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United Nations
Division for the Advancement of Women
Expert Group Meeting on “Equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS”
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AIDE MEMOIRE

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I. Introduction

1. In accordance with its multi-year programme of work for 2007-2009, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will consider ‘The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/ AIDS’ as its priority theme during its fifty-third session from 2 to 13 March 2009. In order to contribute to a further understanding of the issue and to assist the Commission in its deliberations, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) will convene an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on this topic from 6 – 9 October 2008 in Geneva, Switzerland.

II. Conceptual Framework for the Expert Group Meeting

A. Background

2. Commitments on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/ AIDS have been made by Governments at the international level, including at the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), the World Summit for Social Development (1995), and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000), as well as in the outcomes of sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women since 1996. International human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), also recognize the obligations that State parties have to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men.
3. In 1994, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo¹ noted that the full participation and partnership of both women and men is required in productive and reproductive life, including shared responsibilities for the care and nurturing of children and maintenance of the household.² States were encouraged to make it possible, through laws, regulations and other appropriate measures, for women to combine the roles of child-bearing, breast-feeding and child-rearing with participation in the workforce.³ Countries were also encouraged to design family health and other development interventions to take better account of the demands on women’s time from the responsibilities of child-rearing, household work and income-generating activities.

¹ A/CONF.171/13.

² Programme of Action, paragraph 4.1.

³ Ibid, paragraph 4.4.(g) and (d).

4. The Cairo Programme of Action noted that male responsibilities should be emphasized with respect to child-rearing and housework and that greater investments should be made in appropriate measures to lessen the daily burden of domestic responsibilities, the greatest share of which falls on women.⁴ Countries were urged to enact laws and to implement programmes and policies which will enable employees of both sexes to organize their family and work responsibilities through flexible work-hours, parental leave, day-care facilities, maternity leave, policies that enable working mothers to breast-feed their children, health insurance and other such measures. The Programme of Action recommended that similar rights should be ensured to those working in the informal sector.⁵ The equal participation of women and men in all areas of family and household responsibilities, including family planning, child-rearing and housework, should be promoted and encouraged by Governments.⁶
5. Commitments made by countries at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, included the promotion of equal partnership between women and men in family and community life and society, the shared responsibility of men and women in the care of children and support for older family members; and men's shared responsibility and active involvement in responsible parenthood and sexual and reproductive behaviour. Governments committed to develop means of recognizing and making visible the full extent of the work of women and their contributions to the national economy, including in the unremunerated and domestic sectors.⁷
6. The Beijing Declaration emphasized that the equal sharing of responsibilities and a harmonious partnership between women and men were critical to their well-being and that of their families as well as to the consolidation of democracy.⁸ In the Beijing Platform for Action the issue of unequal division of labour and responsibilities were addressed within the context of the critical areas of concern on women and poverty, education and training, health, the economy, and power and decision-making. It was noted that women bear a disproportionate burden, attempting to manage household consumption and production under conditions of increasing scarcity because of the gender division of labour and household responsibilities. Girls and young women are expected to manage both educational and domestic responsibilities, often resulting in poor scholastic performance and early drop-out from the educational system. Lack of access to productive resources and inadequate sharing of family responsibilities, combined with a lack of or insufficient services such as child care, continue to restrict employment, economic, professional and other opportunities and mobility for women; women's unremunerated (unpaid) work is undervalued and under-recorded; and the unequal division of labour and responsibilities within households limits women's potential to find the time and develop the skills required for participation in decision-making in wider public forums.

⁴ Ibid, paragraph 4.11.

⁵ Ibid, paragraph. 4.13.

⁶ Ibid, paragraph 4.26.

⁷ A/CONF.166/9, World Summit for Social Development, 1995, Commitment 5 (g) and (n).

⁸ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II. Beijing Declaration, paragraph 15.

7. The Platform noted that a more equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men not only provides a better quality of life for women and their daughters but also enhances their opportunities to shape and design public policy, practice and expenditure so that their interests may be recognized and addressed.⁹ The Platform called on Governments to ensure opportunities for women and men to take job-protected parental leave and to have parental benefits; to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women, including through appropriate legislation, incentives and/or encouragement, and also to promote the facilitation of breast-feeding for working mothers.¹⁰
8. The outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly¹¹ also noted that failure to recognize and measure in quantitative terms unremunerated work of women, which is often not valued in national accounts, has meant that women's full contribution to social and economic development remains underestimated and undervalued. As long as there is insufficient sharing of tasks and responsibilities with men, the combination of remunerated work and care-giving will lead to the continued disproportionate burden for women in comparison to men. Governments were called on to design, implement and promote family friendly policies and services, including affordable, accessible and quality care services for children and other dependants, parental and other leave schemes and campaigns to sensitize public opinion and other relevant actors on equal sharing of employment and family responsibilities between women and men.¹²
9. Agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women since 1996 have addressed the issue of the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. The 1996 agreed conclusions on child and dependant care, including sharing of work and family responsibilities highlighted that greater participation of men in family responsibilities, including domestic work and child and dependent care, would contribute to the welfare of children, women and men themselves.¹³ The 2004 agreed conclusions on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality recognized that joint partnership between women and girls and men and boys was essential to achieving gender equality and called for the creation and improvement of training and education programmes to enhance awareness and knowledge among men and women on their roles as parents, legal guardians and caregivers and the importance of sharing family responsibilities.¹⁴
10. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) also recognize the obligations that State parties have to promote the equal sharing of responsibility between women and men. Article 5 (a) of CEDAW, in particular, notes the need for appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to

⁹ Ibid, paragraph 185.

¹⁰ Ibid, paragraph 179(c).

¹¹ General Assembly resolution S-23/3, paragraph 47.

¹² Ibid, paragraph 81(d).

¹³ E/1996/26

¹⁴ E/2004/11, paragraphs 3 and 6 9 (c)

eliminating prejudices and practices which are based on the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women. Under article 18 of the CRC, States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. ILO Convention No. 156 (1981) addresses the situation of Workers with Family Responsibilities.

11. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has implications for the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, particularly in the area of care-giving. The Beijing Platform for Action recognized the consequences of HIV/AIDS for women's role as mothers and caregivers and their contribution to the economic support of their families.¹⁵ Governments were called on to support and strengthen national capacity to create and improve gender-sensitive policies and programmes on HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, including the provision of resources and facilities to women who find themselves the principal caregivers or economic support for those infected with HIV/AIDS or affected by the pandemic, and the survivors, particularly children and older persons.¹⁶ The 2007 resolution of the Commission on the Status of Women on 'Women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS', expressed concern that women and girls bear the disproportionate burden to care for and support those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS¹⁷ and encouraged Governments to increase the provision of resources and facilities to women who find themselves having to provide care and/or economic support for those infected with HIV/AIDS or affected by the pandemic.¹⁸
12. The agreed conclusions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, adopted by the Commission in 2007, urged Governments to identify and address the needs of girls heading households, including in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, for protection, access to financial resources, and access to health care and support services, including affordable HIV/AIDS treatment. Measures should be taken to increase men's responsibility for home-based care in order to address the disproportionate burden borne by women and girls in caring for the chronically ill.¹⁹

B. Issues to be addressed

13. The Expert Group Meeting (EGM) will examine the issue of equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS. For purposes of the discussion, the word 'responsibilities' will be used to cover a wide range of activities at the household and community levels. Women and men are assigned different and unequal responsibilities with different and unequal access to the

¹⁵ Beijing Platform, paragraph 98

¹⁶ Ibid, paragraph 108 (g)

¹⁷ 51/1, paragraph 3

¹⁸ 51/1, paragraph 31

¹⁹ Agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, paragraph 14.5(e).

necessary resources to decision-making opportunities to carry out these responsibilities. Women in many societies assume the major tasks at the household level, which in turn, restricts their ability to participate in the workforce and the public sphere. The unpaid care-giving by women and men is very often based on relations of kinship and family, but also takes place through other relations and institutions, such as markets (e.g. domestic workers, nurses, preschool education teachers) and the voluntary/not-for-profit sector (e.g. home-based care networks).

14. The EGM will explore the causes of unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in the public and private spheres, such as gender roles, stereotypes and the socialization process, and identify the consequences of unequal sharing of responsibilities on the structure of the labour market, governance and decision-making at all levels. It will explore ways to address these consequences and propose policy responses to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in the public and private spheres.

Gender stereotypes and unequal power relations

15. Parental and societal expectations for girls and boys define socialization processes. Stereotypical gender roles perpetuate unequal power relations between women and men resulting in unequal access to rights and privileges and discrimination against women. In many societies, men exercise power and control over women, including their productive and reproductive work and their access to resources and decision-making.
16. The persistence of patriarchy and deep-rooted stereotypes has led to unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in both private and public life. Socially constructed gender roles are entrenched in social and cultural norms, institutionalized in the law, political structures and social and economic policies, and embedded in local and global economies. Discrimination against women is perpetuated in societies where women cannot exercise their rights. Gender roles take different manifestations in specific cultural, geographic and political settings. Violence against women is one serious consequence of systemic gender inequality and women's subordination.
17. The gender-based division of labour between women and men, including in relation to reproductive and productive roles, however, is not static. Changes in gender roles and responsibilities can be witnessed by the achievements in women's legal status, their access to the labour market and their greater political participation.

The unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men at household level

18. Stereotypes, lack of access to resources, unequal division of labour and hierarchies within households compel women and girls to assume a disproportionate share of responsibilities in the household, including cleaning, cooking, care of persons, including the young, elderly and the sick. In many developing countries, this also includes collecting water and firewood, food crop production and raising livestock.

19. Women's unequal control in reproductive decision-making regarding the number, timing and spacing of children exacerbates their domestic and care-giving tasks, and continues to negatively affect their health and restrict their access to education, employment and their ability to participate in other areas. Women do not have equal decision-making power regarding the use of household and community resources, including financial resources. The absence of affordable and accessible care facilities combined with the pervasiveness of gender wage gaps create structures where men take on paid work while women are seen as responsible for unpaid care-giving work. The presence of children increases men's allocation to paid work and women's allocation to unpaid care work. As a consequence, men's limited involvement in family/household matters facilitates their dominant role in the public sphere.
20. Equal sharing of responsibilities can result in tangible benefits for both women and men: a better work/life balance; better human relations, especially with partners and with children; better mental health and psychological well-being; social inclusion and the ability to share in more flexible employment arrangements and decision-making at different levels.²⁰
21. Society does not adequately recognize the economic value of women's unpaid work, which continues to undermine the recognition of women's role in social development and their contribution to economic growth, including the reproduction of the work force. As a result of the general invisibility of unpaid work in the national income accounting systems, there is an assumption, including among policy makers, that the supply of women's labour is unconstrained and flexible. Economic and political processes are organized around the availability of women to assume household productive and reproductive functions. Efforts undertaken to record the sharing of unpaid work, including through time-use surveys, can provide data and analysis necessary for developing policies to address the imbalance in sharing of responsibilities.
22. The provision of care, whether unpaid or paid, and in both formal and informal contexts, tends to be disproportionately undertaken by women and girls. As women increasingly enter the labour market, in both the informal or formal sector, their unpaid work in the household is taken on by other women, who often come from disadvantaged groups (including migrant women), typically earn low wages with little or no social protection, or by unpaid family or community members. These arrangements do not challenge the status quo – that is, men's lack of involvement in care responsibilities – and do not lead to restructuring of division of responsibilities.

The unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in the public sphere

23. As a consequence of unequal power relations and gender roles, the public sphere in general, and the workplace in particular are based on male models of work and public

²⁰ R. W. Connell, *Report of the on-line discussion on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality*, p 12 (EGM/Men-Boys-GE/2003/WP.27 October 2003). Available on the web at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/documents.html>

involvement, where men are presumed to be the “breadwinners” and it is assumed that women will take the prime or sole responsibility for activities at the household level. As a consequence, in many parts of the world, insufficient provision of social services, such as child and elder care, continue to restrict employment, limit economic, professional and other opportunities, and constrain mobility for women.

24. The unequal division of labour and responsibilities within households also limits women's potential to find time and develop skills required for participation in wider public forums and governance processes. As a result, women have limited opportunity to influence the development of policies and strategies, the allocation of resources and the provision of services, in areas that directly affect their lives. When women organize and participate in local and national governance structures, including at decision-making level, their voice and influence in policy development can have a direct impact on their lives, including, for example, through access to adequate and affordable public transport, and improved availability and location of health facilities and schools.

Equal sharing of care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS

25. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has further compounded the regular care-giving responsibilities of women and girls as responsibilities for care of people (women and men) living with HIV/AIDS and for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS fall disproportionately on them.²¹ Profound effects are felt across generations, and girls drop out of school to care for sick parents or for younger siblings. Older women often take on the care of ailing adult children and later, when they die, care for the orphaned children. Older women caring for orphans and sick children may be isolated socially because of AIDS-related stigma and discrimination. The extra responsibilities for care and support taken on by women also have enormous implications for their own health and well-being, and for the communities in which they reside. The cost of medication and treatment impacts household resources and the ability to cover other needs, such as the education of girls. Men often play an insufficient role in caring and providing support for those infected by HIV/AIDS.

Legislative and policy responses to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in all areas

26. Since women’s unpaid care work is one of the most persistent barriers to gender equality, governments have a responsibility to address this issue in all policy initiatives. A range of public initiatives designed to increase equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in public and private life have been adopted in countries around the world. These include adopting and implementing gender-sensitive labour laws; family-friendly or flexible employment policies; providing public services (such as child care and elder care institutions) and developing systems of financial support such as allowances and pensions. Many such policies have, however, been directly targeted at women, thus potentially reinforcing the unequal sharing of responsibilities and care work. Even in countries which provide parental leave for both women and men, and where considerable

²¹ UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM. 2004. “Caregiving” in *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*. New York.

efforts have been made to encourage men to share family responsibilities with women, progress has been slow. Broader public policy interventions have been undertaken to support men's and women's equal roles and responsibilities in the public and private spheres, including those designed to improve social infrastructure, such as the availability of education and health institutions, and physical infrastructure projects to reduce time burdens, public transportation and access to energy sources and water. Awareness-raising campaigns and education programmes as well as anti-discrimination legislation are also essential for the eradication of discriminatory stereotypes and ensuring the equal distribution of responsibilities between women and men.

III. Objectives of the Expert Group Meeting

27. The overall objective of the EGM is to facilitate an exchange between experts on strategies for the promotion of the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. Experiences gained, lessons learned and good practices will be highlighted and concrete recommendations developed. The outcome of the EGM will assist the 53rd session of Commission on the Status of Women in formulating policy recommendations on equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including in the context of HIV/ AIDS.
28. The meeting will:
 - identify the causes and consequences of the unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men; and
 - explore and provide good practice examples of possible policy responses.

IV. Profile of the participants

29. The EGM will be attended by 10 to 12 experts appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In selecting the experts, the criteria of geographical balance and, to the extent possible, gender balance, will be taken into consideration. Experts will include academics and practitioners from relevant fields, in accordance with the objectives identified above. The United Nations will provide travel and daily subsistence allowance to appointed experts.
30. Observers from Governments, the United Nations, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and academia attend the EGM at their own expense.

V. Documentation

31. The documentation for the meeting will include: a background paper, commissioned by the Division for the Advancement of Women, outlining the major issues to be discussed; expert papers on specific issues. Papers prepared by observers are made available at the meeting.

VI. Organization

32. The EGM will be organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in Geneva from 6-9 October 2008.
33. The EGM will be conducted in English and all documentation will be in English. The EGM will meet in plenary and in working groups. In an opening plenary meeting, presentations by the experts will create a conceptual framework for discussions. The plenary will be followed by in-depth discussion of specific issues in working groups and drafting of the report.

VII. Expected Outcome

34. The report of the EGM will be adopted by the experts on the final day of the meeting and will contain a summary of the discussion and recommendations. The report will be distributed at the 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women and will be made available on the website of the Division for the Advancement of Women. The findings will also be presented at the interactive expert panel during the 53rd session of the Commission.

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