

United Nations  
Division for the Advancement of Women  
Expert Group Meeting on "The Equal Sharing of Responsibilities Between Women and Men,  
Including Care Giving in the Context of HIV/AIDS"  
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**Discussion Paper  
Submitted by the**

**The NGO Committee on UNICEF: Working Group on Girls\***

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*\*The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.*

We, Non-Governmental Organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC and members of the NGO Committee on UNICEF: Working Group on Girls, reaffirm and call attention to the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of the girl child. We acknowledge the important step taken in Section L of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) in emphasizing the girl child,<sup>1</sup> as well as the international legal architecture for girls, mainly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which mutually reinforce the principals of gender equality.<sup>2</sup> We are also encouraged by the commitments reaffirmed at the 2002 General Assembly Special Session on A World Fit for Children<sup>3</sup> and the 2005 World Summit, where Member States agreed to adopt comprehensive national strategies to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the end of 2015. We are concerned, however, that after more than a decade of policies, promises and programs the girl child remains powerless, invisible and neglected throughout her life-cycle. She is repeatedly denied her political, economic, social and cultural rights and is routinely subjected to cultural and legally sanctioned behaviors that hinder her development and empowerment, especially if she is a member of various disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

The 2009 Expert Group Meeting with a focus on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS, offers a unique opportunity to strengthen the implementation of the Agreed Conclusions adopted by the two previous sessions of the CSW.<sup>4</sup> We are particularly concerned with how gender based inequality places an unequal burden on girls with respect to responsibility-sharing and how this burden increases in an HIV/AIDS context, and are pleased to have this opportunity to offer some of our observations to the Expert Group for consideration and discussion.

### **1. Gender Inequality and the Girl Child: The Role of Cultural Norms, Gender Roles and Gender Stereotypes**

Cultural norms, gender roles, and gender stereotypes are at the root of gender inequality. As a result of cultural traditions and social norms that perpetuate stereotypic attitudes and discrimination toward women and girls, gender inequality and discrimination continues to be pervasive.<sup>5</sup> A substantial body of research has shown that: (a) gender role development is socially constructed and learned from birth;<sup>6</sup> (b) prevailing gender-specific attributes and socialization have a deleterious influence on child development whereby young girls and boys are forced into strict gender roles;<sup>7</sup> and (c) prevailing gender stereotypes and less valued social roles associated with the more marginalized status of women relative to men continues to heighten the vulnerability of the girl child.<sup>8</sup> Research has also demonstrated the profound influences exerted by race, socioeconomic status, rural/urban residence, migrant/refugee status, etc. on the inequalities experienced by girls and women.<sup>9</sup>

Our present global reality continues to be characterized by severe and pervasive violence and danger to the lives and well being of girls on all continents. The girl child continues to experience many of the worst human rights abuses. She is too often denied her right to food, health, education and the freedom to choose her life partner and her life's work. She is repeatedly denied her political, economic, social and cultural rights and subjected to cultural and legally sanctioned behaviors that hinder her development and empowerment. As a result, girls, particularly those in disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, are less able to participate fully in

society, especially in terms of decision making. They also have fewer resources and opportunities. Young girls remain particularly vulnerable as a result of gender development processes that marginalize them from job opportunities (for example, the existing gendered division of labour and associated attributes, that relegate women, especially those from disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, to the unpaid care economy and men to the productive public sphere).<sup>10</sup>

Cultural norms, social roles, and the gender stereotypes associated with them also determine household roles for women and men and girls and boys and as a result, girls and women bear a disproportionate share of household responsibilities. The consequences for the girl child include: (a) less access to resources and income generating activities and opportunities; (b) lower income; (c) limited involvement in the public sphere; and (d) lack of education to prepare them for work and responsibilities in the public sphere. For example, in many parts of the world, educating girls is still viewed as a wasted investment.<sup>11</sup> Females are less likely than their male peers to be able to read and write or to be enrolled in primary and secondary school. Furthermore, even when they go to school, discriminatory attitudes prevail. School curricula, policies and programs too often reinforce existing social roles and gender stereotypes and in too many instances girls are still subjected to harassment and abuse by classmates and teachers.<sup>12</sup>

## **2. Gender Inequality and the Girl Child in the Context of HIV/AIDS**

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has compounded the care giving responsibilities of women and girls. Girls and women provide the majority of care when families and individuals are affected by HIV/AIDS and in many cases, older daughters assume the full responsibility for the household. The disproportionate share of the burden imposed on women and girls was recognized by the CSW.<sup>13</sup> 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. The unequal sharing of responsibilities when families are affected by HIV/AIDS has implications for the full participation of girls in decision-making in all areas, limiting their potential to find the time and develop the skills needed for their full participation. In addition, research on the “*parentified child*” – children under the age of 18 who provide care for a family member – indicates that they are at increased risk for adverse health and developmental outcomes and do so at the expense of their own developmentally appropriate needs and pursuits.<sup>14</sup>

In some cases, these girl child care givers also suffer from HIV/AIDS. The practice of having sex with a virgin to “*cure*” HIV still exists and girl children are all too often unable to protect themselves from unwanted sexual activity. They are also vulnerable due to early marriage to much older men and the transmission of the disease from their mother. This tragedy is compounded by the lack of medical care and access to HIV/AIDS drugs by the most marginalized of the sufferers.

The social stigma of HIV/AIDS further magnifies low status for women and girls compromising their ability to fulfill their traditional responsibilities. All too often, community members fear people with HIV/AIDS and impose a social stigma.<sup>15</sup> This stigma is particularly costly for young girls because they are expected to provide care to family members (regardless of their own health

status), while at the same time facing multiple sources of difficulty and discrimination. These include lack of education and labor market skills because of early withdrawal from the education system (in the case of young girls being pulled out of school to care for affected family members) and direct discrimination by potential employers, health care workers and community members because their families have been affected by HIV/AIDS.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Empower the Girl Child through Mainstream Campaigns to Transform Attitudes, Prevailing Norms and Gender Stereotypes, as these Intersect with Race, Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, Rural/Urban Residence, Migrant/Refugee Status and other Categories of Social Experiences.**

Since the situation of young girls is rooted in systems of social and cultural inequalities including gender politics, sexual inequalities, gender-based discrimination, and patriarchal structures, there must be a strong commitment by the United Nations, governments and civil society organizations to changing prevailing social norms and attitudes affecting the development of girls especially those in vulnerable groups. We recommend the launch of a worldwide mainstream campaign to transform attitudes and behavior, to combat gender inequality and eliminate stereotypes that prevent full partnership of women and men both in the household and in the public sphere.<sup>16</sup> This campaign should be launched and implemented at various levels including the family, community (building social capital), state (creating an enabling socio-economic environment, policy/legal framework) and the international level (fashioning a legal framework that compels states to address taxation, employment policies, budgeting, etc. from a gender perspective).

Campaigns focused on transforming attitudes must include the role of men and boys in establishing gender equality as an effective strategy. This strategy should be incorporated in national policies and programs at all levels. Failure to educate boys for equality will have devastating consequences not only for girls, but also for society as a whole. As long as the oppression of women is tolerated, men will continue to harbor harmful attitudes and habits that they carry from the family to the work place, to political life and ultimately to international relations.

The negative influence of the media, including the Internet, has been widely discussed.<sup>17</sup> Its positive potential, however, has gone largely untapped. The media's responsibility in encouraging positive social values in boys and girls and to improve the ways in which women are portrayed must be valued and encouraged. There should be opportunities given for the media to participate in national consultations both to understand their crucial role in implementation of national policies and programs and contribute towards them.

### **2. Promote the Participation, Visibility and Empowerment of the Girl Child**

The skills, ideas and energy of all girls, especially those from disadvantaged groups, are vital for the full attainment of the goals of gender equality, education for all, sustainable development and peace. We have to ensure that girls have the opportunity to be heard and that their views are

valued and incorporated into discussions and decisions, especially into those areas which affect their lives most directly both at the household level and in the public spheres. Therefore, mechanisms must be developed by the United Nations, governments and civil society organizations to increase the participation of girls at all levels. Governments and communities can create safe spaces for girls to speak, to voice their concerns and to find assistance when violence is committed against them.

### **3. Promote Competence and Resilience of the Girl Child through Education and Training**

Effective strategies to achieve gender equality must include the social, political and economic empowerment of girls through education programmes and job training to prepare them for their critical roles in their families and communities.<sup>18</sup> Curricula need to be rights-based, gender sensitive and empowering. Promotion of gender-sensitive mentoring and training with appropriate materials and methods from the earliest years will assure that the girl child will become an empowered woman.

### **4. Promote and Institutionalize the Collection, Analysis, and Dissemination of Data on Girls, Disaggregated by Sex, Age, Race, Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status<sup>19</sup>**

Better qualitative and quantitative research will help all to understand the realities of girls, particularly those from the most vulnerable groups and how to best meet their needs. UN agencies, international UN conventions and agreements are best channels to initiate the institutionalization process. When policy makers have access to data that is disaggregated by gender, age, race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, they can make appropriate resource allocations and better public policy.

We also urge the United Nations, governments, civil society organizations and universities to engage in research about girls worldwide, especially those in high risk settings. Such research is critical to effectively measuring previously agreed upon goals and targets designed to ensure girls' rights and the degree of vulnerabilities among girls. Data disaggregated in critical sectors inter alia health, education, labor and protection will assist in creating an inclusive gender perspective for the planning, implementation and monitoring of government programs and benchmarking across nations and communities.<sup>20</sup>

### **5. Provide Resources and Funding for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Girls**

In view of the disproportionate care responsibilities taken on by girls and young women in the context of HIV/AIDS, and the low status afforded to them in many societies, a key point of intervention would be expanding economic opportunities for them.<sup>21</sup> Such opportunities would enhance their ability to meet the financial responsibilities that so many take on after the death of their parents. We support the development of gender-responsive budgeting that explicitly allocates monies for: (a) girls' health programs, including adolescent and HIV/AIDS issues; (b) programs to end the trafficking of girls for labor and for sexual exploitation; (c) programs to end all forms of violence against the girl child, including female genital cutting, incest, prenatal sex selection and infanticide; and (d) education at all levels.

## **6. Strengthen the Role of Civil Society and Organizations for Girls' Participation and Empowerment**

Partnerships with civil society are vital to ensure the promotion of equal sharing of responsibilities of women and men and to provide concrete policy recommendations for governments, United Nations, and other stakeholders. Tackling gender stereotypes, empowering girls to participate more fully in their families and communities, expanding educational and training opportunities for girls, and increasing research and expanding data collection and dissemination will require the active involvement of civil society groups. We encourage the secretariat and governments to welcome and support the active participation of their civil society partners as these organizations occupy a central place in society and can support efforts to ensure women's and girls' rights and full participation in the development of their communities.

We thank the Expert Group Meeting for your kind attention to these matters and for extending your review and consideration to the girl child. As we all know she is the key to the future.

### **Annex 1**

#### **Signatories of the WGG Discussion Paper in Preparation for the Expert Group Meeting. Geneva, 6-9 October, 2008**

##### LIST IN FORMATION

Names received as of September 26, 2008

Action Aides aux Familles Demunies (AAFD).  
Armenian International Women's Association.  
Bahá'í International Community.  
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.  
Dominican Leadership Conference.  
Girls Learn International,® Inc.  
International Catholic Association for Girls (ACISJF).  
International Council of Jewish Women.  
International Movement for Fraternal Union Among Races and Peoples (UFER).  
International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES).  
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.  
Pan Pacific South East Asia Woman's Association.  
Passionists International.  
School Sisters of Notre Dame.  
Sisters of Notre Dame.  
Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI).  
Soroptimist International.  
The Grail.  
The International Federation for Home Economics.  
The International Presentation Association.  
The Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association of the U.S.A., Inc.  
UNANIMA International.  
Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund (VGIF).

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Recall that in the Beijing Platform for Action, Section L, governments called attention to the need to overcome the gender stereotypes that exist in many societies in order to allow girls to develop their full potential. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes often narrowly define the division of labour between women and men, and girls and boys in the domestic sphere.

<sup>2</sup> Commitments on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men and boys and girls, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS have also 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 23<sup>rd</sup> special session of the General Assembly (2000), as well as by the Commission on the Status of Women.

<sup>3</sup> In a World Fit for children the governments of the world declared that they were “determined to eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child throughout her life cycle and to provide special attention to her needs in order to promote and protect all her human rights, including the right to be free from coercion and from harmful practices and sexual exploitation.” They further promised to “promote gender equality and equal access to basic social services, such as education, nutrition, and health care, including sexual and reproductive healthcare, vaccinations, and protection from diseases representing the major causes of mortality, and will mainstream a gender perspective in all development policies and programmes.”

<sup>4</sup> The 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the CSW, with the theme “*The Elimination of Discrimination and Violence Against the Girl Child*”, offered a unique opportunity for Member States to review progress, improve and accelerate policies and programmes designed to fulfill promises made at Beijing and beyond and to ensure all girls achieve the full enjoyment of their human rights. In the Agreed Conclusions, the Commission acknowledged that girls do not receive sufficient, explicit attention in policy and program development and resource allocation (#10) and called on governments to “Give explicit attention to the girl child in budget processes at all levels, including resource allocation and expenditure reviews, to ensure the mobilization of sufficient resources for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against girls” (131). The 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the CSW, with the theme “*Financing for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women*”, offered a unique opportunity to strengthen the implementation of the Agreed Conclusions adopted by the 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the CSW. In the Agreed Conclusions, the Commission reaffirmed the goals that are critical to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (#12) and called on governments to “Increase the investment in gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, taking into account the diversity of needs and circumstances of women and girls, including through mainstreaming a gender perspective in resource allocation and ensuring the necessary human, financial and material resources for specific and targeted activities to ensure gender equality at the local, national, regional and international levels, as well as through enhanced and increased international cooperation” (21a). They further urged governments to “Ensure that sufficient resources are allocated for activities targeting the elimination of persistent obstacles to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action” (21b).

<sup>5</sup> IPU-UNICEF: Inter-Parliamentary Union and United Nations Children Fund. (2005). *Combating Child Trafficking: Handbook for Parliamentarians*, No. 9. Geneva, IPU and UNICEF.

<sup>6</sup> Chick, K.A., Heilman-Houser, R., Hunter, M. W., The impact of child care on gender role development and gender stereotypes. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 29(3), 149-154.

<sup>7</sup> O'Reilly, P. (2001). *Learning to be a girl*. In *Educating Young Adolescent Girls*. (P. O'Reilly, E. P. Penn, & K. de Marrais (Eds.), pp. 11- 28. NJ: Erlbaum.

<sup>8</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB). (2006). Pursuing gender equality through the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific; Can be downloaded at <http://www.adb.org/Documents/books/pursuing-gender-equality/pursuing-gender-equality.pdf>; IPU-UNICEF: Inter-Parliamentary Union and United Nations Children Fund. (2005). *Combating Child Trafficking: Handbook for Parliamentarians*, No. 9. Geneva, IPU and UNICEF.

<sup>9</sup> Unger, R.K. (2004). *Handbook of the Psychology of Women and Gender*. NY: Wiley.

<sup>10</sup> UNDAW (2002, November). Trafficking in women and girls: Report of the Expert Group Meeting, Glen Cove, New York <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/meetings/consult/CM-Dec03-CRP2.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF (2005). *Excluded and invisible: The state of the world's children, 2006*.

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<sup>12</sup> UNICEF (2005). *Excluded and invisible: The state of the world's children, 2006*.

<sup>13</sup> In the Agreed Conclusions of the CSW (52nd Session), the Commission noted the disproportionate share of the burden imposed on women and girls imposed by the HIV/AIDS crisis and urged Governments and others to take a number of actions, including “*Address the overall expansion and feminization of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, taking into account that women and girls bear a disproportionate share of the burden imposed by the HIV/AIDS crisis, that they are more easily infected, that they play a key role in care and that they have become more vulnerable to violence, stigma and discrimination, poverty and marginalization from their families and communities as a result of the HIV/AIDS crisis, and, in that regard, significantly scale up efforts towards the goal of universal access to comprehensive prevention programmes, treatment, care and support by 2010 and ensure that those efforts integrate and promote gender equality*”(21ff).

<sup>14</sup> (a) Chase, N. D. (1999). *Burdened children: Theory, research, and treatment of parentification*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; (b) Earley, L., & Cushway, D. (2002). The parentified child. *Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 7(2), 163-178; (c) Hooper, L. M. (2007). The application of attachment theory and family systems theory to the phenomena of parentification. *The Family Journal*, 15(3), 217-223; (d) Jurkovic, G. J. (1997). *Lost childhoods: The plight of the parentified child*. Psychology Press.

<sup>15</sup> Herek, G. et al. 1998. Workshop report: AIDS & stigma: A conceptual framework and research agenda, *AIDS & Public Policy Journal* 13(1), 36-47.

<sup>16</sup> Martin, C.L. Ruble, D.N. & Szkrybalo, J. (2002). Cognitive theories of early gender development. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128(6), 903-933.

<sup>17</sup> (a) UNICEF (2005). *Excluded and invisible: The state of the world's children, 2006*. (b) Valios, N. (2001). Falling prey to prostitution. *Community Care*, 1371, 18-19.

<sup>18</sup> The 51st Session of the CSW clearly recognized the important role that education, both formal and non-formal, plays in ending discrimination against the girl child. The 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the CSW also noted the need to strengthen education as well as health and social services and the Agreed Conclusions urged Member States to “*Strengthen education, health, and social services and effectively utilize resources to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and ensure women's and girls' rights to education at all levels and the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including sexual and reproductive health, as well as quality, affordable and universally accessible health care and services, in particular primary health care*” (21ee).

<sup>19</sup> In the Agreed Conclusions of the CSW (52nd Session), the Commission noted the importance of sex-disaggregated and gender-related data and urged Member States to “*Improve, systematize and fund the collection, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated and gender related data, including data disaggregated by age and other factors and data on women's contribution to the care economy, and develop necessary input, output and outcome indicators at all levels to measure progress in financing gender equality and the empowerment of women, in particular in introducing and implementing gender-responsive approaches to public finance*” (21m).

<sup>20</sup> We therefore recommend the institution of effective and transparent measurement of previously set goals and targets related to the girl child. Targets can be found in documents including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); Beijing Platform for Action, Section L; MDG #2 and MDG # 3; Education for All; A World Fit for Children, Plan of Action; and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as well as the previous agreed conclusions of the CSW, especially the outcome document of the 51<sup>st</sup> session of the commission.

<sup>21</sup> In the Agreed Conclusions of the CSW (52<sup>nd</sup> Session), the Commission noted the positive impact of investing in women and girls. “*The Commission notes the growing body of evidence demonstrating that investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth and that increasing women's economic empowerment is central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and to the eradication of poverty, and recognizes that adequate resources need to be allocated at all levels, mechanisms and capacities need to be strengthened and gender-responsive policies need to be enhanced to fully utilize the multiplier effect*”(#11).