



## **U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief**

### **Fact Sheet for International Day of the Girl Child (October 11)**

#### **1. What is International Day of the Girl Child (October 11)?**

International Day of the Girl Child is a newly established UN observance that will be commemorated for the first time this year, 2012. The observance seeks to promote girls' rights and highlight gender inequalities that remain between boys and girls.

The theme for this first-ever observance of the Day is "Ending Child Marriage." The theme was chosen because child marriage violates the rights of millions of girls around the world, impacting on all aspects of their lives. It interrupts their education, puts their health at risk, and denies them their childhood.

#### **2. What are the gender-based issues affecting the girl-child in Nigeria?**

The girl-child in Nigeria today is faced with a lot of gender-based issues. Some of these include harmful traditional/cultural practices (such as early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation), child sexual abuse and slavery, trafficking in persons, sexual coercion and abuse, neglect, and domestic violence. These issues takes on many forms and can occur throughout the lifecycle, from the prenatal phase through childhood and adolescence, the reproductive years, and old age (Moreno 2005).

### 3. The theme for this first-ever observance of International Day of the Girl is "Ending Child Marriage." How does child marriage affect the girl-child?

Child marriage violates the rights of girls in the following ways among others:

- Disrupts their education – child marriage almost always leads to the termination of formal schooling for the child bride along with all the life chances associated with it: 2008 Nigeria National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) showed that 72% of currently married female adolescents had no schooling compared to 6.9% of their unmarried peers.
- Jeopardizes their health – overwhelming majority of Vesicovaginal fistula ( VVF) sufferers are first time mothers of ages less than 20; also married female adolescents have much higher HIV prevalence than their male age-mates (in some places thrice as high); and over 70% of mothers that die from hypertensive disorders of pregnancies are teen mothers especially in Northern Nigeria.
- Denies them their childhood – child brides face incredible social isolation from friends and family being often married to much older men; have low self-esteem and very few opportunities to recreate and play the way their mates do, and are thrown abruptly and totally unprepared into the deep end of dealing with adult responsibilities like child-rearing, household budget management, managing conflicts with neighbours and relatives, etc

### 4. On “gender-related vulnerabilities”. What’s the link between gender inequalities and girls’ vulnerability to serious diseases such as HIV/AIDS?

- Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is rooted in structural inequalities between men and women and is characterized by the use and abuse of physical, emotional, or financial power and control. —i.e., **unequal power relationships based on biological sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation**—that are codified via cultural beliefs and societal norms and are reinforced in political and economic systems.

- Violence or the fear of violence can pose formidable barriers to HIV prevention, care, and treatment, limiting individuals' ability to learn their HIV status and adopt and maintain protective measures ranging from **negotiating safer sex to getting and staying on treatment to remaining in school** (Gardsbane 2010; World Health Organization [WHO])
- Similarly, violence can **impede access to basic health information and services**, including HIV treatment, care, and support.
- Conversely, **a positive test result can lead to stigma, discrimination, isolation, and violence in the home and community, magnifying the vulnerabilities that women, girls, orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), and other at-risk populations already face in pursuing healthy, satisfying, and productive lives** (Hale and Vazquez 2011). Research studies from India, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam demonstrate that women who are HIV-positive are more at risk of violence than women who are HIV-negative, and that violence is a major contributing factor to HIV infection (Program on International Health and Human Rights and Harvard School of Public Health 2009)

### **5. What are the socio-economic costs of gender-based violence affecting the girl-child or women generally?**

The socio-economic costs include reduced labour productivity associated with large populations of poorly educated and unskilled women (whose education was terminated by early marriage), and domestic violence-induced work absenteeism; huge economic losses associated with preventable morbidities and deaths associated with GBV including STIs, trauma, suicides, and homicides; family instability and its adverse effects on child upbringing

### **6. Can we achieve a world of gender equality and how?**

Yes, we can via (a) expansion of girl-child education; (b) women's economic empowerment; (c) improvement of women's health especially their reproductive health; (d) increased representation of women in decision-making positions; (e) enforcement and strengthening of anti-gender violence

laws and policies; and (f) promotion of gender equality enhancing norms, values and beliefs.

### **7. How has the U.S. Government (USG) as a global partner in development helped to promote and protect the rights of the girl-child in Nigeria?**

The establishing of the International Day of the Girl Child followed a multi-year campaign by activists in Canada and the United States. U.S. Secretary of State, Mrs. Hilary Clinton will host an event to commemorate the Day highlighting its importance.

1. **Focus on women, girls, and gender equality**, including the prevention of and response to GBV is a key priority of the U.S. Global Health Initiative (Global Health Initiative). Through the Global Health Initiative (GHI), the United States will invest \$63 billion over six years to help partner countries improve health outcomes through strengthened health systems – with a particular focus on improving the health of women, newborns and children through programs
2. **Our public health experts and partners** have developed linkages between HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support in these technical areas:
  - Prevention
  - HIV Testing and Counselling (HTC)
  - Prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT)
  - Adult treatment
  - Care and support
  - OVC
3. **PEPFAR partners have also considered a comprehensive, multi-sectoral response to GBV** serving as a starting point for HIV

- programs and services to contribute to a comprehensive response to GBV including direct services for GBV survivors, community mobilization to address the root causes of violence, capacity building for service providers, and policy change and leadership to create an enabling environment for preventing, addressing, and ultimately ending GBV
4. **Increasing women's access to income and productive resources** – USG partners such as APIN, CIHP, in the OVC, Basic Care and Support, and Abstinence and Being Faithful (AB) programs provide positive mothers, single mother, older female orphans, female sex workers with seed grants to establish small businesses in order to support their families and children in their care and to abandon risky behavior.
  5. **Male norms and behaviors are being addressed in PEPFAR** abstinence and being faithful activities through program activities carried out by PEPFAR partners like Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN), Population Council, and Heartland Alliance among many others. These activities address issues such as gender based violence, rape, negative cultural practices affecting women such as land inheritance in some parts of the country.
  6. **Counseling and testing for all pregnant women at ante-natal clinic** – USG PMTCT partners such as GHAIN, CRS, IHVN, Harvard etc provide free HIV counseling and testing for all pregnant women and follow on care and treatment for women who test positive. USG encourages couples counseling to increase **male involvement** which reduces the pressures on positive women, makes status disclosure easier and helps them to easily access care and treatment.
  7. US-Department of Defense (DOD) supports Nigeria's Defense and Police Officers Wives Association (DEPOWA). This organization is headed by the wife of the Chief of Defense. This support enables the organization conduct women and children HIV/AIDS specific activities in FCT military and police barracks. They incorporate HIV/AIDS activities into their yearly work plan. They also carry out HIV/AIDS discussion activities i.e. debates and quizzes during their "Husband Night" fundraising event, where in addition to raising funds for their yearly activities, they use this forum to discuss and provide certain information on HIV/AIDS related issues, while having loads of fun.

**THANK YOU.**