



INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV EASTERN AFRICA (ICWEA)

ICWEA Statement on World TB Day 2026

“Yes! We Can End TB: Led by countries, powered by people”

On this World TB Day 2026, the International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa (ICWEA) stands in solidarity with communities, governments, and partners to reaffirm a simple truth: **ending TB is possible but only if people are truly at the centre of the response.**

The 2026 theme, *“Yes! We Can End TB: Led by countries, powered by people,”* is a call to move beyond commitments to **accountability, equity, and action.** It challenges us to recognize that while country leadership is critical, **communities are the driving force of sustainable change.**

In 2024, **10.7 million people fell ill with TB and 1.23 million people died (WHO)**, a stark reminder that progress remains fragile and uneven. For women and girls living with HIV, TB continues to be a leading cause of illness and death, compounded by stigma, gender inequality, and barriers to accessing care. The Global Burden of Disease (GBD) 2021 Study reveals that while men consistently experience higher incidence and mortality rates, the absolute number of women affected remains staggering. For women living with HIV (WLHIV), the physiological and immunological interactions between these two pathogens are profound. HIV increases the risk of progressing from latent TB infection to active disease by approximately 20 to 30 times.

It should be noted that for women, the burden of TB is often underestimated due to barriers in seeking care; women remain the primary caregivers for their family members even when they are affected by TB disease. In many Eastern African nations, women of reproductive age are disproportionately affected by HIV compared to their male counterparts. TB being one of the leading killer of women in their reproductive age.

In the Eastern African context—comprising of countries including, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi, women face unique biological, social, and economic challenges that influence TB transmission, diagnosis, and treatment outcomes.

At ICWEA, we believe that **ending TB requires both systems change and movement building.**

Through **Community-Led Monitoring (CLM)**, communities are generating real-time evidence on the availability, accessibility, and quality of TB and HIV services. This evidence must not sit in reports, it must **shape policies, inform planning, and drive improvements in service delivery**.

Through the **FIERCE Campaign ICWEA** amplifies the voices, leadership, and lived experiences of women and girls living with HIV, because those most affected are not just beneficiaries of care, but **leaders, advocates, and agents of change**.

We therefore call for:

- **People-centred, integrated TB services at PHC level** that are accessible, affordable, stigma-free, and responsive to women and girls
- **Institutionalization of the Engagement of Recipients of Care in Improving Services delivery as** a core component of health systems, ensuring community-generated evidence drives decision-making
- **Recognition and investment in women's centred programmes and women living with HIV initiatives** that strengthen movement building and advocacy
- **Meaningful and sustained engagement of civil society and affected communities** in TB policy design, implementation, and accountability processes
- **Increased domestic financing** to ensure continuity, sustainability, and equity in TB and HIV responses

Addressing TB in women and girls living with HIV requires more than just clinical intervention; it demands a gender-sensitive restructuring of health systems. Moving toward fully integrated, people-centered models of care, where diagnosis, treatment, and support services are co-located, is essential to reducing the disproportionate mortality rate in this population.

Ending TB is not just a technical challenge, it is a question of **power, voice, and justice**.

When communities are empowered, when women lead, and when evidence from lived realities informs action, **we do more than respond to TB, we transform systems**.

To meet the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of ending the TB epidemic by 2030, Eastern African nations must address the gender-specific barriers that prevent women from accessing early diagnosis and completing treatment and find the missing cases of women and girls living with HIV.

This World TB Day, ICWEA reaffirms:

Yes, we can end TB, when communities lead, and systems listen.

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