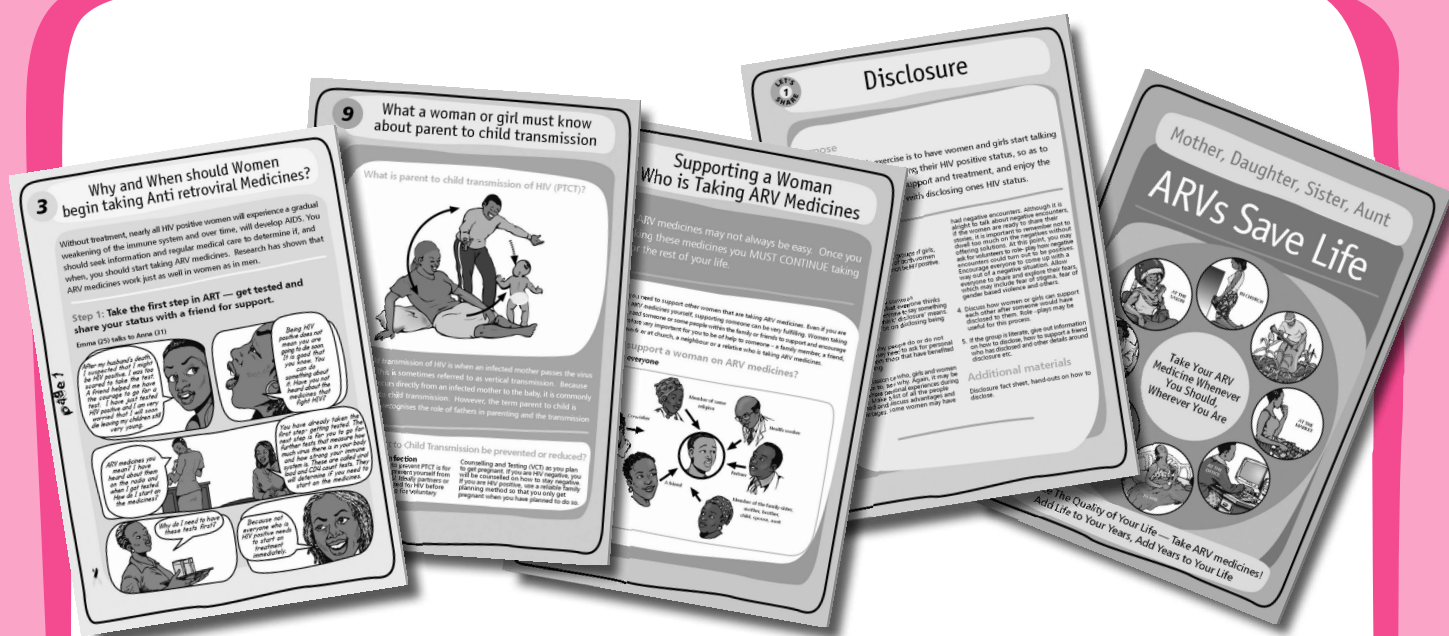


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Foreword

Southern Africa remains by far the most affected region by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, with prevalence rates of as high as 30% in certain countries. Antenatal statistics reveal up to 48% of pregnant women infected with HIV in certain rural areas. Almost 30% of the global number of people living with HIV are residing in southern Africa, where only 2% of the world's total population resides.

Unfortunately, statistics depict negligible declines in HIV prevalence in this region, as feminisation of the epidemic becomes more apparent. On average, there are 13 women living with HIV for every 10 infected men, and this gap continues to widen, with women being infected with HIV at earlier ages than their male counterparts.

Consequently, economic, social, cultural and political status of women is grossly undermined. It therefore becomes imperative that responses in the areas of prevention, care, support, treatment and impact mitigation be aligned primarily from a gender perspective. Mechanisms should be devised to mobilise stakeholders to ensure that women and girls are the main focus of HIV/AIDS interventions. Lack of access to HIV/AIDS related treatment perpetuates stigma and discrimination experienced by HIV positive girls and women in southern African communities. This should not be allowed to go on.

Rolling out ART is not about availing antiretroviral drugs but a complex exercise whose planning should adequately address special treatment concerns of girls and women. They include adherence, women-specific opportunistic infections, effects of treatment, their biological (physical and emotional) lifecycle, post-exposure prophylaxis in view of rampant gender-based violence and PMTCT Plus programmes.

In a bid to strategically address gender inequalities, SAfAIDS, in partnership with American Jewish World Services (AJWS) and ActionAid International, resolved, through this toolkit, to focus on the specific and unique treatment needs of women as a response to the regionally identified gap in basic knowledge levels among women and girls on HIV/AIDS treatment.

This toolkit aims to empower girls and women in communities with accurate and relevant information to enable them to make informed decisions in terms of accessing and demanding their rights to full participation in antiretroviral treatment programmes, fortify their coping mechanisms in adhering to ART, and be able to support their counterparts within the same continuum of care. SAfAIDS promotes the crucial principle of Meaningful Involvement of Women Affected /Infected by HIV/AIDS (MIWA), as an extension of Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV/AIDS (GIPA) and Meaningful Involvement of People Living with HIV/AIDS (MIPA) and is confident that the scale-up of ART programmes in the region will contribute towards mainstreaming MIWA into HIV/AIDS initiatives.

SAfAIDS, AJWS and ActionAid International encourage wide and extensive application and dissemination of this publication within communities, civil society, religious sectors, policy making and legal fraternities, clinical practitioners, private sector and groups of people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA).

The toolkit will be translated into various vernacular languages in southern Africa to ensure wider use. It is hoped that it will motivate other stakeholders to invest in the development of more materials that explore and document specific topical issues on treatment literacy for women in southern Africa.



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Women's Treatment Literacy Toolkit

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