

# WAGGGS POSITION STATEMENT

## Young women and girls in the response to HIV

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) believes that young people need to be put at the centre of all policy and programme developments responding to HIV and AIDS. The present and the future of humankind are in the hands of our young and future generations and in particular in the hands of girls and young women. As the voice of girls and young women, WAGGGS has identified UN Millennium Development Goal 6 on combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases as a priority issue on which to take a stand and speak out, with young women and girls playing a crucial role in any effective response to HIV and AIDS.

WAGGGS provides millions of girls and young women with non-formal education, giving them the opportunity to develop self-esteem, confidence and life skills. Working with Member Organizations in 145 countries, our vision is to build a better world through advocacy, education and action. We aim to speak out on behalf of girls and young women everywhere, as well as empower young women to speak out for themselves and for other girls. Our global action theme 'together we can change our world' enables WAGGGS members to take action to help achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals.

**WAGGGS calls on the international community and national governments to actively increase their efforts to mitigate the prevalence and impact of HIV and AIDS among young people by:**

- **Ensuring** young people have access to comprehensive, objective, non-judgemental, gender and youth-specific information on HIV and AIDS and sexual and reproductive health, including client-initiated voluntary counselling and testing.
- **Increasing access** for young people to effective methods for protection (such as condoms, female condoms, and a full range of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services) by integrating SRH and HIV services, and supporting organizations involved in promoting HIV and AIDS education for girls and young women.
- **Scaling up** access to prevention technologies that benefit women, such as the female condom, post-exposure prophylaxis, and microbicides research.
- **Helping empower** girls and young women with increased efforts to eliminate gender inequality and all forms of violence against women and girls as one of the necessary starting point towards a secure environment for young women to take responsible decisions on their sexual and reproductive health.
- **Involving** young people, especially young women and men living with HIV and/or belonging to key populations at higher risk, in the response to HIV and AIDS as key partners and including them in the planning, delivering and evaluation of HIV and AIDS policy and programme initiatives
- **Enabling** all girls and young women to have access to treatment programmes and therapies, including antiretroviral medication, treatment for opportunistic infections and sexually transmitted infections, and prevention of mother to child transmission programmes.
- **Securing** the human rights of girls and young women, including girls and young women living with HIV and AIDS, or orphaned, widowed or otherwise made vulnerable by AIDS, through laws, policy and international protocols which protect land and property ownership, inheritance rights, and equal opportunities in the workplace for women and men.
- **Ensuring** that country monitoring and evaluation processes disaggregate data by age and sex, and include effective markers of gender equality.

## **WAGGGS urges Member Organizations to:**

- **Integrate** HIV/AIDS, gender and sexual and reproductive health/rights education into their regular programme of activities.
- **Implement** the WAGGGS Global Action Theme into the national non-formal educational programme and use resources on MDG 6 are available to enable members to speak out and take action to mitigate the negative impact of HIV and AIDS.
- **Advocate** for non-discriminatory access to HIV and AIDS education, prevention technologies, treatment and care, and for clear, objective, non-biased, gender and youth-specific information about HIV and AIDS and sexual and reproductive health in formal and non-formal education.
- **Lobby** for the empowerment and self-determination of young women, and emphasize the important role of non-formal education in girls' empowerment.
- **Support** efforts to remove barriers for young women to be able to take decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health, treatment, care and support.
- **Help** and support young people who are HIV positive to get back into education and socially reintegrate.
- **Build** confidence in girls and young women to help break down gender stereotypes to overcome these barriers.
- **Empower** girls and young women living with HIV to take charge of their own lives by promoting secure livelihoods for them.
- **Run** training programmes to provide girls and young women with life skills and to empower them economically.
- **Meaningfully involve** young people, including young people living with HIV, in the HIV and AIDS response, including supporting girls and young women to speak out and develop their own initiatives to address HIV and AIDS.
- **Address** gender norms that discriminate against women, stigma and taboo areas, for example, by establishing a safe, confidential, non-judgemental environment for openness and enquiry among girls and young women with regard to their sexual and reproductive health.
- **Promote** and develop the participation, empowerment and leadership of young women in decision-making in all areas that affect their lives.

## **How WAGGGS is addressing the fight against AIDS:**

- The majority of WAGGGS' 145 Member Organizations are running projects on HIV and AIDS in their own countries.
- The WAGGGS Global Action Theme 'together we can change our world' is a non-formal educational programme for members of all ages on the UN MDGs. In addition WAGGGS introduced a special MDG programme for MDG 6.
- Girl Guides and Girl Scouts can earn the AIDS Badge by undertaking activities in three areas of the badge's curriculum: fighting fear, shame and injustice; prevention through change in behaviour; and care and support for people living with HIV and AIDS.
- With the support of the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, WAGGGS developed a HIV prevention training toolkit aimed at raising levels of knowledge about HIV prevention as well as increasing WAGGGS' capacity to train girls and young women as peer educators on HIV prevention and stigma reduction.
- WAGGGS published 'Fighting Ignorance and Fear' which showcases best practice examples of HIV and AIDS projects of Member Organizations in the areas of education, awareness raising and care and support.
- WAGGGS believes that education and empowerment of young people in a formal and non-formal setting is a key approach to fight HIV and AIDS. Special attention is paid to the needs of girls and young women, and WAGGGS seeks to integrate this approach into the activities of all Member Organizations.

## Case Studies from WAGGGS Member Organizations

### **Listen, Learn, Live - HIV project in Brazil**

The Federação de Bandeirantes do Brasil has been running a project *Listen, Learn, Live* since 2000 to promote awareness of HIV and AIDS issues among adolescents and young adults. It is being supported by UN agencies and the Brazilian Ministry of Health. To date, the project has reached more than 50,000 young people aged between 12 and 21 through several events, and an internet site which answers queries related to HIV and AIDS.

The Association's "AIDS Prevention Distance Learning Internet Course" won an 'Honorary Mention' at the 6<sup>th</sup> Sao Paulo Virology Congress.

### **HIV, Sexual and Reproductive Health in Malawi**

The Malawi Girl Guides Association runs an HIV and AIDS Awareness Project in three districts of the country aimed at training to raise awareness about, and provide information on, issues of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) relating to HIV and AIDS. This project started in 2002, and to date the Association has trained 45 regional trainers, 30 Guiders and 60 Cadets (Peer Educators) in SRH issues and rights, and psychosocial support life skills for orphans and other vulnerable children. More than 5,400 girls and young women have been reached with SRH information and services, and almost 1,000 orphans and other vulnerable children have been reached with psychosocial life skills.

The Association has also documented best practices in SRH/HIV/AIDS which have been printed and distributed to members and other partners. Information and education materials have also been developed and SRH/HIV/AIDS messages have been incorporated into the Association's already existing Girl Guide Laws to make them relevant to Girl Guiding programmes.

### **WAGGGS' AIDS badge implemented by Member Organizations**

Girl Guides and Girl Scouts of all ages are able to earn the WAGGGS AIDS Badge, a project developed in partnership with ICASO (International Council of AIDS Service Organizations) and UNAIDS. Numerous Member Organizations implemented the AIDS badge in their national associations. The curriculum is formed of diverse activities that address key issues on HIV and AIDS awareness:

**Prevention** through change in behaviour - where Girl Guides and Girl Scouts demonstrate that they understand some of the ways in which HIV is transmitted and that they have disseminated that information successfully to their peers.

**Eliminating discrimination** - Girl Guides and Girl Scouts successfully complete a task that educates others as well as themselves about the facts on HIV and AIDS, with the aim of eliminating discrimination.

**Care and Support** - Girl Guides and Girl Scouts learn how to care for and support members of their community who are living with HIV and AIDS. This includes caring for, and supporting, Girl Guides and Girl Scouts who are living with HIV and AIDS.

**"I commend the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts for its commitment to the fight against HIV and AIDS. Girl Guiding and Girl Scouting plays a vital role in breaking the silence around HIV and AIDS through its work in local communities. WAGGGS' unique peer education programme means that this cumulative experience has made a difference to the lives of thousands of girls and young women."**

*Stephen Lewis, Board Chair, Stephen Lewis Foundation,  
former UN Special Envoy for HIV and AIDS in Africa (2008)*

**'The ultimate criterion to judge all AIDS programmes is "Does this work for women and girls?'"**

*Dr Peter Piot, former Executive Director, UNAIDS (2006)*

## Facts and Figures on HIV and AIDS Globally

- More than 60 million people have been infected with HIV, and AIDS has already killed more than 20 million people. An estimated 40 percent of new infections in 2008 were among the 15-24 age group<sup>i</sup> many of whom still lack the knowledge to protect themselves. Young women are shown to have significantly less knowledge about HIV transmission and prevention than young men<sup>ii</sup>.
- Globally, the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age (15-49) is HIV/AIDS. Girls and women are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection due to a combination of biological factors and gender-based inequalities, particularly in cultures that limit women's knowledge about HIV and their ability to protect themselves and negotiate safer sex<sup>iii</sup>.
- According to UNIFEM almost half of the 31.3 million HIV-positive adults in the world are women, but the proportion of women living with HIV is increasing.<sup>iv</sup>
- By the end of 2008 there were 2.1 million children living with HIV globally, of whom 90 percent live in Sub-Saharan Africa. There were 480,000 new infections among children in 2008, and of the 2 million people who died in 2008 of AIDS related illnesses, one in seven was a child. Globally, 31 children die each hour of AIDS related illnesses<sup>v</sup>.
- Children living with HIV often face stigma and isolation. As well as dealing with their own health issues, they may be faced with the death or illness of one or more parent or other family members. Children whose households are affected by HIV may have their education interrupted by pressures to become carers or primary wage earners at a young age. Girls especially may be tasked with household chores and looking after younger siblings. Children in AIDS-affected households may lack opportunities to make friends, form social networks, develop life skills, play and receive parental love.
- By the end of 2008, 275,000 children were receiving antiretroviral treatment. This figure accounts for only 38 percent of children in need of treatment at that time<sup>vi</sup>. Evidence shows that in the absence of treatment, up to 50 percent of HIV-positive children die by their second birthday. Reasons include few appropriate drugs, high drug prices and the lack of healthcare workers trained to treat children.
- Young women, even if they have anti-retroviral drugs available, are exposed to stigma and discrimination and affected by dramatic psycho-social issues caused, for example, by violence which is both a cause and consequence of HIV.
- 17.5 million children under the age of 18 have lost one or both parents to AIDS. More than 14 million of these are in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>vii</sup>.
- Today, 12 million young people are living with HIV and AIDS and 6,000 more are infected daily. Every hour, 250 young people are infected – one every 15 seconds<sup>viii</sup>.
- Gender inequality and the low status of women remain two of the principal drivers of HIV and AIDS. There is a disproportionate impact of the AIDS epidemic on women and girls, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where, on average, three women are HIV-infected for every two men. Among young people (15–24 years), three out of four adults age 15-24 living with HIV are female.<sup>ix</sup>
- Inadequate knowledge about HIV and AIDS, and a lack of education and life skills put young people at great risk<sup>x</sup>. Surveys in 18 countries indicate that less than 50 percent of young people have a comprehensive knowledge about HIV<sup>xi</sup>. Some 80 percent of people above the age of 15, even in high-prevalence settings, are still not getting access to prevention services.
- Girls and young women have less access to education and HIV information, tend not to enjoy equality in marriage and sexual relations, and remain the primary caretakers of family and community members suffering from AIDS-related illnesses<sup>xii</sup>.

<sup>i</sup> Millennium Development Goals Report, 2010

<sup>ii</sup> WHO, 2009, Women and Health

<sup>iii</sup> WHO, 2009, Women and Health

<sup>iv</sup> UNIFEM facts and figures website [http://www.unifem.org/gender\\_issues/hiv\\_aids/facts\\_figures.php#1](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/hiv_aids/facts_figures.php#1) quoting UNAIDS and WHO, 2009 AIDS Epidemic Update [www.avert.org/children](http://www.avert.org/children) accessed 7th July 2010

<sup>v</sup> UNAIDS and the World Assembly of Youth Statement on World AIDS Day December 2006

<sup>vi</sup> Millennium Development Goals Report, 2010

<sup>vii</sup> WHO, UNAIDS, UNICEF, 2009 Progress report: Towards Universal Access: scaling up priority HIV/AIDS interventions

<sup>ix</sup> UNAIDS/WHO AIDS Epidemic Update 2006, GCWA 2006: Keeping the Promise: an agenda for action on women and AIDS

<sup>x</sup> WHO 2006, Preventing HIV/AIDS in young people

<sup>xi</sup> Various Demographic and Health Surveys (2000-2005) quoted in The global Coalition on Women and AIDS 2006. Keeping the Promise: An Agenda for Action on Women and AIDS

<sup>xii</sup> The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS 2006. Keeping the Promise: An Agenda for Action on Women and AIDS

- The average age of sexual debut in young women is 15 to 19. Many first sex encounters are forced or coerced, and few young women are able to use contraceptives including condoms the first time they have sex. The earlier a young woman's sexual debut, the more likely it is to be forced, and the greater the risk of exposure to HIV<sup>xiii</sup>. Young married women aged 15–19 are significantly more likely to be infected with HIV than their unmarried peers<sup>xiv</sup>.
- Violence against women and girls is both a cause and a consequence of HIV infection. Globally, girls are much more likely to experience sexual violence than boys with approximately one in four girls experiencing some form of sexual abuse in the course of her life<sup>xv</sup>.
- Sex trafficking places girls and young women at great risk of exposure to HIV. Girls and young women bought and sold into the sex industry also face violence, abuse and disease on a daily basis.
- Stigma and discrimination persists in many countries where HIV and AIDS is still a taboo. Fear and ignorance are great obstacles to comprehensive and supported HIV and AIDS education.
- In the past decade there have been some positive trends in young people's sexual behaviours in many countries with generalized epidemics - changes that include increased use of condoms, delay of sexual debut and fewer sexual partners. Declines in HIV prevalence among young people between 2000 and 2005 are evident, for example, in Botswana, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe<sup>xvi</sup>.
- Young women and men living with HIV have the right to enjoy healthy and satisfying sexual and reproductive lives. Access to a full range of sexual and reproductive choices (through effective, accessible, affordable and non-judgemental information and services) in combination with antiretroviral treatment not only enables positive men and women to enjoy their sexual and reproductive rights, but also reduces stigma and violence against women. In addition, it prevents HIV infection in negative partners and children.
- Girls' education ranks among the most powerful tools for reducing vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. It can help slow and reduce the spread of HIV and AIDS by contributing to female economic independence, delayed marriage and family planning, as well as greater information about the disease and how to prevent it for themselves and their families.

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<sup>xiii</sup> WHO, 2009, Women and Health

<sup>xiv</sup> Global Coalition on Women and Girls, Backgrounder: Preventing HIV infection in Girls and Young Women ([data.unaids.org/GCWA/gcwa\\_bg\\_prevention\\_en.pdf](http://data.unaids.org/GCWA/gcwa_bg_prevention_en.pdf))

<sup>xv</sup> WHO, 2009, Women and Health

<sup>xvi</sup> UNAIDS/WHO AIDS Epidemic Update 2006