



LET'S GET TALKING ABOUT THE WORLD YWCA AND ICW'S
THIRD KEY CHALLENGE
AT THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S SUMMIT, KENYA 2007

The World YWCA and ICW say
Let's Talk About: 'Gender Inequality'



We will hear these words many times in Nairobi. HIV positive women challenge us to think deeply about them.

Defining gender inequality - Gender inequalities spring from the soil of male dominated societies in which women, to a greater or lesser extent, are seen as second class. Gender inequalities are also interwoven with class, race and religious structures.

- *Male dominated societies are the greatest threat to public health in the world today. (The late Dr Jonathan Mann)*

Gender inequalities range from reactionary notions of women's abilities and their sexual availability to cultural and traditional views of femininity and women's 'proper' roles. From wolf whistles to rape, lack of education to unequal pay, women are paying the price.

HIV positive women, including HIV positive young women, are paying the price many times over. Gender inequality goes hand in hand with HIV-related stigma and violence so HIV positive women face a double dose of discrimination.

- *Our culture makes it difficult to rescue women. They do what the husband or partner says. They are not autonomous. If he says no, then it is no. That's another good reason to empower them, so they can make their own decisions regarding themselves and their families. (ICW member, Mexico)*
- *When the husband dies the relatives of the husband take their things. They have no one to support them in court if they pursue these issues. (ICW member, Tanzania)*
- *When he learns that I went to the health centre for medication, he beats me saying that I am embarrassing him .that I am showing everybody that we are sick. Now I fear going for services. (ICW member, Uganda)*

We must have power, equality, support, collaboration, advocacy skills, influence and our own networks.

- *Being part of the committee and working with other positive women it has made me realise that I am not alone and there are other people like me. I've made friends and I know who to go to if I have a problem. I am no longer shy and locked up in my own worlds and trying to suppress myself and my ideas. It has released that inner person and psychologically I am no longer that stressed and oppressed. (ICW member, Namibia)*
- *Fight until the very end. Do not be led by what your husband says. Don't surrender. No! We have to live. We have to look after ourselves. We have to carry on. Don't stay locked up and still. (ICW member, Panama)*

We want policy makers, health professionals, government bodies, and grass roots organisations to take on the many different meanings of our lives. We want the International Women's Summit on HIV and AIDS to make a genuine and deep attempt to listen to us, learn from us, work with us. Let's get talking.

Talking points:

- How can we change laws and customs that discriminate against women, especially around family law, property rights and inheritance rights?
- How can we change harmful cultural practices such as polygamy, female genital mutilation, widow inheritance and others that affect HIV positive women so acutely?
- Think about our families and communities where male gatekeepers set rules for what women can and can't do. How can we change men's discriminatory and belittling attitudes and practices?
- How can we challenge our own internalised notions of women's inferiority and men's right to rule the roost?

The World YWCA and ICW challenge: Are young HIV positive women being included at every level in all discussions and planning around ending gender inequalities?

To find out more visit our websites: www.icw.org and <http://www.worldywca.info>