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This year's World AIDS Day shines the spotlight on communities

“Let Communities Lead” is the theme of 2023's World Aids Day celebrated on 1 December.

Each year, on this day, the world commemorates World AIDS Day. People around the world unite to show support for people living with HIV and to remember those who have died from AIDS-related illnesses.

Each World AIDS Day focuses on a specific theme, which this year will be [Let Communities Lead](#). Because change depends not on a moment but on a movement, says [UNAIDS](#), the message “Let Communities Lead” will not only resonate on one day. It is at the core of activities that have been building up since early November, saw the release of the [World AIDS Day Report](#) – entitled Let Communities Lead – in late November, reached a crescendo on World AIDS Day on 1 December, and will continue to echo throughout December and beyond.

This year's theme joins a growing list of challenges about which World AIDS Day raises global awareness. Founded in 1988, World AIDS Day was the first ever international day for global health. Every year, United Nations agencies, governments and civil society join together to campaign around specific themes related to HIV:

- Awareness-raising activities take place around the globe.
- Many people wear a red ribbon, the universal symbol of awareness of, support for and solidarity with people living with HIV.
- People living with HIV make their voice heard on issues important in their lives.
- Groups of people living with HIV and other civil society organizations involved in the AIDS response mobilize in support of the communities they serve and to raise funds.
- Events highlight the current state of the epidemic.

World AIDS Day 2023 – Let Communities Lead

According to [UNAIDS](#), the world can end AIDS with communities leading the way. Organisations of communities living with, at risk of, or affected by HIV are the frontline of progress in the HIV response. Communities connect people with person-centred public health services, build trust, innovate, monitor implementation of policies and services, and hold providers accountable.

However, community leadership is being held back. Funding shortages, policy and regulatory hurdles, capacity constraints, and crackdowns on civil society and on the human rights of marginalised communities, are obstructing the progress of HIV prevention and treatment services. If these obstacles are removed, community-led organisations could add even greater impetus to the global HIV response, advancing progress towards the end of AIDS.

This World AIDS Day is more than a celebration of the achievements of communities; it is a call to action to enable and support communities in their leadership roles. World AIDS Day 2023 highlighted that, to unleash the full potential of community leadership to enable the end of AIDS, we need to do the following:

- Communities' leadership roles need to be made core in all HIV plans and programmes and in their formulation, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. "Nothing about us without us."
- Communities' leadership roles need to be fully and reliably funded to enable the required scale up and be properly supported and remunerated. "Not ending AIDS is more expensive than ending it."
- Barriers to communities' leadership roles need to be removed. An enabling regulatory environment is needed which facilitates communities' roles in provision of HIV services, ensures civil society space, and protects the human rights of all, including of marginalized communities, to advance the global HIV response. "Remove laws that harm, create laws that empower."

Because communities are leading World AIDS Day, across the world they have shaped the events and tailored the detailed calls to their specific needs. Through photos and videos shared by groups on social media and collected by UNAIDS, people have been able to witness the medley of events taking place, been inspired by the determination and hope, and heard communities' calls for action.

Materials prepared by UNAIDS highlight communities' leadership role: the angle has moved from looking

from above people to looking up at them, and is more “face on”. Materials can be tailored by countries and communities to their own context, to reflect the unique set of local circumstances that affect their HIV response.

“The end of AIDS is possible, it is within our grasp” says UNAIDS Executive Director Winnie Byanyima. “To follow the path that ends AIDS, the world needs to let communities lead.”

World AIDS Day remains as relevant today as it’s always been, reminding people and governments that HIV has not gone away. There is still a critical need for increased funding for the AIDS response, to increase awareness of the impact of HIV on people’s lives, to end stigma and discrimination and to improve the quality of life of people living with HIV.

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