Germany’s contribution to a gender-sensitive and -transformative global response to HIV

A policy brief by the BMZ’s theme group on HIV/AIDS

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1. Young women encouraging each other at a generation dialogue on HIV and sexual morality in Guinea
2. Shepherd and girl on a bridge in Peshawar, Pakistan
3. Members of the Cameroonian network of organisations of people living with HIV
4. A young and an older man discussing HIV and sexual morality in the past and in the present in Guinea

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ........................................................................................... 4

SUMMARY .......................................................................................................... 5

A GENDER-SENSITIVE GLOBAL RESPONSE TO HIV ........................................................ 6
Rationale ........................................................................................................... 6
International resolutions and initiatives ............................................................... 7
The political commitment of the German government ................................................ 7

CONTRIBUTIONS OF GERMAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION TO GENDER-SENSITIVE RESPONSES TO HIV ................. 9
Strengthening the rights and promoting the self-determination of women and girls ........ 9
Promoting the participation of women in the planning and design of national responses to HIV .................................................. 10
Linking the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights with responses to HIV .... 10
Promoting women's and girls' access to information and education ......................... 12
Economic empowerment of women .................................................................... 13
Inclusion and deliberate targeting of men and boys .............................................. 14

REFERENCES ........................................................................................................ 15
# List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMZ</td>
<td>Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>GCWA</td>
<td>Global Coalition on Women and AIDS</td>
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<td>GF</td>
<td>Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria</td>
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<td>GTZ</td>
<td>German Technical Cooperation Agency</td>
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<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
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<td>KfW</td>
<td>KfW Development Bank</td>
</tr>
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<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMTCT</td>
<td>Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission</td>
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<td>SRH</td>
<td>Sexual and Reproductive Health</td>
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<td>SRHR</td>
<td>Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights</td>
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<td>STI</td>
<td>Sexually Transmitted Infection</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNAIDS</td>
<td>United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS</td>
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<td>VCT</td>
<td>Voluntary Counselling and Testing</td>
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In recent years the proportion of women and girls living with HIV has risen to around 50 per cent globally and is continuing to rise. In sub-Saharan Africa in particular, women and girls are worse affected. They account for 60 per cent of all infections, and the risk of becoming infected is three times higher for young women than for young men. This feminisation of the epidemic can only be curbed by making the global response to HIV more gender-sensitive.

The aim of this policy brief is to elucidate Germany’s contribution to this gender sensitivity for the benefit of our international partners and to provide a policy framework for decision-makers in German development cooperation.

The international community has come to realise that a successful response to HIV must include measures to combat social and economic discrimination against women over the long term. The G8 states have made a commitment to strengthen the gender sensitivity of the global response to HIV, most recently at their 2007 summit. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GF), at its eighth funding round, called on applicants to take special account of the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women, girls and sexual minorities.

Under Germany’s dual presidency of the EU Council and the G8 in 2007, the German government came out strongly in favour of a gender-sensitive global response to HIV, and since then it has been a leader toward this aim internationally.

German development cooperation contributes to a gender-sensitive global response to HIV in the following areas:

- Strengthening the rights and promoting the self-determination of women and girls
- Promoting the participation of women in the planning and design of national responses to HIV
- Linking the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights with responses to HIV
- Promoting access for women and girls to information and education
- Economic empowerment of women
- Including and targeting men and boys

At multilateral level, the German government, together with other donor countries and partners, is committed to taking more account of the gender dimension in the structures and processes of the GF, in relation to the specific needs of women, men and of sexual minorities.

The first part of this policy brief sets out the rationale behind a gender-sensitive global response to HIV and makes reference to relevant initiatives and resolutions taken by the international community. There follows an outline of pertinent policy guidelines of the German government. The second part presents the range of gender-based measures which flesh out this policy framework within German development cooperation.

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1 The original version of this report is in German and it uses the term ‘gender-orientiert’ which translates best as ‘gender-responsive’. To avoid the clumsy combination ‘gender-responsive response’ for the English version, this term was translated as ‘gender-sensitive’. However, depending on the context, the original German term, and the German policies and programmes go beyond gender-sensitive and stand for a gender-transformative perspective.
A gender-sensitive global response to HIV

Rationale

In the last 25 years the HIV pandemic has developed into a health crisis of unprecedented proportions. There are about 33.2 million people in the world today living with HIV, and 2.5 million of them became infected last year alone.¹ In the hardest hit countries the HIV epidemic, with its deleterious effects on all social sectors, is one of the principal constraints on development. German development cooperation therefore regards it as a priority task to curb the spread of HIV infections and help to alleviate the social and economic consequences of the pandemic.

This policy brief was prompted by the rising proportion of infected girls and women between the ages of 15 and 49. Globally, they account for about one half of the total, but in sub-Saharan Africa the proportion is already closer to 60 per cent. The risk of infection for girls and young women in this region is three times higher than for men of the same age group, and of the 10 million HIV-infected young people in sub-Saharan Africa about 75 per cent are female. This challenge can only be adequately met by making the global response to HIV more gender-sensitive. The aim of this policy brief is to give our international partners a clear idea of Germany’s contribution to gender responsiveness and German development cooperation’s decision-makers an outline of the policy framework.

In addition to girls’ and women’s physiological higher risk of infection, the main causes of the ‘feminisation’ of the HIV epidemic are structural, reflecting the inequality of the sexes. Thus the situation for girls and women in the countries hardest hit by the HIV epidemic is characterised by gender-specific discrimination and disadvantages, lack of access to education and information, economic dependence, poor negotiating and decision-making skills in private and public life and, last but not least, gender-based violence coupled with lack of access to the law and legal certainty.

For men and boys, culture-based ideals of masculinity that glorify the consumption of alcohol, a high turnover in sexual contacts with girls and women, and physical violence, but which marginalise and consider taboo sex with same-sex partners increase their risk of becoming infected themselves and then infecting their sex partners with HIV. At the same time, masculinity norms do not prepare boys and men adequately to take over the functions of carers and providers as members of households or communities that are affected by HIV. So if a member of the household has AIDS, the job of providing home care mainly falls on the girls and women. In many of the hardest hit countries of southern Africa today it is grandmothers and groups of women who look after the growing numbers of AIDS orphans. Thus women play a central role at household and community level, which is a highly relevant level in terms of a comprehensive response to HIV. In many places it is they who care for the ill and for orphans, and it is they who have responsibility for educating children and young people about health, gender roles and sex. A comprehensive, gender-sensitive response to HIV must take account of these many different facets of the relationship between HIV and gender-specific discrimination, including the discrimination against sexual minorities.

International resolutions and initiatives

The international community is becoming increasingly aware of the connection between structural, gender-specific discrimination and the spread of the HIV epidemic. Thus, gender equality and curbing the HIV epidemic constitute two – in many respects linked – Millennium Development Goals, to which 189 member states of the United Nations committed themselves at the Millennium Development Summit. In the resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its twenty-sixth special session in 2001 (Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS), the heads of state and government stressed that gender equality and the empowerment of women were fundamental elements in reducing the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV infection.

In its Agenda for Action, launched in 2006, the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (GCWA), which was initiated by UNAIDS in 2004, calls on decision-makers, when financing and designing anti-AIDS activities, to better address the plight and vulnerability of women and girls and to make better use of their capacity and ability to bring about positive social developments in families and communities.

The member states of the European Union and the G8 countries addressed this challenge at their meetings in 2007 and resolved to combat the feminisation of the HIV epidemic by making the financing of their interventions to respond to HIV more gender-sensitive. In its current eighth funding round, the GF is, for the first time, encouraging applicant countries to address in their applications the needs and vulnerabilities of, in particular, women and girls and members of sexual minorities.

The political commitment of the German government

Curbing the HIV epidemic is a priority of German development cooperation and is one of the priority areas of the German government’s Programme of Action 2015 for reducing global poverty. Taking human rights as its point of departure, the German government supports a broad-based response to HIV that addresses social and health dimensions and thus explicitly includes poverty reduction, training, better health services and the empowerment of women, so as to enable them to take a larger part in design and decision-making processes. Measures to support sexual and reproductive health and rights and to strengthen women’s rights are an integral part of the German government’s Development Policy Action Plan on Human Rights 2008–2010.

Under the German dual presidency of the EU and the G8 in 2007, the German government, and in particular the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), strongly advocated a gender-sensitive global response to HIV.

- It placed a response to HIV, tuberculosis and malaria and strengthening health systems on the agenda of the G8 summit in Heiligendamm as part of the focus on Africa, which made it possible for important decisions on overcoming gender-based discrimination in the health sector to be taken for the first time at this level.
- As part of its EU Council presidency the German government drafted a presidency paper on new challenges in the response to the HIV epidemic. On the basis of that paper, the EU Council committed to gearing measures more closely to women’s and girls’ needs.
- In association with other donors and partners the German government in 2007 proposed mainstreaming the gender factor in the structures and proc-
One of the strategies proposed, which was well received by international partners, aims to increase women’s representation at all levels of the Fund, to make gender sensitivity one of the quality criteria for applications and to allow projects that work to counter the feminisation of the epidemic and combat gender inequality to have access to GF funds.

The HIV/AIDS Strategy of the Federal Government serves to guide the German government’s contribution to a global response to HIV in the medium term. To implement that strategy under German development cooperation the BMZ has drawn up an action plan for the period 2007–2010. The plan defines promotion of gender equality as a fundamental element of a successful response to HIV. It declares that the following measures must be integrated into all fields of action to eliminate gender inequality.

- Strengthening women’s rights,
- Creating access to education and information for women,
- Promoting sexual self-determination,
- Creating economic security,
- Targeting men.

German development cooperation supports a range of gender-sensitive approaches to HIV in its Technical, Human Resources and Financial Cooperation with partner countries. Specific gender-sensitive measures in Financial Cooperation are set out in a position paper on gender and HIV/AIDS of the KfW Entwicklungsbank (KfW), while the series ‘German HIV Practice Collection’ provides insights into gender-sensitive methods developed under German-backed projects and programmes with HIV components.

The following section briefly describes the areas in which German development cooperation is strongly engaged in fleshing out the policy framework outlined above for a gender-sensitive response to HIV.
Contributions of German development cooperation to gender-sensitive responses to HIV

Strengthening the rights and promoting self-determination of women and girls

German development cooperation takes a human-rights-based approach, that is, it bases its work on the human rights standards set forth in international conventions, and endeavours to apply these in development cooperation in such a way that central principles such as non-discrimination, participation and empowerment are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. Accordingly, in many partner countries, German development cooperation is actively engaged in strengthening human rights and promoting the self-determination of women and girls who, owing to stigmatisation and social exclusion, and the economic discrimination that frequently goes with them, are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection and its impact on affected households.

In a number of African partner countries, German development cooperation is providing support to organisations that bring together people living with HIV, encouraging national and international networking among them and helping to equip them with the skills they need to take part in the various policy forums that shape their national HIV/AIDS programmes. Women living with HIV account for a majority of the members of these organisations. They can benefit from mutual encouragement and support, they learn how to demand that their rights are taken into account and respected and how to introduce those rights into local and national debates.

An internationally recognised approach to strengthening the rights of young women and promoting their self-determination was developed within the framework of Cameroon-German cooperation. It seeks to assist young single mothers, who are especially stigmatised and vulnerable. They are trained as ‘tantines’ ('aunties', aunts being traditionally responsible for sex education in Cameroon) enabling them to act as peer educators and pass on their knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, including HIV prevention, to other young people in their communities. The ‘aunties’ are helped to organise themselves into associations with young women in similar situations, take on responsibility and represent their interests in local and – via their national network – national forums.

A further vital element in strengthening the rights of women within a broad-based response to HIV is the prevention of gender-based and sexual violence, whether in the domestic context or as a consequence of hostilities, displacement or other acute emergencies that destroy livelihoods and the social fabric. German development cooperation supports a multi-sectoral approach to preventing and dealing with gender-based violence, which covers urban development, local government and health services. One approach that is supported in post-conflict situations, such as in Congo and Liberia, as well as in urban hot-spots such as the South African townships, consists of restoring women who have suffered gender-based violence to emotional, medical and economic health. In addition to ensuring that these women receive appropriate treatment, the aim of these measures is to empower them in a way that they are more able to protect themselves against gender-based violence and infection with HIV.

10 German HIV Practice Collection (2006a): Involving People Living with HIV: Support to PLWH organisations in Cameroon. Eschborn
Promoting the participation of women in the planning and design of national responses to HIV

The gender-specific discrimination that leads to women and girls being hardest hit by the HIV epidemic is perpetuated at all levels of the planning and decision-making bodies that are concerned with HIV programmes. Therefore, in addition to advocating within the donor community stronger gender sensitivity for the GF, the German government is preparing a programme aiming to increase the participation of women in the design and implementation of national responses to HIV and facilitate access to national and international funding for local organisations offering gender-sensitive programmes. Women’s rights groups and networks of women living with HIV are an important target group here. Projects that address boys and men specifically and include them in their efforts to bring about gender equality will also be supported.

Many local initiatives in the hardest hit countries are already making an important contribution towards combating the feminisation of the epidemic, but they still do not have sufficient access to global funding mechanisms such as the GF and their voices are not being heard to a sufficient extent in national forums. Training measures that help such initiatives to represent their interests at the local and national level (advocacy) and to plan projects can help increase these projects’ call for funding and improve the quality of their applications.

At the same time, central steering and decision-making bodies, such as national AIDS councils and GF Country Coordinating Mechanisms, are advised on gender-mainstreaming measures designed to increase women’s participation in the planning and design of national programmes and strategies.

Linking the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights with responses to HIV

Universal access to sexual and reproductive health services designed to meet the specific needs of both sexes is essential to comprehensive HIV prevention and integrated, stigma-free AIDS treatment programmes. Linking the policies and programmes of these two thematic areas therefore constitutes a further principle of German engagement for a gender-sensitive response to HIV. It is expounded in detail in another policy brief of the BMZ’s thematic team on the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). 12

The German government has agreed to make the health sector a priority area of its developing cooperation with a total of 14 partner countries. In many of these countries the cooperation programmes comprise HIV/AIDS and SRHR components, enabling this link to be made. Sexual and reproductive health services, such as family planning and antenatal care, are an ideal opportunity to reach women of reproductive age with HIV prevention and/or AIDS treatment programmes.

One area in which German development cooperation is strongly engaged in this context is the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT). In many countries of southern Africa, where between 20 and 30 per cent of all pregnant women are infected with HIV, about 10 per cent of newly born infants become infected by their mothers during either birth or breastfeeding. Between 60 and 70 per cent of these children die before the age of five. Administration of antiretrovirals during or shortly after birth, combined with

advice, support and treatment of the HIV-infected mothers and their partners, which can be provided by the PMTCT programmes, reduces the risk of mother-to-child transmission of the virus by 60 per cent and raises the quality of life for the affected family, especially the women. But PMTCT programmes of this kind are still only available to about 11 per cent of the women who need them, since many countries do not have the technical support necessary to establish and consolidate them. German development cooperation has been playing a pioneering role since 2001, providing specialist support for PMTCT programmes in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, as well as establishing, consolidating and implementing programmes of this sort, including concomitant research. With the help of a voucher system it facilitates access to these services, even for economically disadvantaged women, on the basis of self-determination.

Another area of German engagement which should be mentioned in this context is the promotion of social marketing programmes for contraceptives. These programmes help to combat gender-specific discrimination using gender-differentiated education and information measures aimed at women and men of all age groups, but especially young people and traditional local authorities. The objective is, first, to increase the acceptance and use of condoms / contraceptives to protect against HIV and reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and, second, to strengthen the right of women and girls to sexual self-determination and encourage men and young males to take more responsibility in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Social Marketing in Burkina Faso

Women in the waiting area of Migori district hospital, Kenya

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14 KfW Entwicklungsbank (2007b): A working paper: Voucher schemes as a financing option in the health sector – the experience of German Financial Cooperation. Frankfurt (am Main)
Promoting women’s and girls’ access to information and education

In order to be able to protect themselves from an HIV infection, or, in the case of an existing infection, to live positively with HIV, women and girls, as well as men and boys, need information and advice tailored to their particular situation, needs, questions and risks. In many partner countries, therefore, German development cooperation assists both governmental and non-governmental health service providers to develop information and counselling services which can reach these different groups, are culturally appropriate and deal sensitively with possible stigmatisation and gender-based discrimination. Two things are very important in this context: the linking of family planning and antenatal services with HIV counselling and testing, and the provision of wideranging information on family planning and pregnancy for people diagnosed as being HIV-positive and their partners.

Alongside health services, schools also play a very important role in a gender-based response to HIV. Education is considered to be a ‘social vaccination’ against HIV. As part of life skills programmes, schools can give children and young people information and guidance for later life and teach them how to deal responsibly with the other sex, with their own sexuality and with their sexual and reproductive health.
Therefore, German development cooperation supports, in a number of African countries, basic education programmes that bring school children, teachers, parents, out-of-school youth and the surrounding communities into HIV prevention programmes, as well as targeting socially disadvantaged and therefore highly vulnerable girls. HIV prevention is taught using active learning techniques that make dialogue on equal terms possible between teachers and pupils; it is then conveyed by the pupils and parents to the community, where it is further disseminated. The HIV epidemic can only be stopped from spreading further if people are encouraged, while they are still young, to question existing gender roles and patterns of behaviour; if young people are encouraged to take part in designing responses to HIV; and if girls as well as boys are given unrestricted access to information about their sexual health and rights.

**Economic empowerment of women**

Decision-making autonomy is for many women, however, not just a matter of education, it depends also on the economic environment in which they live and the opportunities open to them. In most of the countries hardest hit by HIV, rates of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy are high, and women are inevitably worst affected.

In these partner countries, German development cooperation is therefore actively seeking not only better basic education for girls, but also wider economic opportunities for women. For many of them, establishing or collaborating in informal micro-enterprises is often the only means they have of earning a living; yet they have no access to credit.

The high proportion of women among the clients of German microfinance projects and their solid repayment performance show that women can run small businesses successfully and that the availability of financing at the level required by women is a highly effective contribution to their economic empowerment. The effects of such empowerment are many and various: local economies are primed; women gain economic security; and women invest their income in, among other things, better food, health and education for their children. Microfinance projects thus also contribute to a gradual change in the image of women in the partner countries concerned and are an important element in a gender-sensitive response to HIV.

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17 KfW Entwicklungsbank MIFSSA. Microfinance Initiative for sub-Saharan Africa. Frankfurt (am Main)
Inclusion and deliberate targeting of men and boys

In a gender-sensitive response to the HIV epidemic, the work with boys and men is a necessary correlate to measures addressing women and girls. Ideals of ‘masculine’ behaviour and behaviour patterns that more often occur among men, such as alcohol consumption and a high turnover of sexual partners, raise men’s own risk of becoming infected with sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, as well as that of their partners. A woman’s ability to protect herself and her children from HIV depends not least on her partner, because it is he who decides on his sexual contacts and whether or not to use a condom.

Whether or not women avail themselves of health services such as Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT), PMTCT and therapy often depends on the consent of their brothers, fathers or husbands. Not least, the widespread dominance of men over women and violence against women are key factors in the spread of HIV, for the threat of violence alone is enough to weaken a woman’s negotiating position and restrict her ability to make decisions.

Hence German development cooperation deliberately addresses men and/or the partners of the women with whom it is already working with its education and information programmes, the social marketing programmes it supports and the PMTCT programmes it promotes in Africa, so that they can consciously exercise their responsibility within the man-woman relationship and as fathers.

While socially determined ideals of masculinity confer power and influence on men and boys, they also restrict their ability to behave in other ways. Therefore, instead of simply blaming or appealing to individuals, more fundamental measures are required at community level if stereotypes of masculinity, femininity and prejudice and discrimination against sexual minorities are to be questioned and changed. Consciousness-raising measures, such as the generation dialogue set up in a number of countries by German development cooperation in collaboration with local initiatives, are based on the premise that while culturally rooted gender roles cannot be broken down by individual boys or men, girls or women, they are nevertheless subject to constant change, and can, in a context of reflection and dialogue, be resisted and gradually transformed.

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