

# Make or Break

The Role of Social Determinants on the  
Health of Adolescent Girls and  
Young Women

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# New HIV Infections Among AGYW



- While new HIV infections have fallen globally by 35% since 2000
- In Africa, 74% of new HIV infections are among adolescent girls aged 15-19

## Taking A Deeper Look

- Young women and girls are also disproportionately affected by the spread of HIV. Globally, young women and girls are twice as likely to acquire HIV as young men and boys.
- AIDS-related illnesses are the second leading cause of death among 15-19 - year old girls in sub-Saharan Africa and the third most common cause of death among adolescents globally.



## Unpacking the Facts

- In sub-Saharan Africa, AGYW are 5 to 14 times more likely to be infected with HIV than their male peers
- Every day, more than 750 AGYW are infected with HIV
- Many factors make girls and young women particularly vulnerable to HIV, including gender-based violence, exclusion from economic opportunities, and a lack of access to secondary school.



# When It Is More Complex Than Just SEX

- Education
- Access to SRHR
- Exposure to Violence
- Comprehensive Sexuality Education
- Child Marriage
- Poverty
- Gender Inequity
- Harmful Social Norms
- Regressive Policies
- Lack of Investments
- Unemployment

# If We Are To Go Well – We Are To Go Together

PEPFAR data show that new HIV infections must be reduced in AGYW, or the global community risks losing the extensive progress made towards reaching epidemic control.



# Just Say No!

- Adolescent girls are often unable to refuse unwanted sex or resist coerced sex, which tends to be unprotected
- Sexual violence is widespread and particularly affects adolescent girls: about 20% of girls around the world experience sexual abuse as children and adolescents
- Inequitable gender norms and social norms that condone violence against women put girls at greater risk of unintended pregnancy, STI's, HPV, Cervical Cancer and HIV



# My Body – But NOT My Choice



- Approximately 15 million adolescent girls between 15 to 19 worldwide have experienced forced sex sexual acts at some point in their life
- In the vast majority of countries reviewed by UNICEF, adolescent girls are most at risk of forced sex by a current or former husband, intimate partner or boyfriend
- In 30 countries, 1% sought professional help

# For Many AGYW – Choice Is Too Expensive

“Poverty includes deprivation, constrained choices, and unfulfilled capabilities and refers to interrelated features of well-being that impact upon the standard of living and the quality of life”

For AGYW, it can mean making impossible choices



# The High Price of Survival

The poorest young women may have little choice but to adopt behaviors that put them at risk of infection, including transactional and intergenerational sex, early marriage, and relationships that expose them to violence and abuse. Poorer and less-educated women may be less knowledgeable about risks and therefore less able to adopt HIV risk-reducing behaviors



# The Invisible Consequences of Crisis



- 20 million AGYW live in conflict or fragile settings
- Impact is critically detrimental to understand the health, education and rights of AGYW
- In these setting girls are 2.5 times less likely to attend school
- Crises, conflict and humanitarian emergencies both expound and permeate gender inequity
- Without food, income or general stability, AGYW are subject to will of male providers without self agency and heightened vulnerability to coercion

# The Silent Victims of Conflict

- A crisis heightens vulnerability of AGYW to gender-based violence, unwanted pregnancy, HIV infection, maternal death and disability, early and forced marriage, rape, trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse
- In emergencies, adolescent girls need tailored programming to increase their access to education, SRHR, violence prevention and social protections



# Adolescent Girls Are Disproportionately Affected By Child Marriage and HIV



- Every year, 12 million girls are married before the age of 18
- Although boys are sometimes married off, child marriage is driven by gender inequality and disproportionately affects girls
- Overlapping factors that put girls at risk of child marriage also place them at higher risk of HIV infection including poverty, low education and gender inequalities
- These factors limit ability to make health decisions

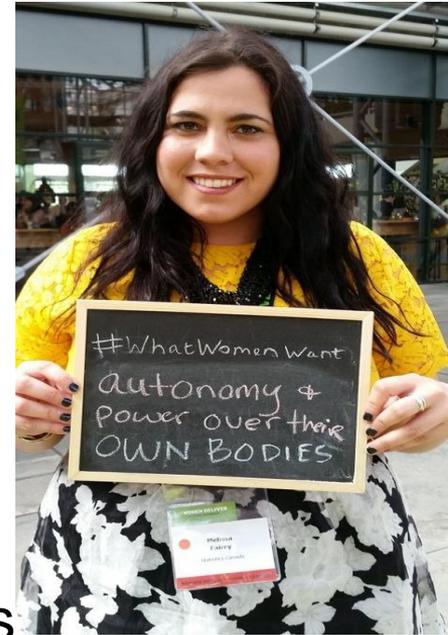


# Power Imbalance of the Unequally Yoked

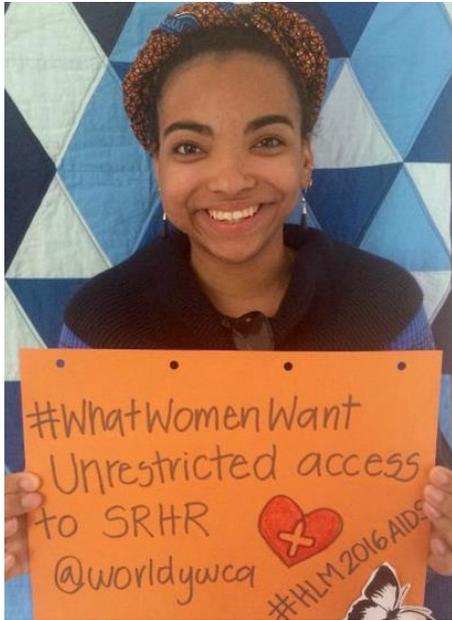
- Early sexual debut – including that which takes place within child marriages is associated with increased lifetime risk of HIV infection
- Child brides are exposed to frequent unprotected sexual activity, in part because there is pressure on them to prove their fertility
- Child brides have little say in how they practice their sexuality, because of their young age and limited power in the relationship, leaving them unable to negotiate safer sex or refuse sex
- Heightened vulnerability to intimate partner violence, a factor that has been shown to increase the likelihood of contracting HIV
- Girls married before the age of 18 tend to have lower levels of education than their unmarried peers, which further limits their access to CSE and HIV prevention tools, while increasing their risk of contracting HIV

# Health Is A Human Right: Access Not Granted

- 29 countries women require the consent of a spouse or partner to access SRH services
- Alternatively, parent or guardian consent is required for HIV testing or SRHR services
- Restrictive age-of-consent laws limit HIV prevention, HIV testing and STI screening
- Provider attitudes and stigma provide added layers of challenges for AGYW accessing care
- Even when services can be accessed, there can be fear of violence from family or partners



# Youth Tailored Health Services



- Culturally and linguistically trained provider providing inclusive care
- Youth tailored services
- Ensuring AGYW are included in UHC
- AGYW need hours compatible with school
- Include AGYW in 90/90/90 investments

# Because That's The Way It Has Always Been

- Religion and culture too often perpetuate and reinforce gender inequity
- Many cultures worldwide view AGYW in subordinate roles
- AGYW are made to carry the responsibility for protecting family honor which can limit uptake of needed SRHR services

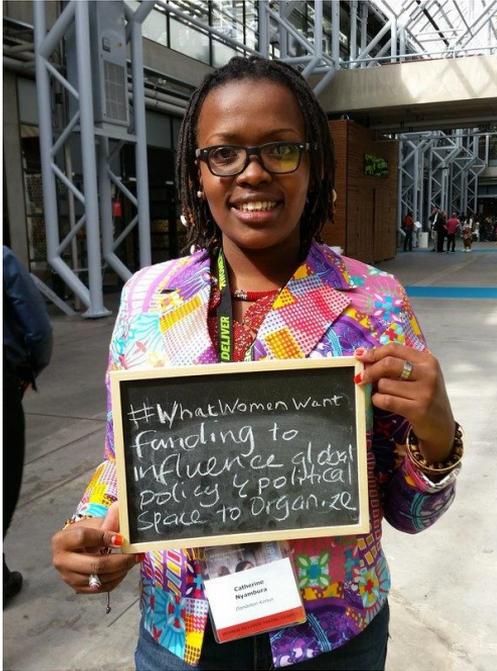


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# So... What Do We Do?



# Help AGYW Help Themselves



- Funding is needed specific to the health and rights of AGYW
- AGYW have vast knowledge and viable solutions from programs to policies
- Funding and resources for infrastructure and sustainability
- End the culture of volunteerism

# AGYW Need A Seat At the Table

- Young women need to have capacity building and investments to participate in decision-making process around key policies, funding and services that impact them
- Young women need to be equal partners in and void of tokenism





## Knowledge Is POWER

- Comprehensive Sexuality Education enables young people to protect their health, well-being and dignity
- CSE based on human rights principles, they advance gender equality and the rights and empowerment of young people
- It also creates an opportunity to address and eliminate HIV related stigma and discrimination

# Integrative Programs Addressing SDH

- PEPFAR DREAMS Initiative reinforces the need for integrated interventions that combines evidence-based approaches that go beyond the health sector, addressing the structural drivers that directly and indirectly increase girls' HIV risk
- DREAMS underscores the need to look beyond just reducing new HIV infections, aiming to reduce other critical vulnerabilities such as gender-based violence noting that

“When girls and young women thrive, the effects are felt throughout their families, communities and countries”



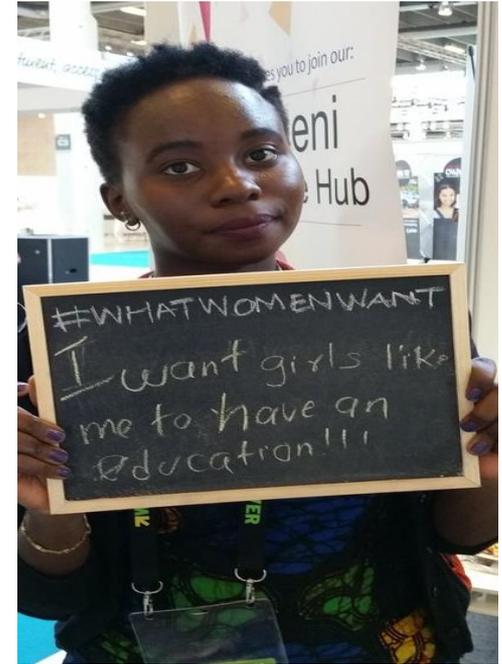
## Political Will: Speak, Act & Invest

- Bold leadership from governments, normative bodies and traditional leaders reinforcing the health, rights and gender equity for AGYW
- Repeal of harmful laws and policies
- Transformation of social norms
- Robust investment in SDG 5



# Let AGYW Learn – Let Them Grow

- Make secondary education for AGYW a financial and political priority
- Invest in job training, micro-financing and entrepreneurial programs
- Leadership to shift norms to affirm the need and right for AGYW to have access to quality education



# Listen To AGYW

