Gender Response in HIV/AIDS, National Strategic Framework Reviewed  
By Senator Iroegbu from allafrika.com

Abuja — In a bid to create an enabling environment for implementation and achievement of the National Strategic Framework (NSF) objectives and targets on HIV/AIDS, experts have begun a review to promote a gender equality and human rights sensitive policy environment in the Nigerian HIV/AIDS National Response. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), in collaboration with Women Aid Collective (WACOL), embarked on implementing the project; with support of the Nigerian AIDS Responsive Fund of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA/NARF).

In 2005 the Federal Republic of Nigeria completed its National Strategic Framework (NSF) articulating the Country’s response to HIV and AIDS for the period 2005-2009. The NSF, which recently came under review, identified women as a priority group to be targeted by programmes under the framework, including through the use of behavioural change communication (BCC) and calls for the promotion and implementation of gender-sensitive community and home-based care services.

In the National Validation workshop on promoting gender equality and human rights sensitive policy environment in the Nigerian HIV/AIDS organised recently in Abuja, desk review of policies was carried out in three key sectors namely agriculture, education and health; where stakeholders critically examined findings and made recommendations thereon that will inform reforms.

According to the UNIFEM Country Manager, Mrs. Tolulope Lewis-Tamoka, the overall aim of the project is to promote the emergence of a coherent policy environment for the achievement of the human rights-based targets of the NSF at the national level and in three project states of Bauchi, Taraba and Cross River States.

Tamoka said the desk review of the relevant policy instruments in the health, education, agriculture and the law sectors were conducted, to assess the extent to which they facilitate the implementation of NSF.

"The process has been able to identify those aspects of the policies that require reform. A broad range of stakeholders have also met to interrogate the report and validate it against current realities on ground. The findings and recommendations also form the basis for a national advocacy campaign to promote the reforms that would bring the sector policies in line with the goals of the NSF," she explained.

Speaking further, the UNIFEM boss said that the review identified significant gaps in the responsiveness of the sectoral policies to the gender and human rights objectives of the NSF.

"Most of the provisions of these policies do not incorporate gender dimensions of the causes and the differential impact of HIV/AIDS on women and men, nor are they developed from human rights perspective. They are also non-aligned with the objectives of the NSF especially with regards to the gender equality and human rights objectives.

"For instance, the National Health Policy does not adequately provide for reproductive health. In the education sector, there is recognition of the place of preventive education at the formal and non-formal levels. "However, a lot needs to be done to align the education policy, particularly as regards non-formal education, to the NSF," she noted.

Furthermore, she remarked; "The report calls for, among other things, the need to review different sectoral policies towards aligning them with objectives of the NSF. It also calls for the need to provide necessary support to the state governments to develop gender and human rights sensitive policies that can support the successful implementation of the NSF."

"Sectoral policies should address the gender gaps in the different sectors and not address women and girls issues alone. Such policies should ensure that human rights of all are considered in decision making processes and that women, the poor and the vulnerable are active participants in the different sectors", she advised. Similarly, the Executive Director of WACOL, Mrs. Joy Ezeilo, noted that there are few state policies on gender issues, and that in most of them, there are no proactive measures in place to implement such policies.

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Ezeilo said that there is a correlation between poverty and HIV/AIDS, and as well as gender inequality and HIV/AIDS. “It is mostly women that are poor and widows being denied access to inheritance, loans and credit facilities”, she noted.

“I hope that the Federal and state government will integrate gender in their HIV/AIDS Programme and policies; increase the awareness and strengthen the capacity of NACA and SACA; and promote linkages of human rights advocacy.”

“It is a double stigmatisation when a woman is infected with HIV/AIDS, driven away from family or matrimonial home and deprived of her benefits”, she said.

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The African Union (AU): Africa must manufacture own AIDS drugs from reuters.com

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA - Africa must manufacture its own generic medicine if it is to continue to fight HIV/AIDS during the financial crisis and ensure its faltering economies can benefit from drug production, the African Union (AU) says.

“Africa shouldn’t just import drugs all the time,” AU Commissioner for Social Affairs, Bience Gawanas, told Reuters on the sidelines of a conference of African ministers for health in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa.

“Most of our HIV/AIDS drugs come from sources outside Africa. How can we be sure this will continue during the financial crisis?”

South Africa is the only African country that makes its own HIV/AIDS drugs. Michel Sidibé, the new head of the United Nations HIV/AIDS agency and the first African to hold the position, has said ensuring all Africans who suffer from the virus have access to drugs will be his priority.

Most infected Africans have no access to treatment, though a few countries were doing exceptionally well, Gawanas said. "Some countries in Africa now have 80 percent of people with HIV/AIDS on anti-retroviral drugs," Gawanas said. "But if there are cuts (in support from donor countries) can that progress continue? We need to mobilize local production."

African economies would profit from the drugs being made locally, Gawanas said. An estimated 33 million people globally are infected with the HIV virus that causes AIDS, and most of them live in Africa and other developing countries.

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Reverend Paul Mokgethi-Heath, “Do I preach about HIV at my church? Every Sunday!” from plusnews.org

JOHANNESBURG, Rev Paul Mokgethi-Heath has been leading the flock at the Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church in Johannesburg, South Africa, since 1998, when he was diagnosed with HIV. He spoke to IRIN/PlusNews about being a gay, HIV-positive pastor, and gave his advice to other discordant couples.

"Do I preach about HIV at my church? Every Sunday. We make sure that we have a candle-lighting ceremony [in memory of those who have died], but before we ... [do this], we have people we invite each and every Sunday to talk to us, to share their stories and ... their journeys as well.

"In terms of relationships with other pastors, I know it's a difficult issue - when you talk about HIV and sex it's just a taboo. One or two of the [church] board members initially did have issues with [my status] but, through my preparation and me educating them as well, they have learned to accept it and they've been there for me.

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"Reverend Paul Mokgethi-Heath, "Do I preach about HIV at my church? Every Sunday!" continued, from page 2

"So, yes, my church is well informed [but] ... in terms of the members and how they take HIV, it has really been a challenge. As much as we talk about it, as much as we are open about it, there are still those people with self-stigma.

"A lot of people are still scared of coming out and talking about it, so we see that even within my congregation, as much as we talk about it and are open, we still see a lot of people dying.

"Basically, I just try to live healthy - make sure that I eat healthy, get enough sleep and lots of exercise. I party sometimes when there is a time to party, and I travel and enjoy myself and see the whole world.

"Yes, I'm married to another man, and I'm a gay man and he is also a pastor. I know [the debate around this] is all about culture and religion, and a whole lot of other things ... about what the scripture says.

"If you want to have that debate one more time, I'm ready and I'm willing, but what I can say I know: God has called me to be a minister and God has loved me - that is why I am married in a monogamous relationship with another man and I thank God for that.

"To people who are also in discordant relationships [where one partner is HIV positive and the other is not], I would advise those that are negative that, please, we protect them and keep it that way.

"If you know your status, please talk about it and don't hide it. I know it's a very difficult issue because sometimes we are scared that when we come out and talk to our partners about it that they will reject us; yes, sometimes they do.

"They will run away from us; yes, sometimes they do. They will gossip about us; yes, sometimes they do. Be true to yourself and an agent of change, and be sure that at all times you are yourself."

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