

Women4GlobalFund advocacy brief: The Global Fund and the response to COVID-19

Women4GlobalFund (W4GF) stands in solidarity with people around the world as together we face the growing COVID-19 pandemic, and congratulates the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (Global Fund) for taking early action to support countries with extreme vulnerability. COVID-19 has drawn into sharp focus the uneven vulnerabilities around the world, and specific threats for the safety of women and their sexual and reproductive rights and health. W4GF affirms and agrees with the Global Fund Advocates Network (GFAN) [asks](#) of the Global Fund in the response to COVID-19 and also calls on the Global Fund to do more to tackle the uneven impact of the pandemic on women and girls affected by HIV, TB and malaria. COVID-19 magnifies gender inequalities and is already having an intense impact on women, especially those already living below the poverty line.

We applaud the Global Fund's swift reaction to COVID-19 to support countries to manage the devastating impact that is becoming more visible on communities and health systems across the world – and is yet to peak in countries most affected by HIV, TB and malaria with even weaker health systems. The new Global Fund policy enables countries to use up to 5% of approved grant funding - approximately [US\\$500 million](#) - to help protect and treat vulnerable communities around the world, and to ensure access to the quality programmes for HIV, TB and malaria which are being impacted by the growing pandemic.

We urge the Global Fund to remain alert to the gendered aspects of COVID-19 and to support countries to flatten the curve of inequalities as they access Global Fund resources to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. In particular this means responding to the increases in domestic violence, and weakening access to sexual and reproductive health services, both of which also put women and girls at increased risk of HIV. As with previous outbreaks, including Ebola, the world has seen a sharp rise in [violence against women](#) as also seen in [China](#) at the start of the year. We welcome the recognition in the Global Fund [COVID-19 Information Note: Considerations for Global Fund HIV Support](#) that: *““Stay at home” orders can increase HIV and other risks such as gender-based violence for women and girls living in violent or abusive households. Spikes in HIV incidence amongst newly out of school girls, sex workers, people who use drugs and others are therefore increasingly predicted.”*

We urge the Global Fund secretariat to encourage countries that access the flexibilities in funding to address the social inequities that continue to place women in danger, in particular to support the programmes and services that will help women to escape immediate impacts of violence, and the related increased risks of HIV.

In addition, in many countries, women and girls are cut off from accessing essential sexual and reproductive health and rights services. There are reports (highlighted by [The Guardian](#)) that *“up to 9.5 million women and girls could miss out on vital family planning services this year because of COVID-19, potentially resulting in thousands of deaths.”* We welcome the encouragement to countries, in the Global Fund guidance, to continue supply of condoms and lubricants, with a focus on marginalised people, and also to *“intensify health information/communication for adolescents in high incidence locations focus on COVID-19, and on HIV prevention and sexual health. As schools close, access to HIV, safe sex and sexual health information for adolescents will need to adapt towards online platforms.”*

We urge the Global Fund to encourage countries to always take gender into account, and invest in programmes that will support women to continue to access the services they need and to seek safety and shelter, should this be required. At this stage of this global crisis it is no longer 'nice but not essential'. Anything not done through a gender lens will fail women; now is the time to address the last mile first.