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FOCUS ON

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

In order to maximize investments for AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, the Global Fund is supporting countries in integrating interventions for these diseases into sexual and reproductive health services. These services provide a country's health care system with a critical opportunity to reach people living with and affected by the three diseases. For example, many countries use antenatal care visits to provide pregnant women and their families with insecticide-treated nets to protect them from malaria. Treating men, women and transgender people for sexually transmitted infections is an important element in the response to AIDS. Reaching key populations with comprehensive and quality sexual health and rights services is a critical HIV prevention strategy. And it is through reproductive care services that women can access treatment to prevent transmission of HIV to their unborn children. Everyone deserves access to comprehensive and quality sexual health and rights services.

What are Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights?

The premise of sexual and reproductive health and rights is that all people are entitled to a state of wellbeing – physical, mental and social – in all matters related to sexuality and reproduction. It implies that people are able to have a safe and satisfying sex life, are able to have children, and have the freedom to decide if and when to have children and how many to have.

Ensuring sexual and reproductive health requires that people have: access to accurate information; access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of contraception; the ability to protect themselves from (and to treat) sexually transmitted infections; access to services to support a fit pregnancy, safe delivery and healthy baby; and access to safe abortion.

Comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services should include patient education, contraception counseling and management, the diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, voluntary male medical circumcision and screening for cervical cancer, as well as antenatal care.

Linking Reproductive Health Care with Ending the Epidemics

Antenatal care is a critical segment of a country's health care system, and plays an important role in not only ensuring the health of a mother and child during pregnancy, but also in bringing children, adolescents and family members into the health care system where they can access additional services and care that improve overall health outcomes. There is a clear need to educate and encourage women to seek out health care during their pregnancies, and to improve the quality and availability of antenatal care.

The Global Fund supports the integration of maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health programs with HIV, TB and malaria interventions. Pregnant women and children under 5 are particularly vulnerable to malaria, especially children under 5 who are suffering from diarrhea or malnutrition. The Global Fund supports preventative treatments for pregnant women as part of antenatal care, and treatment for pregnant women with malaria. To ensure children are born free of HIV, Global Fund investments support programs that have, to date, put 3.6 million women on treatment to prevent transmission of HIV to their babies.

By providing focused antenatal care and integrated community case management, overall health outcomes are stronger, more cost-effective and efficient. For example, with funding from the Global Fund and UNICEF technical support, **Côte d'Ivoire** is focusing on Community Case Management (iCCM) to extend case management of childhood illness beyond health facilities so that more children have access to lifesaving treatments. In **Kenya**, the Global Fund has integrated TB screening into the country's antenatal care platform, which also provides treatment to prevent the transmission of HIV from mothers to their babies. This has resulted in a 43 percent increase in the number of clients screened for TB during antenatal visits.

One effective way that countries have integrated health services is through the use of community health workers. In countries such as **Ethiopia**, **Kenya** and **Nepal**, volunteers or health workers are trained in a series of health interventions such as basic hygiene and sanitation, malaria diagnosis and treatment, and antenatal care. In this way, they are able to provide foundational health services to the local community.

Adolescence and Sexual Health

It is crucial to provide sexual and reproductive health services and education to adolescent boys and girls, before and after they become sexually active. The Global Fund invests in adolescent-friendly programs that offer comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and promote healthy practices, through the health and educational systems and through community-based initiatives. In **Mozambique**, for example, community health workers provide education sessions for girls aged 15-19 to learn about HIV prevention, safe sex, and their health rights.

Children and adolescents living with HIV need additional support as they reach adolescence, particularly in terms of adhering to treatment, maintaining their own health and understanding the implications of their status in terms of their relationships and sexual development. The Global Fund works with partners and countries to address barriers to accessing services for adolescents, such as the need for parental permission, legal age requirements for testing for HIV, and other barriers.

Gender Equality

Issues of sexual and reproductive health cannot be separated from issues of gender equality. Physiologically, women are more vulnerable to HIV than men, and this vulnerability is exacerbated by gender inequality, which often prevents women from accessing information or from controlling their own reproductive health. Gender norms, sometimes based on harmful concepts of masculinity, often keep men from seeking health services and exacerbate risk-taking behavior that has negative health consequences. Gender inequality is also a driver of gender-based violence, which is a cause and a consequence of HIV infection for women and girls. The Global Fund invests in programs to prevent gender-based violence and provide treatment and care to survivors.

Access to Health Information and Education

Ensuring access to health information and education is a key element of sexual and reproductive health and rights. This includes programs such as peer support and counseling networks for youth and adolescents, providing male and female condoms through community-based prevention efforts or using local drama groups to inform about AIDS. **Swaziland**, for example, with support from the Global Fund and partners, has launched an ambitious program to improve health and reduce HIV risk among young women and girls by removing barriers to education for girls, supporting access to sexual and reproductive services and information, and addressing gender-based violence.



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In rural **Zimbabwe**, out-of-school teens ages 15–24 take part in a day-long program called a “JIC Run” (JIC stands for Join-In-Circuit) to learn about HIV transmission, sexually transmitted diseases and self-esteem as it relates to sex. Peer educators quiz participants as they make the rounds through a series of pictorial stations, each one themed around an education topic. All teens who take part receive a referral slip for a voluntary HIV test at the end of the JIC Run, which is often held on site at a health center for immediate access to counseling and testing.

Expanding Impact Through Partnership

The Global Fund works closely with other agencies to encourage the integration of sexual and reproductive health issues into health care services. The Global Fund is working with UNICEF to encourage countries to include interventions to address maternal health through HIV and TB/HIV programs. This could include, for example, iron supplements, tetanus vaccinations or syphilis screening during antenatal visits. The Global Fund also works with UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to strengthen supply chains to ensure that essential medicines and other commodities are available. And the Global Fund has been working closely with partners on the development of the Global Financing Facility, which will support efforts to end preventable maternal, newborn, child and adolescent deaths.

About the Global Fund

The Global Fund is a 21st-century partnership designed to accelerate the end of AIDS, TB and malaria as epidemics. As a partnership between governments, civil society, the private sector and people affected by the diseases, the Global Fund mobilizes and invests nearly US\$4 billion a year to support programs run by local experts in more than 100 countries. The Global Fund’s operating costs are just 2.3 percent of grants under management, reflecting an exceptionally high degree of efficiency. By challenging barriers and embracing innovative approaches, we are working together to better serve people affected by the diseases.