

**UNIFEM CONGRATULATES NEW LIBERIAN PRESIDENT  
 AND PLEDGES \$500,000 TO SUPPORT GENDER MINISTRY**

UNIFEM is the women's fund at the United Nations. It provides financial and technological assistance to innovative programmes and strategies to foster women's empowerment and gender equality. Placing the advancement of women's human rights at the center of all of its efforts, UNIFEM focuses its activities on four strategic areas:

- \* Reducing feminized poverty;
- \* Ending violence against women;
- \* Reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls;
- \* Achieving gender equality in democratic governance in times of peace as well as war.

**CONTACT US @**

UNIFEM UN House  
 Plot 617/618 Diplomatic Drive  
 Central Business District  
 Garki Abuja -Nigeria

E-mail:  
 Ikechukwu.attah@unifem.org  
 Phone: 09—4616309  
 08036452973.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) presented its congratulations to Liberia's new President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, at her official inauguration ceremony in Monrovia on 16 January 2006, pledging US\$500,000 to support the Ministry of Gender and Development, and women's organisations to promote gender equality and peace in the country. "UNIFEM is proud to have supported the Ministry of Gender and Development, and women's organizing throughout Liberia to reach this truly historic achievement," said Noeleen Heyzer, UNIFEM's executive director, who attended the inauguration. Vabah Gayflor, Minister of Gender and Development, pointed to UNIFEM's long history of working with Liberian women - "They stood with us when we were mobilizing to support women's candidacy and leadership in the parliamentary and presidential elections."

President Johnson-Sirleaf is the first elected female president in Liberia, and the first elected woman head of state on the African continent. In her inaugural speech, she acknowledged the invaluable role women played in the elections, saying "They stood with me. They defended me. They prayed for me." She pledged to 'empower Liberian women in all areas of national life', and to deliver on her government's commitments and targets to promote peace and gender equality.

Following the inauguration ceremony, Heyzer met with the President, Minister of Gender and Development and over 200 women from all the counties of Liberia to discuss the development of a national programme to empower women. As the women's fund of the United Nations, UNIFEM will be mobilising the UN system to respond to the priorities identified by the women's strategic action plan. UNIFEM, together with UNDP will also soon conduct a gender assessment that will feed into UN development assistance frameworks.

**LIBERIA: Women in Government**

UNIFEM Anglophone West Africa has been successful in its Programme on achieving women empowerment and gender equality in democratic governance in times of peace as well as war. This success is shown in the number of women in the Liberia's New Democratic Government. These are the numbers of women in the Government:



*President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf taking oath of office*

13 Members of Parliament; 1 Associate Justice of the High Court; 5 Cabinet Ministers including the Minister of Finance; 6 Deputy Ministers; 4 Heads of Agencies & Bureaus; 4 Commissioners; and a Deputy Governor of the Central Bank. This was as a result of UNIFEM encouragement of women to get involve through its workshops before and during the election.



Micheline Ravololonarisoa  
 Chief Africa Section  
 UNIFEM Headquarters

## GENDER EQUALITY: HIGHLIGHTS AT ICASA 2005

### Context:

The 14<sup>th</sup> International Conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections in Africa (ICASA 2005) organized by the Society for AIDS in Africa (SAA) with the theme “HIV/AIDS and the Family” held in Abuja, Nigeria from 4<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> December 2005. The Gender Technical Committee (GTC) set up by The Expanded Theme Group on HIV/AIDS to promote a deeper understanding and commitment to gender responsive HIV/AIDS programming in Nigeria expressed concern about the initial non-inclusion of sessions and events for women in the ICASA agenda and its implications for the conference. A consensus was reached with the ICASA Chairman, Prof Soyinka that gender and women specific segments would be incorporated into the event programme. A partnership between UNIFEM and CIDA (members of the GTC) aimed at achieving this objective of highlighting gender equality concerns at the conference developed with resources pooled by UNIFEM and the CIDA moderated Nigeria AIDS Responsive Fund (NARF). UNIFEM also provided technical expertise and managed the project.

The main objective of the initiative at ICASA 2005 was to highlight gender equality concerns and the voice of women at various sessions of the conference. The strategies adopted to achieve the objectives were threefold: to support women’s participation, giving special attention to those living with the HIV; to organize and facilitate well publicized sessions on gender equality issues as well as positioning gender advocates in other sessions (e.g. youths forum); and to organize a forum through which gender activists could plan and monitor progress during the conference.



Specific sessions focusing on women and gender issues in the context of HIV organized under the initiative were:

- Pre-ICASA  
1-day advocacy skills building and strategy development session for women living with HIV/AIDS from West Africa



- 1
  - o 1<sup>st</sup> Gender Caucus meeting at which women living with HIV/AIDS, women and HIV/AIDS focused organizations and other women organization were brought together to brainstorm on issues of Gender and HIV/AIDS

10 parallel sessions on Youth, Gender, Human Rights and HIV/AIDS at the Youth Forum

- During ICASA
  - o Dialogue session on “The Impact of AIDS and poverty on Women in Africa” at the Leadership Forum
  - o 1 Round table session on Women Living with HIV/AIDS in West Africa
  - o 1 Round Table on Women and Care Work in Africa
  - o Dialogue session on “Voices from the Grassroots – Gender & HIV/AIDS in Africa” at the Community Forum

2<sup>nd</sup> Gender Caucus meeting – the same group of women present during the 1<sup>st</sup> Gender Caucus meeting met again towards the end of ICASA 2005 to discuss outcomes of the conference





- 4 1. *Florence Butegwa UNIFEM Regional Programme Director*
2. *Micheline & Hajia Ciroma, Hon. Minister of Women Affairs at ICASA 2005 Leadership Forum.*



5

## 2. Home-based Care – the burden for women

Persons living with HIV, particularly those with AIDS require a lot of care over time. The fact that in Africa this care is located in the household, rather than in health care institutions came out strongly. Unlike in developed countries which have private or publicly funded institutions providing home-based care, in Africa women and girls provide the care required in each home – even if *they* are living with HIV or AIDS. In many sessions, including the round table on Women and Care Work in Africa and the Gender Caucus meetings the burden of care for women was a recurrent theme. It was highlighted that this burden is an extension of women’s gender roles in society. It is not recognized. National responses to HIV/AIDS do not take women’s contributions to the health care system into account. No resources, including information packaged for the home care givers, financial assistance, or social security benefits for women who give up jobs or girls who forego school to take care of sick relatives. The value of the contribution is not computed. UNIFEM also launched the campaign with the theme “**Who Cares for the Care Giver**” to call attention to and address this important but neglected aspect of HIV/AIDS dynamics. Women called for a large portion of funds for HIV management to be channeled to the communities/households where HIV/AIDS where the care is provided by women.

6



3. *YWCA Representative from Ghana during an advocacy skills building and strategy development session for women living with HIV/AIDS from West Africa*
4. *ICASA Participants*
- 5 *Jebbeh Forster UNIFEM (Programme Specialist Sierra Leone & Banke Akinrimisi UNIFEM ICASA Coordinator*
- 6 *Kagwiria Mbogori Programme Specialist UNIFEM Liberia*

## The Highlights

### 1. The visibility and voice of women living with HIV/AIDS

Women were very visible during the conference. The UNIFEM and CIDA & NARF partnership supported over one hundred women to participate in the conference. The majority are living with HIV. They came from different countries including Liberia, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Kenya and the host country Nigeria. They networked among themselves and called attention to issues that concern and affect them. They marched into some sessions as a group, demanding for attention and action on issues such as equality in access to treatment, the right to employment and economic independence, and the right to participate in the formulation of policies and programmes on HIV/AIDS. They affirmed the fact that in spite of the HIV, their capacities to work, to take care of their families, and to participate in governance is not affected. Some gave testimonies indicative of stigma and denial of the right of access to their children once their status is known. Women from Liberia, Senegal and Sierra Leone indicated that working with colleagues from other countries at the conference had enabled them to speak about their sero-status in public for the first time. The cohesion and effective strategy was made possible partly because UNIFEM organized a 1-day advocacy skills building and strategy development session for WLHA from Nigeria and other West African countries to prepare them for the conference.

Women living with the virus challenged some of the basic tenets of prevention campaigns, including the ABC strategy. Women had abstained until marriage but became infected. Many had remained faithful and became infected. The condom (male or female) is not a device in their control. At the Leadership Forum for instance, Rolake Odetoynbo Nwagwu, a positive woman stated that the ABC campaign has failed to address the needs of women. She proposed an alternative campaign of A-F thus (see box below).

- A – Access to treatment /Accept
- B – Be realistic
- C – Choices (not only limited to condoms)
- D – Delay sexual debut
- E – Empowerment (for women)
- F – Financial independence (for women)

*The story of Mama Njeri, an old woman from Kenya who spoke through an interpreter at the round table on care work illustrates the burden of care for people infected with HIV/AIDS very well. Mama Njeri, a woman who is very advanced in age and has lost her children to HIV/AIDS is involved in the care of infected people and children who have been orphaned by AIDS including her own grandchildren. She can no longer tend her farm for food and it is sometimes neighbors who give her food for the infected and the orphans she cares for. She stated further that she sometimes goes begging on the street to enable her care for the sick and provide for their children and her grandchildren. According to her, care for the infected is multifaceted and needs to be comprehensive to be effective*

### 3. Poverty

There is a complex relationship between poverty and HIV/AIDS in which one reinforces the other. The experience of HIV/AIDS by individuals, households and communities causes an increase in poverty which also makes individuals, households and communities vulnerable to HIV infection and to rapid progression of the infection to full blown AIDS.



Mama Njeri from Kenya

### Challenges

The challenges that arise from ICASA 2005 and the gender highlights of the conference is to keep the momentum alive by ensuring that the voice of women living with HIV/AIDS is heard and attention is given particularly to the issue of home based care as a burden for women.

WLWHAs articulated a need to stay connected both at country level and within the sub-region. This would facilitate the process of learning from each other, developing and implementing joint or coordinated advocacy

strategies, as well as strengthen their voice in policy matters. They agreed to strengthen national networks of Women Living with HIV/AIDS, and to progressively move towards the establishment of a network - **the West African Coalition of Women Living with HIV/AIDS**. They also agreed to link up with the **Africa Gender Caucus on HIV and AIDS – AGCHA**, established at ICASA by a coalition of women’s rights advocates, community-based organizations and the Women Living with HIV/AIDS.

The second challenge is how to take the issue of the care burden on women in households forward. The immediate challenge is how to make advocacy on the issue evidence based, so as to inform policy responses

### Way forward

It is important that the momentum created at ICASA 2005 is kept alive. Attention should be paid to the issues raised by infected and or affected women at the conference particularly the issue of care and the burden it has for women.

National Associations of women living with HIV/AIDS will require significant support. UNIFEM is committed to provide some leadership and broker support for these associations in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Nigeria, there is some support already through UNAIDS. There is also need to support the networking aspirations of the women. A mailing list is being compiled to share the summary of issues discussed during the meetings and others that arise regularly. This will prepare the ground to eventually carry the ICASA 2005 experience in terms of visibility and voice of WLWHAs (from West African region) on issues that pertain to them to regional and international events such as the International Conference on HIV/AIDS coming up later in the year in Toronto, Canada and beyond.



Florence Butegwa Regional Programme Director UNIFEM Anglophone West Africa Sub-region & Andrew Spezowka, Head of Programme CIDA

With regard to home-based care, UNIFEM proposes to undertake a study in Nigeria on the cost implications (to the women, households and to the economy) of the HIV/AIDS care role performed by women. The value of this so-called social subsidy will inform policy advocacy and decisions on allocation of HIV/AIDS funding.



Madam Esther, a Care Giver from Kenya



Workshop for WLWHAs organized by UNIFEM during ICASA 2005

## MAINSTREAMING GENDER INTO HIV/AIDS FRAMEWORKS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

The expiration of the HIV/AIDS Emergency Action Plan (HEAP) in 2004 provided the opportunity for the review of the Nigerian National Response to HIV/AIDS and the development of a new Nigerian National Strategic Framework popularly called the NSF (2005-2009). Now in place and operational, the NSF singularly represents Nigeria's national objectives, strategies, policies, systems and cycles for a coordinated national response to HIV/AIDS.

The linkage between the social construction of gender and the transmissions of HIV/AIDS has been acknowledged through the findings of a number of evidence-based researches. However, the gap between research, policy and intervention remains huge particularly at the level of the States and sub-sectors. One of the unique features of the NSF is the extensive mainstreaming of gender perspectives into its development and implementation processes.

Having a gender sensitive NSF is one thing, and ensuring an effective implementation of a gender sensitive NSF is another.

It was against this background that **UNIFEM** in collaboration with **UNFPA** and other partners offered to enhance the capacity of programme planners and implementers to mainstream gender in the State Strategic Plans for HIV/AIDS activities at all levels using the NSF as a guide. Gender Training workshops were designed to hold in the six geo-political zones of the country. The workshops were targeted at senior officials from the State Action Committees on AIDS (SACAs), senior officials from Line Ministries, Civil Society Groups, Women Living with and Affected by HIV/AIDS.



Dr. Salma Burton, DRR UNFPA.



Dr. Neddy Matshalaga, UNIFEM Consultant @ Gender Mainstreaming Workshop

The goal of the Gender Capacity Training is to enhance the skills of the SACAs and other stakeholders in order for them to appreciate the importance, and develop the capacity to address gender concerns in their States Strategic Plans. It is also intended that the training will enable the participants to further train all other HIV/AIDS stakeholders within each of the States on how to mainstream gender in HIV/AIDS programmes. During the trainings (which are on-going) the new HIV/AIDS NSF, its gender components and utility are further disseminated among the participants.

Three States were selected from each of the zones to participate in the pilot phase of the initiative. Such States were those who had actually commenced the development of their State Plans or those who showed appreciable commitment to doing so. UNIFEM hopes to expand the training to cover as many States of the country or all of the 36 States and the FCT depending on the outcomes of the pilot phase and whether or not we are able to leverage sufficient resources for the project.



Dr. Olasunbo Odebode, UNIFEM Gender & HIV/AIDS Programme Coordinator

## 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

**16 Days of Activism on Gender-Based Violence**, is an annual international event intended at further sensitising and raising public awareness on the issue of violence against women the world over. Each year between November 25<sup>th</sup> (being International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) and December 10<sup>th</sup> (being International Human Rights Day), organisations all over the world come up with programmes and activities to advocate for an end to gender-based violence.

UNIFEM in Nigeria, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Project Alert, a non-governmental organisation, working to eliminate violence against women in Nigeria, organised an interactive forum, in memory of women who died as a result of gender-based violence, on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2005. This activity was to commemorate the 16 days of activism against VAW. The objectives of the Forum was to raise national awareness on the endemic nature of VAW, interact with and listen to the experiences of survivors of VAW, celebrate the courage and strength of women who have survived, mourn those women and young girls who have died and advocate for laws and policies aimed at eliminating all forms of VAW in Nigeria.

As part of the interactive forum, 2 survivors and families of victims of VAW who were killed were invited to share their testimonies. Also included in the programme was the launching of Project Alert's Publication, 'NO SAFE HAVEN', a compilation of media reports between December 2004 and November 2005, of violent attacks (domestic violence, sexual assaults/abuse, physical assaults, kidnaps/abductions and the use of acid to disfigure women by partners and spouses – a particular type of VAW in Nigeria) against women. Other events included a clothesline display of names and victims of VAW, lighting of candles and the recitation of poems as a memorial and dialogue between families/survivors and key stakeholders (Police, Judges/Magistrates). All participants at the Forum were all given commemorative T-shirts - **White** T-shirts for murdered women; **beige** for victims of domestic violence; **red** for rape victims; **blue** for incest/child sexual abuse; **yellow** for assault, which they all wore during the event.

All major stakeholders such as the police, judges/magistrates, the media, legislators, civil society groups etc, along with some victims/survivors and their family members were all invited to the Interactive Forum/Memorial.

## SIERRA LEONE: Promoting gender equality, women's human rights and good governance through the justice sector at local government level.

UNIFEM supported two initiatives in December 2005 aimed at moving a few steps closer towards gender equality at local government level where data collected for Sierra Leone's first CEDAW Report (Combine Initial to Fifth Report) indicates that gender inequality is widest.

Sierra Leone reverted to Local Government administration in 2004 after 30 years of centralized administration. The Local Government Act 2004, provides opportunities for women's participation in decision making at local level and equally important gives legislative powers to Local Councils to pass bye-laws including laws to redress traditional norms and practices that hinder development. The councilors will embark on their legislative functions in 2006.



Training of Local Court Officials in Sierra Leone by UNIFEM

### Gender Responsive Legislation training for Chairmen of Councils and councilors of Kailahun District

The main aim of this training was to build the capacity of Chairmen of Councils and councilors on gender related issues and equip them with the skills to develop gender responsive legislations. At the national level all 19 Chairmen of the 19 District Councils participated in the training. The opening ceremony was attended by the Regional Programme Director, Mrs. Florence Butegwa, the Minister of Local Government, the Mayor of Freetown and the Director of the Decentralization Secretariat. In Kailahun 33 councilors and 9 observers from civil society and Ministry officials attended the training.

An outcome of the Kailahun training was a Work Plan to Review Development Plan and Budget to ensure Gender Responsiveness and The Development/Drafting of Bye-laws. Under the latter were included gender equality, education, health and sanitation and secret societies. UNIFEM will support the Councils in their sensitization process. In a similar development, the Decentralization Secretariat has in their budget for 2006, included the training of the other 18 District Councils on Gender Responsive Legislation. UNIFEM welcomes the breakthrough and will provide technical support to the Secretariat.

### Training of Customary Law Officers in the Eastern Province on the administration of Justice, Gender and Human Rights

✦ 155 Customary Law officers for the first time received formal training on the administration of justice, gender and human rights. The training was facilitated by the Law Officers Department, the High Court Judge in the Eastern Province and the UNIFEM CEDAW Programme Officer.

The court officials were for the first time introduced to court procedures, human rights instruments including the Sierra Leone Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and CEDAW. They discussed gender issues and women's human rights. They confessed their ignorance of these issues and the miscarriage of justice that had occurred over the years as a result of this. One of their strongest recommendations was that such concepts should be introduced to the communities and their other colleagues. UNIFEM plans in 2006, to sensitize communities on gender issues and women's human rights through its collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children's Affairs to support gender mainstreaming and CEDAW implementation in the Local Councils. The Law Officers Department does not have a budget for training of Local Court Officials and UNIFEM will support short term gender and human rights training for the officials in the other regions who had already received training on the administration of justice through a DIFID and OSIWA supported initiatives.

### UNIFEM WEDDING OF THE YEAR 2005

Despite being so busy, staff were able to take a break as we joined Isatu Sesay, the CEDAW Programme Officer Sierra Leone, to celebrate her wedding on 29 December 2005 to David Kajue. Isatu had to plan her wedding mostly on trek and in between organizing workshops. We wish the couple the best of marriage bliss.



Isatu Sesay, CEDAW Programme Officer, UNIFEM Sierra Leone with her husband David Kajue.