

foreword

The Commonwealth Secretariat supports governments and civil society in their efforts to curb the HIV/AIDS pandemic – recognised as a Commonwealth emergency by Heads of Government (CHOGM Durban 2001). Sixty percent of the global number of persons affected with HIV/AIDS come from Commonwealth countries and recent statistics show that women and girls make up close to sixty per cent of those suffering from HIV/AIDS. This means education and training should be oriented to meet the needs of women and girls and that men and boys must be part of the "learning curve" of the target groups using the training tool. Previous materials produced by the Commonwealth have reflected the multisectoral nature of HIV/AIDS and recent work has added a "gender lens" to this perspective. This material accompanies the Secretariat's publication "Gender Mainstreaming in HIV/AIDS: Taking a Multisectoral Approach", but can also be a stand alone training tool.

This publication is produced in collaboration with the Commonwealth Youth Programme, and was prepared by Mrs Valencia Mogegeh, Ms Imelda Molokomme and Ms Patricia Pheresi, all from Botswana, a country with high prevalence rates. Editorial assistance was given by Nancy Spence, Rawwida Baksh, Cindy Berman and Joseph Amuzu. Our sincere thanks to Rupert Jones-Parry for publication support.

It has been with vignettes and stories that reflect an African milieu, where we have seen the heart of the pandemic. But its simple messages and training exercises transcend the physical context and can be easily adapted to the Asia, Caribbean and Pacific context by downloading the CD Rom and making contextual changes. It is hoped that its straightforward and appropriate approach can be used in schools, in community groups and with peer educators to begin to sensitise and mobilize community efforts to help mitigate the spread of HIV/AIDS.

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It is recognized globally that the power differences that exist between women and men have a huge influence on the lives of both. Increasingly, the emphasis has moved away from a focus on sex discrimination – which is attributed to biological differences – towards an understanding of how gender roles assigned by society to women and men affect equality issues. HIV prevention and protection efforts are failing to stem infections among women and girls because they do not take into account such issues as gender relations and sexual behaviour. The Gender and Development approach recognises the profound effect which gender-based roles have on the sharing of responsibilities and access to resources and benefits between women and men. It also acknowledges that these roles have a major impact on the balance of power, often to the disadvantage of women. Because of their lack of social and economic power, many women and girls are unable to negotiate relationships based on abstinence, faithfulness and use of condoms. It is precisely these inequalities that must be addressed in order to reduce women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. Gender inequalities manifest themselves in many areas of daily living: in politics, health, social and economic spheres, businesses, occupations, the environment and others. Discrimination combined with the belief that men are superior, denies women opportunities, resources, dignity, respect and decision-making powers at all levels of society, in homes, organisations, communities and nations. Efforts to prevent new HIV infections among women and girls, promoting equal access to HIV care and treatment, protecting women's property and inheritance rights, and reducing violence against women must be made in order to change the current imbalance.

It has been recognised that HIV/AIDS is not solely a health problem. To address the pandemic successfully, a gender perspective has to be mainstreamed into a broad-based, multi-sectoral response.

There is a critical challenge for governments, civil society organisations and international agencies to ensure that HIV/AIDS programmes and policies meet the needs of

those who are most vulnerable to the social and economic impact of the pandemic – especially women and girls. Prevention, treatment, care and support programmes and approaches that do not take account of gender inequalities cannot be successful, as they will exclude the majority of those most vulnerable and susceptible to HIV/AIDS infection and its impact.

It is essential that limited human and financial resources should be used effectively and efficiently, and there is an urgent need to ensure that budgets, programmes, strategies and policies are gender-sensitive and reach the root causes and consequences of the pandemic at household, community, national and regional levels.

Action must be taken to ensure that women and girls have