



#GenderMatters

## Stepping Up for Women and Girls During COVID-19 Campaign messages for the 16 Days of Activism

### INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is not only a health issue, just as HIV never was. It impacts on a wide range of human rights, and although it affects all people, it does so unequally. Women and girls in all their diversity are experiencing the greatest impact of the crisis. Their disparate experience is related not only to the virus but also to existing discrimination, gender stereotypes and deeply rooted inequalities including lack of equal access to food, clean water, housing and health services.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, women and girls are facing decreased access to essential health services. The consequences of reduced access to critical HIV services and sexual and reproductive health care are particularly severe as they impede the ability of women and girls to protect their health, avoid unwanted pregnancies, and prevent or manage HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. The COVID-19 quarantines, as well as increased rates of gender-based violence (GBV), have placed considerable strains on mental health. Evidence from Asia and the Pacific collected by ICWAP suggests that women living with HIV are not able to obtain regular counselling and psychosocial supports that would help to mitigate and manage mental health issues.

Women living with HIV have been deterred from seeking treatment at HIV clinics due to fear that they would be compelled to reveal their HIV status to the police as a condition for leaving their homes during lockdown – a clear violation of their privacy. As reported by ICWAP, harmful gender norms contributing to limited decision-making and ability to leave the home are compounded by COVID-19 lockdowns, making it more difficult for some women, notably those in serodiscordant relationships, to access ARVs, contraceptives and health commodities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has left women more vulnerable to gender-based violence. India reported double the usual number of domestic abuse cases in the first week of the nationwide movement restrictions, according to the country's National Commission for Women. ICWAP survey of women living with HIV in Asia and the Pacific found that 30% of respondents have experienced gender-based violence. For women living with HIV, gender-based violence can impede HIV prevention and access to sexual and reproductive health services. Violence, or the potential for it, discourages many women living with HIV from disclosing their HIV-positive status to their partners, families and health providers, and make it more difficult for women to stay on HIV treatment. Gender-based violence and unequal power dynamics make it especially difficult for women to negotiate safer sex.

Each year the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence (GBV) serves as a platform for UN agencies and civil society partners to catalyze support in preventing and addressing GBV, as well as raise awareness about issues that women face. This year, on the occasion of the 16 Days of Activism, the International Community of Women Living with HIV in Asia-Pacific (ICWAP) and UNAIDS Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific have partnered to amplify the diverse voices of women living with HIV and profile the work done in the region to address inequalities.

UNAIDS and ICWAP will be sharing social media messages intended to raise awareness about the critical need to address GBV targeting women living with HIV and challenges in accessing health



services. These messages draw from data sourced via ICWAP's regional survey aimed at understanding the situation and hardships faced by women and girls during the COVID-19 epidemic. The messages align with ICW's global initiative #GenderMatters, a campaign highlighting how gender inequality and patriarchy underscore women's health outcomes and intensifies the diverse issues women living with HIV experience in relation intersecting identities.

During the 16 Days of Activism, starting on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November) until Human Rights Day (10 December), partners are encouraged to follow ICWAP and UNAIDS Asia-Pacific at their respective social media channels listed below and share/retweet posts using the hashtags below.

To learn more about the 16 Days of Activism, including this year's theme, "Orange the World: Fund, Respond, Prevent, Collect!", click [here](#). To learn more about ICW's #GenderMatter campaign, click [here](#). To learn more about the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, globally, and what measure should be taken in response, click [here](#).

#### TAGGING PROFILES

- **FACEBOOK** @unaidsasiapacific @ICWAP
- **INSTAGRAM** unaids\_ap icwap2014
- **TWITTER** @UNAIDS\_AP @ICWAPasiapac

#### HASHTAGS

- **PRIMARY HASHTAG** #GenderMatters
- **SECONDARY HASHTAG** #16Days
- **TERTIARY HASHTAG** #OrangetheWorld



**#GenderMatters**  
**Stepping Up for Women and Girls During COVID-19**  
**Campaign messages for the 16 Days of Activism**

**SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES**

**25 November 2020 – International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women**

**Initial Facebook Post:**

Like #HIV, #COVID19 is revealing deeply rooted inequalities that are impacting the health & rights of women and girls. @unaidsasiapacific @ICWAP call on gov'ts&partners to include women in all their diversity, including women living w/HIV, in #COVID19 response & decision-making processes that affect their lives #GenderMatters #16Days

#COVID19 responses are deepening structural inequalities – efforts to end #COVID19 should not roll back gains for gender equality @unaidsasiapacific @ICWAP call on gov'ts, donors civil society to account for unique needs of women living w/HIV in COVID19 response #GenderMatters

Gender inequality denies women & girls the ability to make their own health-care choices. Join @unaidsasiapacific @ICWAP to raise awareness about addressing entrenched inequalities&remove barriers in accessing health services to end #HIV & #COVID19 #GenderMatters #OrangetheWorld

**Additional Posts:**

During #COVID19 networks of women living w/HIV helped prevent HIV service interruptions and provide vulnerable ppl w/food relief & mental health support. Join @ICWAP @unaidsasiapacific urging gov'ts to consider networks of women living w/HIV as allies to ensure aid reaches the ppl who need it the most. #GenderMatters

The #COVID19 response, like #HIV response, has shown us the power of the communities – providing ppl w/info, food relief & mental health support. But community activism cannot do it alone. We need gov't, donors&civil society to advance this work further #GlobalSolidarity #SharedResponsibility

Quarantine for #COVID19 has seen a surge in #GBV @ICWAP survey of women living w/HIV in Asia & the Pacific found 30% of respondents have experienced GBV. This #16Days let us not forget that #GenderMatters & call on gov'ts to reaffirm their commitment to end GBV

Lessons from #HIV response: epidemics leave women especially vulnerable to GBV. During #16Days join @ICWAP @unaidsasiapacific call on gov'ts to make prevention and redress of GBV a key part of national response plans for #COVID19. #GenderMatters

@ICWAP survey of women living w/HIV: more than 20% of respondents lost their jobs b/c of #COVID19. Join us to call on gov'ts to develop income-generating schemes meant for women living w/HIV to compensate for the loss of income caused by COVID-19 #GenderMatters



#COVID19 -related travel restrictions can be a barrier for women living w/HIV to access HIV treatment and support @unaidsasiapacific @ICWAP call on gov'ts to incorporate gender perspectives into policy responses & provide differentiated health services like ARV multi-month dispensing #GenderMatters

@ICWAP survey of women living w/HIV during #COVID19: More than 80% of those surveyed lacked access to sexual & reproductive health services. Ensure SRH services & info are integrated into all current/future emergency health frameworks & financing schemes, including plans for accessibility during health crises #GenderMatters

@ICWAP survey of women living w/HIV: 90% reported mental health issues due to #COVID19. During the #16Days of Activism join us to call on gov'ts & health systems to not leave women living with HIV behind & invest in mental health services. #GenderMatters

#HIV & #COVID19 responses must address issues related to women's rights & gender equality, including SRHR, GBV and mental health. Women living w/HIV must be included in the response planning & implementation #GenderMatters

#COVID19 pandemic revealed that no one is safe until everyone is safe. Leaving ppl behind is not an option if we are to succeed. This #WorldAIDSDay join @unaidsasiapacific in solidarity to tackle discrimination & stand against GBV to end the colliding pandemics of HIV & COVID-19

### **10 December 2020 – Human Rights Day**

@ICWAP survey: 20% women & girls living w/HIV missed antiretroviral medicines for 1–10 days during #COVID19 outbreak. On #HumanRightsDay join us to call on stakeholders to ensure the right to health & place women at the center of the #HIV & #COVID19 response #GenderMatters

Stigma & discrimination towards women living w/HIV, LGBTIQ communities & sex workers are barriers to prevention & treatment necessary to respond to the colliding pandemics of #COVID19 & #HIV. Let us stand together against discrimination #GenderMatters #HumanRightsDay