

CO-CHAIRS CONFERENCE OUTCOME DOCUMENT

- The EC/UNIFEM international conference ***Fight Against Cervical Cancer*** was held in Brussels 27-28 September 2007, and hosted by the Belgian government.
- The conference was a landmark in the fight against cervical cancer because it brought together for the first time, politicians and policymakers from around the world; industry and regulators; research groups, civil society organisations including women's rights groups.
- Cervical cancer primarily strikes women aged 35-50 years. Annually, 250,000 women die from the disease and 80 percent of these deaths occur in developing countries. This has catastrophic consequences on families and communities, especially in developing countries where women are the backbone of society. This further exacerbates the already damaging effects that HIV/AIDS has on communities where women have multiple responsibilities towards extended families.
- The conference took place at a historic point in time where technologies for preventing cervical cancer and its consequences have become increasingly available. This is due to new vaccines and diagnostic tests that have been developed and have recently come on the market. These new tools have given hope and added impetus to a concerted global drive to prevent cervical cancer. However, vaccines and new diagnostics need to be seen as components of a comprehensive cervical cancer prevention, screening and treatment strategy. This needs to operate within competent health systems that can implement efficient and effective programmes of reproductive health including global strategies of cervical cancer prevention.
- The greatest obstacles to the prevention and treatment of cervical cancer are; poverty; the stigma attached to the disease; the lack of disease awareness and knowledge; the lack of attention to women's health worldwide and the weakness of underfunded health systems.
- With regard to **rolling out comprehensive strategies and new technologies** for preventing cervical cancer, participants identified **cross-cutting principles**, including:

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1. The importance of remaining **context and country/region specific**, particularly with regard to notions of accessibility, and in relation to determining age groups, target groups, **pricing policies** and involvement of men and boys
 2. The need for **comprehensive cervical cancer plans** that incorporate multiple methods and approaches into broader **national strategies for cancer prevention and women's health**.
 3. The added value in **linking with existing and complementary** areas of work, advocacy and public information strategies at country and regional level, such as the focus on condom use in HIV/AIDS campaigns, sexual and reproductive health education initiatives, etc.
 4. The involvement of: **girls** in all aspects of strategy design, roll out and assessment; **women and women's organisations**; and **broad multi-stakeholder partnerships**, including parliamentarians, private sector groups, men and boys, youth groups, health professionals, etc.
 5. Working in partnership and in complementarity with the private **sector** and building public/**private partnerships** which may include the supply and distribution of the new screening tools and vaccines.
- The conference recognised the important role that several strategic meetings, partnerships and coalitions had played over the past 12 months (London region meeting, UNFPA/WHO meeting, the Global Call to Action to Stop Cervical Cancer...etc). This conference was seen as part of this ongoing process, specifically in galvanizing political support and leadership.
 - While convening conferences is important for expanding constituencies and bringing together more advocates, it is also time for **ACTION** and **moving forward** based on what we know. Priorities for action include:
 1. The facilitation of **multi-stakeholder debates at country level** to start developing country specific strategies, building country ownership and approaches towards cervical cancer prevention and treatment.
 2. **Gathering evidence and data**, particularly to answer the remaining questions about the vaccine, to support the creation or strengthening of **cervical cancer registries** in countries in which inadequate data exists about the nature and prevalence of cervical cancer. Providing an economic

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- case (cost-effectiveness studies) to inform the selection of the most suitable strategy/ies for fighting cervical cancer.
3. **Educating multiple stakeholders**, to clarify misperceptions and build knowledge, particularly: boys/men; girls/women; health professionals and educators, relevant national ministries; local, traditional and new media
 4. **Capacity development** related to available methods of screening, diagnosis and treatment of cervical cancer.
 5. **Advocacy in strategic places**, using all available opportunities to link cervical cancer information to key events and networks, such as the ACP/EU Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentarians Network on Reproductive Health; MDGs and aid effectiveness processes; Commission on the Status of Women, NGO networks etc.
 6. **WHO to provide normative guidance** on new cervical cancer prevention and screening technologies
- The discussions and presentations during the conference identified several **key questions** that need further debate and exploration, including:
 - The extent to which we link cervical cancer/HPV with discussions on STIs and public education to raise awareness about STIs
 - The extent to which cervical cancer prevention strategies will also be a good entry point for accelerating attention to and progress on women's human rights and control over their own bodies
 - The participation of diverse stakeholders at this conference led to some creative and **innovative ideas** that merit further exploration. These include:
 - The possibility of combining **vaccination of daughters with screening for mothers** as a health strategy
 - Exploring **local production of HPV vaccines and screening technologies**
 - The conference concluded on a positive note when many of the **participants made pledges, describing the concrete actions** that they would take in their respective countries and/or organisations, to mobilise support and drive the agenda to fight cervical cancer forward.

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