

The Wye River Call to Action for Global Women's Health

7 June 2005

We have the power to explore the planets and walk the moon. We have the power to coax green from the deserts. We have the power to map the human genome.

Yet in the year 2005, in millions of communities in every corner of the globe, people are suffering because those with political power have failed to meet their most basic responsibilities. That failure is seen in the crisis of local health systems that do not work, that exclude the poor, abuse and marginalize women, sow distrust and feed corruption. The result is societies marked by profound insecurity, by deep and growing inequities, and by the unacceptable toll on the health and well-being of girls and women.

Every minute of every day:

- 5 more women join the 20 million women currently living with HIV/AIDS;
- 190 women conceive an unwanted or unplanned pregnancy;
- one woman dies while giving birth; and
- countless women and girls suffer the health consequences of malnutrition, chronic and communicable diseases that disproportionately affect women, gender-based violence, harmful traditional practices, and war and civil conflict.

As political and civil society leaders, we come together to express our outrage at this carnage and to solidify our commitment to work together for change.

We call for a profound shift in the priorities that shape policies and resource allocations globally, nationally and locally.

We call for universal access to health care:

- Universal coverage of critical health interventions for women and girls requires strong health systems that ensure access, equity, and financial protection.
- Health systems are more than delivery systems for technical interventions. They are core social institutions that lie at the heart of the poverty reduction agenda. They are fundamental building blocks of secure and democratic societies.

We call for systemic changes to build strong health systems:

- Funding of health systems must be increased through predictable, sustained and long-term investments, nationally and globally.
- User fees for primary health care must be abolished, financial barriers to access eliminated, and systems to ensure financial protection implemented.
- Countries, rich and poor, must confront urgently the crisis of human resources: increase training, ensure that mid-level cadres of health workers are expanded and empowered, provide adequate and fair compensation for all health workers, and take measures to stem the exodus of scarce health workers from the public sector.
- Countries must adopt and implement laws, regulations and policies to strengthen health systems, improve women's health, and establish tolerance and respect for women's decisions in all matters pertaining to their health and well being.
- HIV programs and policies must be oriented to the strengthening of health systems and to the uncompromising protection of the health and rights of women and girls.

We call for these priorities to be reflected in poverty reduction and development strategies:

- Political leaders must recognize the critical importance of women's health and empowerment, and of health systems to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and
- Countries must endorse the ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development) target of universal access to reproductive health by 2015 as an additional target to MDG 5.

These commitments are not optional.

Women have a human right to health and to access to health care.

Women are vital to the future development of their countries - as workers, as caregivers for their families, as stewards of the environment, as technological innovators, and as political leaders at all levels.

Women are citizens with the right and responsibility to participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect their lives and to demand accountability from the people and institutions that have the duty to fulfill these rights.

Women are entitled to no less.

Let us work for no less.

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The Wye River Call to Action for Global Women's Health was developed by participants to the "Innovations in Supporting Local Health Systems for Global Women's Health: A Leaders Symposium", Aspen Wye River Conference Center, Maryland, USA, 5th - 7th June 2005.

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