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**INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY 2017**

**A CALL FOR INCREASED FUNDING TO NETWORKS OF WLHIV**

**Theme: Be bold for change**

The International Community of Women Living with HIV&AIDS Eastern Africa (ICWEA) is a membership regional network run by and for women living with HIV (WLHIV). Founded in 2005, ICWEA exists to give visibility to WLHIV through promoting collective women’s voices to advocate for changes that improve our lives, to stand up for our rights often violated, and influence our environment for an in-depth change of our societies

ICWEA joins the rest of the world in commemorating the International women’s Day with emphasis on taking bold steps to improve on the lives of women living with HIV across East Africa through partnerships with Women Living with HIV across the region so as to improve health service delivery and accountability.

**Background:** International Women’s Day (March 8) is a global day dedicated to celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. It is a day that marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity.

As we mark the day, ICWEA would like to focus attention to the HIV prevalence across the five East African Countries stands as follows; Kenya 5.6% (females 6.6%, males 4.9%). Uganda 7.3% (females 8.3%, males 6.1%), Tanzania 4.7% (females 6.2%, males 3.8%), Rwanda 3.0% (females 3.6%, males 2.2) and Burundi at 1.3%.

Available Data across East Africa shows a steady feminization of the HIV epidemic regardless of age. As we join the rest of the world in commemorating the International Women’s Day 2017, under theme: **Be Bold for Change,** wepresent our concerns and priorities to all stakeholders at national, regional, and global levels.

**Limited participation in funding processes:** It is unfortunate that women remain invisible from the processes where decisions are made on HIV policies, programmes, budgets and laws that will have an impact on the lives and wellbeing of women and girls living with HIV. Women who are statistically most infected and affected are missing, perceived to be recipients or denied space to present their views. Failure to promote the participation of women and girls living with HIV in taking decisions that critically affect them negatively affects their lives and wellbeing while increased participation will enable them influence policies, programmes and budgets to the benefit of their wellbeing

Inadequate funding to networks of Women Living with HIV: ICWEA has done research to establish access of funds by organisations of women living with HIV and established that they are not adequately accessing funding, particularly those dealing with Human rights and advocacy. Limited funding to networks of people living with HIV reduces efforts towards fighting HIV.

**SRHR violations against women and girls living with HIV**: We continue to note the sexual and Reproductive rights violations of women and girls living with HIV in both the community and health settings across East Africa. These violations impact on our desire to have children, access contraceptives as well as well as access to prevention, treatment, care and support. These violations are usually a result of persisting stigma and discrimination.

**Gender Based Violence as a predisposing factor:** Violence and the threat of violence increases women and girls’ vulnerability to HIV by making it difficult or impossible to set the terms of an equal relationship. It is difficult for women to refuse sex when in a relationship, to get their partners to be faithful, or to use a condom. Violence is a barrier in accessing HIV prevention, care, and treatment services.

Violence against women is associated with an increased risk of acquiring sexually transmitted infections, a risk factor of HIV. Fear of violence prevents women from seeking voluntary counseling and testing for HIV, returning for their test results, or getting treatment if they are HIV positive or services to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission.

**FUNDERS:**

* Increase financial support to community organizations that promote economic empowerment of women and girls living with HIV
* Ensure that networks of WLHIV are represented on National AIDS Councils, country coordinating mechanisms and in other relevant national and local decision-making and consultative bodies
* Increase the participation of women and girls living with HIV in informing and shaping the funding mechanisms
* Invest resources strategically to support interventions and populations that yield the highest impact and progress on HIV, TB and malaria

**GOVERNMENT**

* Sensitize and build the capacity of health workers to provide quality and non-discriminative care
* Sensitize communities with particular focus on involving men to increase their knowledge and appreciation of the SRHR of women living with HIV
* Provide tailor-made, non-stigmatizing sexual and reproductive health services for ‘key populations’
* Introduce/enforce comprehensive national legislation that protects the rights of girls, young women and people living with HIV.
* Partner with low income households to mitigate vulnerability to HIV, improve care and treatment outcomes

**CSOS/WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS**

* Scale up advocacy for funding, policy review and mass sensitization of women and girls on SRHR and protection
* Empower young people, particularly girls and women, living with HIV to defend their rights and have access to information and services

**Contacts**

Lillian Mworeko

**Executive Director**

+256392947313

lmworeko@icwea.org

Martha Akello

**Communications Officer**

+256782642349

makello@icwea.org