

THE ICWEA BULLETIN



MAY - AUGUST 2016



The International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa (ICWEA)

ICWEA at the AIDS 2016 conference

The International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa (ICWEA) is proud to have been part of the 21st International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa from July 16 – 22.

This was thanks to the tremendous support from our donors, partners and the International AIDS Society. We were at the conference as a regional international civil society partner and as an HIV&AIDS response organization. Represented by ICWEA

members and staff operating across the region, our participation gave us a platform to learn from other people working towards ending HIV and to share about our work.

ICWEA took part in the call for action to end HIV criminalization, forced and coerced sterilization and launched the dissemination of the ICWEA toolkit that is based on our research on violations of sexual reproductive health rights of women living with HIV in clinical and community settings in Uganda.

In Durban, we widely created awareness about the violation of sexual reproductive health rights of women living with HIV.

We held a historical solidarity march against forced and coerced sterilization of women living with HIV. Joined by partners, donors and human rights activists from various organizations and countries, together we said out loud and clearly that the bodies of women living with HIV should not be tampered with without consent.



Left is the ICWEA Executive Director speaking after the great Durban march against forced sterilization. Right: Some of the young women that attended the conference pose for a picture.

Above: Nienke Westerhof launches the dissemination of the toolkit on the research on SRHR violations. Below: ICWEA staff pose for a group photo at the booth.



L-R: Adrienne Munene, ICW Burundi at the march. ICWEA's Programmes Manager during her poster presentation and on the screen is Brenda Facy Aziziyu making her presentation

Solidarity walk against HIV criminalization



ICWEA joined a group of over 60 Civil Society Organizations led by Uganda Law Network on Law, Ethics and HIV/AIDS (UGANET) in a solidarity walk against contentious clauses in Uganda's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Act.

While recognizing that the HIV Act is good in some of the sections and clause, it also has some clauses that have the potential of promoting discrimination within society and undo decades' work put into the fights against HIV&AIDS.

We protest because these clauses criminalise HIV and criminalization of HIV harms women. As it is now, knowledge of one's HIV status can make you guilty with intentional transmission of the disease and this discourages people from being

tested for fear of knowing their status and the likely consequences.

We challenge the sections that violate people's privacy by allowing a health worker to disclose a patient's HIV Status to those that are perceived to be in close relationship with the patient.

We are also against Section 41 which talks about intended transmission, an overly broad statement, which people may take advantage of to punish others unfairly

Such clauses, will lead to community reluctance to test.

They are contrary to the best practices that have been implemented by civil society organizations. These kind of clauses will tremendously reverse the progress achieved in reducing HIV prevalence within

Uganda. That is why we must challenge them.

As ICWEA, this issue concerns us because pregnant women who discover that they are HIV positive are already under pressure to disclose their status to their spouses. And yet according to the ACT, this could be considered intentional transmission if a health worker decide to tell the spouse before she does.

Given that women still carry most of the HIV burden, we worry about how much heavier this burden will become for us if the HIV Law as it is now is implemented. And for these reasons, ICWEA stand in solidarity with civil society organizations against the harmful clauses of the Act and demand that they are amended.

Kenya to use sports to eliminate HIV&AIDS stigma

After listening to compelling stories of HIV Stigma faced by people living with HIV, President Uhuru Kenyatta who has passionately been at the forefront fighting stigma and HIV/AIDS urged people to accept people living with the virus and support them.

The president said this at the launch of a new anti-HIV drive, Maisha County League, a campaign that will use sports to create awareness against stigma of people living with HIV in all the 47 counties.

He also received trophies that will be presented to the winning football teams at the end of the league as part of celebrations to mark the World Aids Day on December 1.

The goal of the campaign is to reach young people with messages motivating to end HIV Stigma, fast tract HIV testing and linkage to care among young people towards 90-90-90 targets. The campaign will have young people as leaders and champions to stop stigma.

Kenya High Court allows ICWEA to join sterilization case

The Kenya High Court has allowed ICWEA to join the sterilization case. This is the case in which Kenya Legal and Ethical Issues Network on HIV (KELIN) and Africa Gender and Media Initiative Trust (GEM) together with five women living with HIV filed two petitions dated 9 December, 2014 in the High Court of Kenya (Constitutional and Human Rights Division) in Nairobi.

The cases are about the forced and coerced sterilization of five women living with HIV. The five were



sterilized in health facilities in Nairobi County through a procedure known as bilateral tubal ligation. They

were forcefully sterilized under different circumstances.

The cases will have far

reaching ramifications for the realization of the right to reproductive health care and services.

ICWEA is happy to be part of the case as it creates awareness and calls for an end to Sexual Reproductive Health Rights violations especially after release of findings of a study titled, *Violations of Sexual Reproductive Health Rights of Women Living with HIV in Clinical and Community Settings in Uganda*.

New ARVS initiative will boost HIV&AIDS fight in Rwanda

In partnership with key partners, government of Rwanda has launched a new initiative which will see more Rwandans access anti-retroviral drugs soon after testing HIV positive. The "treat all positive" initiative will be a big boost in the fight against HIV/AIDS because previously, only those who were in their later stages of the infection had access to ARVs. With early treatment, HIV can be managed since it significantly improves the patients' health and reduces risk of transmitting new infections.

However, for the initiative to successfully contribute to the bigger goal of achieving an HIV free country, there is need for continued sensitization focusing on prevention as the most appropriate tool. Behavioural change communication should be the focus of the campaign since prevention is better than cure.

This will go a long way in meeting the overall objective of achieving zero new HIV infections.

The Minister of Health pointed out that, HIV is still a very expensive disease without cure, hence preventing it is the most viable option. There is therefore need to make the public understand that having more ARVs available is not a ticket to indulge in risky behavior that exposes them to the risk of contracting HIV.

Kilimanjaro Challenge against HIV/AIDS

A Tanzania company Geita Gold Mine (GGM) managed to collect TShs1.2bn at its 15th 'Kilimanjaro Challenge against HIV/AIDS' initiative that would be directed to the fight against the epidemic in the country.

The money was collected under the challenge to trek Mount Kilimanjaro that was flagged off by the retired president, Mr Jakaya Kikwete on July 16. 58 people scaled Africa's highest mountain while other 30 marched around it by bikes.

The main objective of the initiative is to fight HIV/AIDS until there are three zeros - in HIV infection, discrimination and AIDS related deaths.

For 15 years running, GGM have been in the campaign to collect money in conjunction with the government under the Tanzania Commission for Aids (TACAIDS) that would help in providing essential services to those affected by HIV/AIDS.

The joined efforts are aimed at seeing that Tanzania becomes the first country to declare that HIV/AIDS is eradicated.

Uganda needs to pass a supplementary budget to buy ARVS

On June 8, 2016, Uganda heard the Financial Year 2016/2017 budget. It reflected an increment in the health sector budget from Ushs1.227 trillion (FY 2015/16) to Ushs1.828 trillion (FY 2016/17). This is a commendable step towards availability of quality health services to the citizens.

However, the increment to the health sector budget sums up to only 8.7% of the national budget and that remains below the 15% Abuja target that Uganda committed to fulfill. This leaves the health sector with a huge gap to fill.

This concerns us because any gap in the health sector affects women living with HIV the most since we bear the burden of the AIDS epidemic the most.

Also, as mothers, we remain at the centre of meeting health care needs of our family members a role that is affected with a poorly functioning health sector.

One of the prevailing issues that need to be addressed urgently is universal access to treatment.

Therefore, ICWEA held a press conference demanding that government passes a supplementary budget that allocates US\$151b to buying anti-retroviral drugs this financial year. This needs to be addressed urgently to avoid the drug stock outs that were faced last year. Such a move will also enable the country to embrace the new WHO ART recommended guidelines on Test and Treat.

Engagement in PEPFAR Uganda operational plan

ICWEA has coordinated CSO engagements with the PEPFAR Uganda team and this has come with great strides. For example, as a result, CSOs had input in the 2016 Country Operational Plan for Uganda and were represented during the finalization process in Johannesburg, South Africa in May 2016. Because of our involvement, we were able to achieve the following;

- Ministry of Health expressed support for Test and Treat and accepted to write and circulate a circular rolling out guidance to implement Test and Start. Approximately 93,000 patients currently in pre-ART care would be the first beneficiaries.

- Stakeholders committed to fighting for reforms in National Medical Store (NMS) in order to increase transparency, accountability, and value for money.

- The PrEP target was set at 3417 people for three new implementation sites.

- Commitment by PEPFAR Uganda to accelerate efforts to engage people living with HIV and key populations in service delivery.

- Global Fund representatives committed to negotiate for competitive procurement and supply chain management costs from the NMS.

These are great strides indeed but the bulk of the work lies ahead for example, the test and treat policy, months later has not yet been rolled out. Once rolled out, this will call for the need to advocate for reforms in NMS to get value for money and for a supplementary budget that allocates more money to ARVs to meet the country's needs.

ICW Burundi: Spreading the love

Members of ICW Burundi chapter took off time to visit women living with HIV especially those that are bedridden in the sisterhood spirit. During these visits, the women offered a listening hear, counselling and for those that needed healthcare services, recommendations were made.

During these door to door visits, women living with HIV were also empowered by educating them about their human rights.

And in an effort to increase the membership, the membership

forms have been translated into a local language that can easily be understood. Our members also participated in the meeting of civil society in Burundi with representatives of the Global Fund to discuss how best to benefit from the funds in the fight against HIV before their release.

The executive committee also initiated a savings and credit group that has been in operation for four months now. The objective is for members to enable economic empowerment of the members.

ICWEA hosts interns from Sewanee University



ICWEA is pleased to have hosted three interns from Sewanee - The University of the South – Tennessee –USA. Anna Summer Noonan, Brook Vann and Daniela Cubilo all pursuing a Bachelor of Arts were hosted for eight weeks between June and August 2016 at ICWEA secretariat in Wakiso. The interns had interest in information technology, photography/videography, report and grants writing and interacting with ICWEA clients; women and young girls living with HIV

During the internship period,

the team learnt and supported the ICWEA team in various ways. They helped improve the website visualization, supported documentation for several office and field based activities, developed and submitted grant applications to three donors, developed concepts for improving resource mobilization and edited some reports. It was such a resourceful team that ICWEA wished could have stayed longer. We hope that this is only the beginning of such engagements with the University and its students.

Up Coming

7th International Workshop on HIV & Aging, September 26 – 27, Washington DC

HIV Research for prevention (HIVR4P) October 17 – 21, 2016 in Chicago

47th Union World Conference on Lung Health. Liverpool, UK: 26 October - 29 October 2016

The first International Maternal Health in Africa (ICAMMHA) conference, December 12 – 16, 2016.

Deadline for abstract submission is August 29.

The ICWEA Bulletin is published by the Communications office at the regional secretariat, Plot 1106 Ssenge Road - Wakiso District Kampala, Uganda. Articles published here can be reproduced freely provided ICWEA is acknowledged. More details can be obtained from the Communications Officer, Brenda Banura; Tel: +256 414 531 913, Email: bbanura@icwea.org.