural practices;

- to introduce an informational component in educational programs in the sphere of prevention of HIV/AIDS with regard to interconnection of the gender inequality and factors of spreading a pandemic that prevents women from getting the necessary knowledge and practice on sexual and reproductive health, about the importance of sex education for teenagers and youth, etc.;

- to learn and use the best international experience and practical application of the mechanisms to receive specialized services for women from various groups on the basis of simplified procedures;

- to establish specialized departments for women to provide a social, medical and legal assistance and support for women on the basis of the district and city health departments (experience of Saint Petersburg);

- to develop and implement a single registration system for disabled people (including people living with HIV) without indication of pathology;

- to establish services on providing state advisory services for the population on the basis of principle a “one stop service”.

***In order to empower and support women living with HIV (WLWH) it is recommended:***

- with an aim of improving the effectiveness of counselling and treatment of WLWH on issues of sexual and reproductive health in the healthcare system, to develop and implement a protocol to support sexual and reproductive health of people living with HIV. It is necessary to place a conceptual approach based on human rights and gender equality in the core of a protocol to be developed;

- in programs aimed at the treatment and social rehabilitation of WLWH, to ensure an expansion of free public services, including services by the Center of the social and psychological rehabilitation with hotlines, providing a wide range of services including legal aid, assistance in solving social problems, organization of leisure and communication, working with family members, etc.;

- to increase the involvement of the community of WLWH in decision-making processes for the development and implementation of policies, prevention and treatment programs, including the Country Coordination Mechanism, monitoring groups, etc.;

- to assist to the consolidation of efforts of organizations of women living with HIV in the country as well as regional levels, in order to ensure a consolidated joint efforts to prevent the growth of HIV, stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV;

- to promote programs to protect women's rights in the context of HIV, including programs aimed at increasing the legal awareness of women living with HIV as well as programs advocating the equal rights of women and girls. To strengthen programs aimed to reduce stigma and discrimination and eradicate violence against women.