

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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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,¹ 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.² We are also encouraged by the commitments reaffirmed at the 2002 General Assembly Special Session on A World Fit for Children³ 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

society, especially in terms of decision making. They also have fewer resources and

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.¹⁸ 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 Status¹⁹

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.²⁰

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.²¹ 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).

ENDNOTES

¹ *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, an

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

¹³ 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).

¹⁴ (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.

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

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

¹⁷ (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.

¹⁸ 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 52nd 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).

¹⁹ 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).

²⁰ 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 51st session of the commission.

²¹ In the Agreed Conclusions of the CSW (52nd 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).