

**Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-third session
New York, 2 – 13 March 2009**

INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

Capacity-building for mainstreaming a gender perspective into national policies and programmes to support the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS

**Written statement*
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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

The theme of this panel—equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS—involves efforts in primarily three areas. First, to recognize the value of un-paid labor of domestic and care-giving work and reflect the value in the national economic indicators, laws and policies; second, to introduce labor and social security policies to re-organize the current unequal division of labor, both paid and un-paid, between women and men, and to reduce the disadvantages women face; and third, to eliminate gender role stereotyping which perpetuate the unequal sharing of responsibilities. In my presentation, I will also highlight achievements as well as gaps and challenges, especially from my region, which is Asia.

Before I get into these points, however, I would like to emphasize the importance of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in addressing the theme of equal sharing of responsibilities.

CEDAW AS A LEGALLY-BINDING INSTRUMENT TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUAL SHARING OF RESPONSIBILITIES

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), now ratified by 185 countries, obligates the States parties to take measures for gender equality in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. The CEDAW Convention is a comprehensive, legally-binding international instrument which provides the standards and guidelines for States parties in development, implementation and evaluation of legislative and other measures to eliminate discrimination, both direct and indirect, and bring about equality between women and men. Universal ratification of the Convention and its Optional Protocol, withdrawal of reservations if any, and full implementation of the Convention by each State party at the national level are the goals of the global community.

In CEDAW, maternity is understood, not as a matter of concern for individuals or each family only, but “as a social function” (Article 5 (b)). Hence, the States parties are required to “provide the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of child-care facilities”(Article 11 (c)). At the same time, the Convention nullifies child and forced marriages (Article 16), which violate them and put severe limitations and restrictions to their life chances and realization of their potentials. The Convention also acknowledges the “significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy” (Article 14.1).

The provisions of the CEDAW make it clear that “upbringing of children is the common responsibility of both men and women” (article 5 (b)) and that women and men have “the same rights and responsibilities as parents” in marriage and family relations. (article 16. (d)) Also, under the CEDAW, the States parties have the obligation to eliminate prejudices and customs which are based on stereotyped roles for women and men, as stated in

articles 2 (f), 5 (a) and 10 (c). The CEDAW Convention and its Optional Protocol, read together with 26 general recommendations issued by the CEDAW Committee, provide the basic frame for policies and programmes to support the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men.

RECOGNIZING THE VALUE OF DOMESTIC AND CARE-GIVING WORK

In addressing the unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, the first issue is to socially recognize the value of un-paid domestic and care-giving work, and to reflect the recognized value in the national economic indicators, laws and policies. It is necessary for policy makers and the society in general to recognize that the domestic and caring work is essential for the maintenance and reproduction of the current and next generations of labor force.

In a capitalist system, unless paid with money, work is not given proper worth and treatment it deserves. The domestic and caring-work at home, as long as not-paid, is not considered as “work.” As parts of the domestic and care-giving work become increasingly commercialized, such as hiring professional cleaning service, maid or private nurse, it is now easier to understand its value. The macro economic figures such as GDP, however, do not include the value of un-paid domestic and caring work. To fully recognize the value of women’s (and men’s) reproductive labor, estimates of unpaid domestic and care-giving work should be calculated and presented.

Even if the current economic indicators do not directly reflect the money value of domestic and caring work, there are still some indirect ways to incorporate the value of these works into laws and policies. For example, similar to men’s service in the army, period of maternal leave is counted as work period; or compensation for a woman injured in a traffic accident would reflect how her contribution as a worker or a housewife is calculated, or the system of property registration and a woman’s share at the time of divorce would reflect how the society values and acknowledges the un-paid domestic and care-giving work.

LABOR AND SOCIAL SECURITY POLICIES SUPPORTING EQUAL SHARING

Equal sharing of responsibilities is not possible without gender equality in the labor market. At the same time, gender equality in the labor market cannot be achieved without equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. Woman’s primary role as care-taker and home-maker, perceived or practiced, provides excuses for gender discrimination in employment. A woman is excluded from employment, discouraged to leave the job early or relegated to insecure or low-paying job, since “she is considered to have a breadwinner.” Other forms of discrimination are: fewer opportunities for training or promotion, sexual harassment, dismissal or disadvantages due to pregnancy or childbirth, etc. The labor market is segregated by sex, both horizontally and vertically, that women are concentrated in certain categories of occupation and located at the low-paying jobs at the bottom of the pyramid.

The most urgently needed policies are how to re-organize the workplace so that women can reduce the burden of domestic and caring work while men can share the responsibilities. A more flexible work system, which men also can use without being penalized in their career path, is needed. At the same time, adequate facilities and financial assistance for child-care, disabled and the aged, should be provided to the needy households.

More fundamentally, without eliminating various forms of gender discrimination in the labor market, women would continue to bear the domestic responsibilities alone. For example, due to wage gap it is usually the mother, not the father, who takes the parental leave. That is why policies on paternity leave, reserved exclusively for fathers and non-transferrable, are needed to induce participation by men.

GENDER STEREOTYPES AND THE UNEQUAL SHARING

Gender role stereotyping is the most important underlying cause of unequal sharing of responsibilities between men and women. Gender stereotypes are based on perceptions of women as homemakers and care-givers, and men as providers and workers.

Gender role stereotypes have several characteristics. Firstly, gender stereotypes are prevalent in all societies, whether in developed or developing countries, although with different levels of social support system. Secondly, stereotypes apply to all women—regardless of their marital or economic status. Women who do not marry or have no child are not exempt from stereotypes. Thirdly, gender stereotypes and the subsequent unequal sharing of responsibilities result in inequalities in all areas of women's lives such as in education, employment, political and public decision-making, health, sports and violence. Lastly, gender stereotypes prescribe not only different roles and responsibilities to women and men in the family and society, but also bestow different values on women and men. In many societies, women are less valued, viewed as sex objects and violence against women are widely accepted. In some societies, this leads to strong boy preference and illegal sex-selective abortions, resulting in high adverse sex-ratio.

Stereotyping is created and transmitted from generations to generations through the process of socialization in various institutions—upbringing in the family, education in schools, learning from peers, portrayals in the media, teachings in religious institutions, trainings in the army, etc. How to intervene and create changes in this process is the key. Laws and policies to prohibit negative stereotypes and to encourage equal sharing should be developed, as well as awareness-raising campaigns targeted towards the key groups of people in the socialization process, such as parents, teachers, media producers, religious and community leaders and influential celebrities. Awareness-raising campaigns targeted towards discriminatory old sayings and proverbs and changing them into positive ones can be a strategy. The strong women's movements in Korea changed an old saying, "When a hen cries (meaning an assertive woman), her family goes down," into a new, positive one, "When a hen cries, she lays an egg."

SYSTEMATIC DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH

Discussions on today's priority theme require data, disaggregated by sex, age, region and other categories. Women's un-paid family labor or engagement in informal work is invisible and often not included in economic participation rate. Time-use surveys are necessary to find out how much time women and men spend on paid and un-paid work, on domestic and care-giving work for children, disabled, aged and the sick members of the family. Along with time-use survey, the needs, values and aspirations of each household in different stages of their life cycle in terms of balancing work and family should also be researched. Data from these researches and surveys would provide the basis on which effective policies or programmes are to be developed. Such data collection should be carried out regularly and systematically, so that the effectiveness of policies and programmes can be evaluated and revised as needed.

ACHIEVEMENTS

During the 14 years since the Beijing Conference and 30 years since the adoption of CEDAW, gender equality became a normative goal. In most countries, there is a constitutional or legal basis for pursuing gender equality. National machinery on women was established, although at different levels of government hierarchy and with varying degrees of power and resources. Gender mainstreaming was adopted as a strategy. A national plan of action has been developed in most countries, and in some countries, the plan included as one of the focus areas gender-equal family policies or work-family balance for men and women. In general, however, compared to issues such as economic empowerment of women, equal political representation, or violence against women, less attention is paid to equal sharing of responsibilities in Asia.

Recognition of Women's Un-Paid Work

In Asia, only a few countries conduct national time-use surveys at regular intervals (Republic of Korea and Japan for example) or designed a national survey (Philippines) or conducted a pilot survey in several states (India). There are studies on valuation of women's unpaid work and estimation of its economic contributions, but no incorporation into the national economic indicators. The Secretary-General's report on violence against women in 2006, published as a book, "From Words to Action," contains calculation of social costs of violence against women in a country and shows the social importance of the issue. Likewise, it would be useful to calculate the contribution of women's un-paid domestic and care-giving work to a national economy.

Family-Friendly Policies and Men's Participation

In Asia, measures to support the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men are mainly geared towards expanding social insurance coverage for maternity protection and family care. In particular, countries with low fertility rates, such as Japan, Singapore and the Republic of Korea, adopted new laws and policies to expand child care and family care leaves, as well as higher levels of maternity protection and new elderly-care program paid from social security. These expanded care leaves apply to both men and women. However, men's participation does not increase much due to men's higher income and strong gender role stereotypes. Project ERPAT (Empowerment and Reaffirmation of Parental Responsibilities) in the Philippines trained several hundreds of father-volunteers and leaders on parenting and proper childrearing. India introduced 15-day paternity leave. The effects of these policies are not known yet.

Elimination of Gender Stereotypes

Efforts to eliminate gender stereotypes are found mostly in three areas—school education, in media and public awareness-raising. Most Asian countries have policies to review and revise school textbooks and to provide same curricula to both male and female students. Teacher training programs and career guidelines for non-traditional jobs are also accompanied. Regarding media, many Asian countries have laws against obscenity to control its misuse against women and adopted policies to encourage positive portrayal of women.

An example of systematic and long-term awareness-raising comes from the Republic of Korea. It has established, under the Ministry of Gender Equality, an institution which provides year-round educational programs for different groups of people including government officials, media personnel, teachers and NGO leaders. Japan distributed to every family with a child a Handbook of Education in the Home and to companies, training program in videos to raise awareness on gender role stereotypes at workplace. Japan also takes regular public opinion polls on gender equality and gender roles. In Singapore, a couple of men's groups were formed to take responsibility in childrearing, as well as involvement in the White-Ribbon Campaign against violence against women. Thai men also participated in the White-Ribbon Campaign.

Award-giving is frequently used in many countries to encourage gender-equal families, couples, newly-weds or TV programs. Corporations with gender equality policies are also praised with social recognition. The national governments give awards to local governments which took the lead in gender mainstreaming for gender equality.

GAPS AND CHALLENGES

The national census on economic activities does not correctly reflect women's work and their contribution to the national economy. The issue of work-family balance or equal

sharing of responsibilities is still a women's issue, or at most, issue of the women's ministry, not a national agenda. Care-giving work, whether paid or un-paid, is still considered a women's job throughout the Asian region.

Comprehensive, Coordinated and Continued Efforts

Changing unequal sharing of responsibilities between men and women requires continued and concerted efforts, which would take time and money. National Policies, programmes and campaigns should be comprehensive, coordinated and continued. Comprehensive efforts would involve all ministries, government agencies and the civil society including NGOs. The national machinery on women would require adequate resources and power to coordinate with other ministries, such as education, culture, rural development, information, statistics and finance. Sporadic programmes would not bring significant results in changing the unequal sharing of responsibilities. Also, programs to reach out to ethnic minorities or other groups with strong stereotypes require additional efforts such as publication materials and services in their languages.

Effective Monitoring and Impact Assessment

National policies and programs are developed and implemented, but often times effective monitoring and evaluations are not existent, serious enough or systematically conducted. Effective monitoring and correct assessment of whether the policies and programs were implemented as planned and brought the expected impact and changes are essential so that and the measures can be subsequently adjusted and re-tried. Monitoring and impact assessment should be carried out in a way to create the interests of people and involve various groups of people.

Budget Allocation and Gender-Sensitive Budgeting

All efforts to advance the status of women and promote gender equality need budget. Budget allocation is the expression of political will. Elimination of unequal sharing of responsibilities needs continued efforts of long term plans and hence stable budget covering longer periods of time. In many developing countries, many programs depend on outside funding, which is insecure and unstable. A sizable budget should come from the general budget of the State, while outside funding should be offered in a more stable and foreseeable manner. In addition, all the ministries and government agencies need to adopt gender-sensitive budgeting. India is a good example with its Women Component Plan which set a policy for all ministries to spend 30% of the budget for women.

Lack of Data or Study

There is a great deficiency in statistics and data collection on women's work. Systematic study is lacking. Often times, women's work, both paid and un-paid, are not correctly reflected in the census or survey on national economic activities. In many countries in Asia, time-use surveys are not conducted, nor are people's perceptions and values monitored on domestic and care-giving work as well as changing perceptions over time. National machinery on women is encouraged to conduct time-use surveys, either on its own or by working closely with the office in charge of statistics. The surveys should be conducted regularly and systematically so that any changes over time in women's and men's participation in paid and un-paid work can be detected and analyzed.

Involvement of Men and Boys

Equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men requires the understanding and participation of men and boys, as well as supportive policies. In particular, providing opportunities for boys to learn and participate in the domestic and caring work in various institutions of socialization, such as at home, at school, at summer camps, church activities, etc., would bring changes in their perceptions and behaviors on gender role stereotypes. Social encouragement and recognition, rather than teasing and stigmatizing, of men's and boys' sharing of responsibilities would create a favorable atmosphere to increase their participation. In terms of social policies, non-transferrable paternity leave and other items of leave for the family provided for male employees would be helpful.

Economic Crisis and Equal Sharing: Opportunities Forward or Setbacks?

Experiences during the financial crisis in Asia in late 1990s show that achievements were eroded by massive lay-offs of women workers and revival of patriarchal ideology including strengthened gender role stereotyping. The current global economic crisis, much wider and deeper than the Asian financial crisis a decade ago, might bring similar or worse negative impacts upon women's lives. Special attention and programs are required to prevent the negative impacts and create new chances to promote gender equality, including men's participation in sharing responsibilities in domestic and care-giving work.