

**Launch of the WHO report
"Women and health: today's evidence tomorrow's agenda"
9 November 2009, Geneva, Switzerland**

**Statement by Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Secretary-General
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The World YWCA welcomes the WHO Women and health report - it is a timely report produced as governments and civil society prepare to review the Beijing+15 Platform for Action, 15 years since adoption of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action, a year from the 2010 target of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and five years from the end of the Millennium Development Goals. The evidence in the report is clear: addressing sexual and reproductive health of women and girls is essential to improve the health and lives of women around the world.

The report shows that globally, the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age is AIDS related. It clearly states that girls and women are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection due to a combination of biological factors and gender-based inequalities, particularly in cultures that limit women's knowledge about HIV and their ability to protect themselves and negotiate safer sex.

The report also indicates that pregnancy and childbearing present major risk factors for women and girls. Promoting the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of all women and girls including the right to safe motherhood is therefore essential; a human rights approach must be adopted in addressing reproductive health.

Although SRHR and HIV and AIDS lead as serious health issues for women of reproductive age, adolescent girls face different challenges. Around the world, chronic disease, mental health and accidents threaten adolescent girls' health. Mental health and safety of girls and young women is of grave concern and calls for a multi-faceted approach; women and girls need health services that address all aspects of their lives.

To ensure health services are holistic, women must be involved in building solutions to the challenges presented in this report. Expanding the roles of women in health care delivery must be considered as a key strategy for improving health systems. The report rightly emphasizes that women are the backbone of the health system, women are nevertheless rarely represented in executive or management-level positions. In their roles as informal health-care providers at home or the community, women are often unsupported, unrecognized and unremunerated.

Therefore, the World YWCA calls on WHO and stakeholders to:

- 1. Develop the leadership of women and young woman through an inter-generational approach.** It is essential to promote the participation, empowerment and leadership of women at all levels of society including equitable representation at the highest level of global, national and local structures. A genuine commitment is needed to support women's participation at all levels of health governance and particularly in decision-making positions.
- 2. Ensure a comprehensive prevention approach at community level** that includes access to comprehensive information and services. Expand access to services for women including safe voluntary HIV testing and expansion of female-initiated HIV prevention.
- 3. Adopt a strong human rights approach** in responding to women and health issues. The human rights of women and girls must be recognized. The realization of these rights is critical to an effective response to global health.