IANWGE
Inter-Agency Network on Women and
Gender Equality

Summary of the
Online Discussions Held in Preparation for the 10 Year
Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the
Platform for Action in the 49th Session of the
Commission on the Status of Women

March 2005

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I.   INTRODUCTION

The Beijing Platform for Action emphasizes that women's shared concerns can be addressed only by working together and in partnership with men towards a common goal of gender equality. It respects and values the full diversity of women's situations and conditions and recognizes that some women face particular barriers to their empowerment.

To provide input from civil society into the ten year review and appraisal of the Platform for Action during the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women which takes place from 28 February to 11 March 2005, WomenWatch hosted an extended series of online discussions.

The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) sponsored, organized and moderated 11 discussions, each lasting four weeks, with the exception of the discussions on *Women and Health*, which lasted ten weeks, and *Vision of Young Women and Men for Gender Equality*, which lasted three weeks.

About this Report

This summary draws on the final reports of the sponsoring entities and the moderators. The full reports will be available on the WomenWatch website. Each section features selected and edited quotations from participants, with moderators' background statements and conclusions.

II.   TOPICS OF DISCUSSIONS

Sponsoring agencies and topics were:

1. Human Rights of Women: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
2. Violence against Women: United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
3. Trafficking in Women: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
4. Women and Health: The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
5. Education and Training of Women and the Girl Child: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
6. Women and Armed Conflict: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA)
7. Women and the Environment: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
8. Women and Poverty: World Bank
9. Women and the Economy: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
10. Vision of Young Women and Men for Gender Equality: Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DAW/DESA)
11. Institutional Mechanisms: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)

1. Findings of the online discussion on the Human Rights of Women

1.1 Background statement

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights organized the online discussion on Human Rights of Women from 8 November to 3 December 2004. The Moderator was Lucinda O'Hanlon.

The Beijing Platform for Action identified the human rights of women as one of its twelve critical areas of concern. Three strategic objectives are enumerated in this area of concern:

- Promote and protect the human rights of women, through the full implementation of all human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- Ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice; and
- Achieve legal literacy.

The first strategic objective emphasizes ratification and implementation of CEDAW and cooperation with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, as well as the removal of reservations. It calls on governments to develop national action plans for ensuring gender equality and to establish national machinery to promote women's rights. Special mention is made of children's rights, trafficking, and indigenous women.

The second strategic objective identifies legislation as key for ensuring equality and non-discrimination. It calls on governments to give strong support to national mechanisms for the protection of women's human rights. It highlights the need to combat all forms of violence against women, including female genital mutilation. It also highlights access to justice, recalling that women should be aware of their rights; that the judicial and police systems must be sensitive to gender issues; that women ought to receive necessary protection as victims of gender-based crimes, and that legal aid should be affordable.

The third strategic objective urges governments to publish, translate and disseminate information on international human rights and how to exercise those rights in national and international fora. It also calls for partnerships with NGOs to improve legal literacy, and encourages governments to promote education at all levels concerning human rights. It takes special note of migrant, refugee and internally displaced women, who may require special attention in order to be fully informed of their rights.

The Beijing+5 outcome document identified achievements with respect to the human rights of women, including legal reforms; the creation of an enabling environment for women's empowerment; the increased number of ratifications of CEDAW; the adoption of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, and progress in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the United Nations system. The outcome document also cited obstacles, such as the persistence of gender discrimination and the failure to achieve universal ratification of CEDAW by 2000. Additionally, the document suggested that women do not enjoy sufficient access to justice in many parts of the world; that their reproductive and sexual rights are not adequately recognized, and that many women experience the negative effects of multiple discrimination.

1.2 Summary

a. Legislative and policy reforms at the national level

The introductory message asked participants to reflect on experiences in challenging discriminatory laws and practices, translating legal reforms into de facto equality and the role of women's organizations in these efforts. Participants particularly stressed the value of a holistic approach in addressing

discrimination, combining legal strategies with targeted interventions to raise awareness about women's human rights and challenge ideologies which subordinate women. Participants also noted that it is important to increase women's representation among decision-makers.

Participants observed that discrimination against women remains a pervasive problem, with serious implications for women's enjoyment of their human rights.

> Discriminatory practices place women at a disadvantage and inhibit their capacity to contribute meaningfully to societal development and critical decisions regarding their reproductive rights. Various discriminatory traditional and cultural practices coupled with gender stereotypes conspire to hamper the reproductive rights of women. *Olaide Gbadamosi, Nigeria.*

Women share many experiences of discrimination across cultural and geographic lines: they are also subjected to multiple forms of discrimination based on ethnicity, race, immigration status, class and disability. Recognition of women's similarities as well as their differences and diversity is essential to formulating laws and policies against discrimination.

While some participants highlighted the importance of legal reform for protecting women's human rights, others stressed the need for a holistic approach.

> Until the amendment of this Act [concerning evidence in rape cases in India] it was common for defence counsel to refer to prior sexual conduct of the complainant in their attempts to demolish her testimony that she did not consent, tarnishing her reputation and chances of marriage. *Sadiq Syed, Timor-Leste.*

Several contributors noted the crucial role of women parliamentarians in developing non-discriminatory legislation or repealing discriminatory legislation, and cited efforts to ensure that more women are present in parliament. Other participants observed that increasing the number of women in legislative bodies did not necessarily lead to gender equality in legislation, and emphasized the need for more women in decision-making positions.

b.   Access to justice

The moderator requested that participants explore the reasons women have not traditionally used the justice system; enumerate the obstacles to women's effective use of the system; and share best practices and lessons learned in attempting to improve women's access to justice.

The participants noted many obstacles to women's effective access to justice, including poverty, lengthy procedures, lack of confidence, lack of awareness of victims and judges, and discriminatory laws. Women also face severe obstacles in accessing justice where their husbands are missing, or have decided to divorce or leave them.

> If the male is not classified as dead, then the woman cannot inherit family assets to keep the family together... Often, she has no legal avenue … to even find out what those assets are. Therefore, my new law will create a new legal document called a "certificate of missing" as a first step to allow women to go to court to try to have access to information of family assets and inheritance rights. *Jane Durgom-Powers, USA.*

Participants called for training for judges on gender-sensitive procedures and women's human rights.

> The [International Association of Women Judges] Program's ultimate goal is to build a true "jurisprudence of equality" – one based on universal principles of human rights. [Jurisprudence of Equality] training workshops and seminars bring judges together to focus on the concrete meaning of abstract guarantees of equal protection and nondiscrimination. Through case studies, problem solving exercises and other adult learning techniques, judges have opportunities to share insights with colleagues and deepen their understanding of international law as applied to domestic contexts. *Joan Winship, USA.*

Another participant noted good practices in India, where alternative justice systems are used, such as family courts or courts with women judges. National Human Rights Commissions also have an important role to play in protecting the rights of women.

> The Nepal Human Rights Commission can use its mandatory power for the protection and promotion of the human rights of women, dalit and other vulnerable communities and recommend the government for the enforcement of its obligation under Constitution and party of major human rights instruments, including CEDAW, CERD, ICCPR, CESCR. *Surya Deuja, Nepal.*

c.   International human rights instruments and mechanisms

Participants were asked whether the international human rights system provides effective protection of women's human rights; the ways in which women have made effective use of this system, and the obstacles that women face in using it. Many participants commented on the difficulty of realizing guarantees found in international human rights instruments, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Some countries do not sign or ratify these treaties. When countries do ratify a treaty, especially in the case of CEDAW, they register multiple reservations. Even where countries publicly express commitment to the international human rights treaties, implementation at national level remains a serious challenge.

Participants recognized the Optional Protocol to CEDAW as an important new tool for protecting women's human rights, while observing that it still does not have the necessary enforcement capabilities.

> The Optional Protocol, however, contains many of the same inadequacies as CEDAW, and it is not ratified by as many States and thus, the ineffectiveness remains. Due to the need for stronger remedies, the Optional Protocol should provide the right to an individual petition followed by more adequate international remedies to attain true effectiveness. *Vanessa von Struensee, lawyer and activist, USA.*

According to participants, many women are still not aware of CEDAW and other international mechanisms, or feel that the instruments do not address their particular situation.

Interesting issues were also raised with regard to the frequent clash between custom and international standards.

> *[With reference to the family name system, in comparing]*…the relationship between deep-rooted custom that most people don't consider discriminatory and critical to ensure the equality between men and women, and international human rights standards; if there is huge resistance from the public and people are not ready to accept any legislative change, do you think that there is strong argument to change the practice? If so, what can be strategy to persuade the public and the legislative? *Yoojin Oh, Republic of Korea*

Despite the limitations of the international human rights framework, participants affirmed that international standards are key to effecting change, and they encouraged broad-based support to civil society to implement them.

d.   Strategies for the future

Discussing future strategies, participants generally emphasized education and awareness-raising on women's human rights, and implementation and political will. These strategies would address a range of challenges, including repealing discriminatory laws; establishing an enabling environment; and providing adequate resources. Participants endorsed affirmative action programmes among other means of securing women's participation and representation at all levels. They also felt that women should engage in the international human rights framework

Participants noted that discussions about women's human rights can become abstract and difficult to understand. Education and outreach activities were cited as important strategies to address this challenge.

> I would have to admit ignorance to many actualities, and if not for the universality of issues spoken about, I could easily get lost in the midst!! Thus my concern is: how much would an ordinary farmer's wife or daughter with very little education and knowledge understand about all this? What have we done so far to educate them or even help them understand what has been going on to tackle these issues? *Rebecca Padilla, Philippines.*

Contributors noted the need for political will to ensure implementation of laws and standards. Women should become politically involved and hold their representatives accountable.

> For women's human rights to advance, the work at regional and international levels, such as having a gender balance at the International Criminal Court, having sanctions at that level for crimes against individual women rather than needing it to be against groups of women, the ideas about possible truth commissions having a gender-specific approach are ways in which women's human rights can be addressed at an international and national level. *Sam McLean, New Zealand*

Some participants offered very specific recommendations concerning rural women's centres:

> For the rural women in the food deficit countries, the right to livelihood through land rights as provided in CEDAW art 14, 15 and 16 could be a focus for our future strategy. We call upon governments at the UNCSW to support the call for women's centres in rural areas that promote women's collectives for land based livelihood projects. . . . These projects should be based on land/forest/ponds grant to the women's groups for economic activity on lease for a period of fifteen years. *Shivani Bhardwaj, India*.

Others spoke of the establishment of a special rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women:

> One idea we have been discussing for Beijing + 10 is the creation by CSW of a Special Rapporteur on Laws that Discriminate against Women… [This] Special Rapporteur… would support and facilitate implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in a very concrete way that actively complements the work of CEDAW at the level of the Commission. The continued existence of sex discriminatory laws fundamentally blocks efforts to promote equality between men and women. While not a panacea to end all forms of discrimination against women, the revocation of sex discriminatory laws is a

critical threshold step, without which women have little or no legal recourse. *Maia Goodell, USA.*

2.   Findings of the online discussion on Violence against Women

2.1   Background statement

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) organized the online discussion on violence against women from 8 November to 7 December 2004. The Moderator was Melissa Connor.

Reaffirming the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted in 1993, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognized violence against women as a gross violation of women's human rights and as an obstacle to equality, development and peace. At the crux of this pandemic are "unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement."

The Platform for Action identified three strategic objectives for addressing violence against women:

- Take integrative measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women
- Study the causes and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of preventive measures
- Eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking

The Beijing+5 outcome document noted that among achievements since Beijing was the broad acceptance that "States have an obligation to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons, and provide protection to victims." The document further noted progress in the following areas: policy reform; service provision; education programmes for law enforcement personnel and health-care and social service providers; public awareness campaigns; and research on the root causes of violence and on gender roles. Such efforts had benefited from cooperation between governments and civil society organizations.

However, during Beijing +5 a number of obstacles to further progress were identified. These included an inadequate understanding of the root causes of violence, a lack of comprehensive programmes dealing with perpetrators, and insufficient data to support policymaking. Other shortcomings were the lack of a coordinated multidisciplinary approach and a deficit of programmes focusing on prevention. Discriminatory sociocultural attitudes and economic inequalities were also cited as contributing factors.

In addition to these obstacles, reports by both the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences and UNIFEM noted that changes in the global environment in the previous decade had led to greater vulnerability of women and girls. Conflict and post-conflict situations, inequities and economic shifts associated with globalization, and the spread of HIV/AIDS all presented complex challenges for the prevention and elimination of violence against women.

2.2   Summary of Outcomes by Main Topics

While the discussion ranged widely, it often circled back to gender-based discrimination – both its role in perpetuating violence and the ways in which violence is used to maintain patriarchal practices. Participants noted that despite great strides in raising awareness about violence against women, the subordination of women and violence committed against them are so entrenched that they are seen as normal. This is reflected in the continued absence of political commitment to implementing laws and policies adopted in recent years.

The most lively discussions were on gaps and weaknesses in legal codes, access to justice and problems with implementation, as well as positive examples of legal reform. Addressing these issues would require a collective effort on the part of government and civil society, large infusions of resources and, most importantly, a level of political will yet to be seen.

a. *Political Commitment and Accountability*

Women's rights advocates are disheartened by the lack of follow-through in the wake of international agreements and new legislation. Several participants highlighted the need for more robust mechanisms to promote state accountability and for women's rights advocates to make better use of existing monitoring mechanisms.

> There are now relatively sufficient international standards and mechanisms in place to protect women form violence, but their domestic application is lagging behind …As a Special Rapporteur I am able to get into a dialogue with governments on the basis of the complaints I receive. The communications with governments is then compiled in a report and submitted to the Commission on Human Rights that meets annually in Geneva. I urge you all to become familiarized with this mechanism and use it to submit specific incidents of violence against individual or groups of women. The communication reports can also be useful for advocacy and used to monitor state compliance of international human rights standards. *Yakin Etürk, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.*

Participants voiced their concern at the lack of commitment by governments and international organizations to finance gender policies and fund services for female survivors of violence. Tracking governmental expenditures would provide an additional entry point for advocating the implementation of laws.

b. *Access to Justice*

When attempting to access justice, women face a multitude of obstacles, in the legal system and from their families, peers and communities. Discrimination may take the form of social and family pressures against seeking legal redress; economic barriers, or outright bias on the part of police, judges, or health-care workers.

c. *Culture, Tradition and Religion*

Violence in the name of culture, tradition and religion is a massive obstruction to women's rights. Opponents have used culture as an argument against full recognition of women's human rights. Several postings noted that local initiatives ought to be culturally aware: they should perhaps alter human rights language to avoid the perception that women's equality and rights are Western constructs.

> Violence against women in name of culture, tradition, religion is the biggest challenge for women and civil society to eradicate. At local and international levels states often object to discussions relating to culture as violating and interfering in others cultures – in the name of preserving cultures, and hence using culture as defence for men. *Indira Patel, UK.*

> The international agencies might reconsider the despotic rhetoric to be taken as original voices of the South. Instead they should attempt to recognize complexities, "biased interpretations" and newly emerged evolutionary changes. Awareness of gender

oppression imposed by the fundamentalist State interpreted as "cultural sensitivity" needs rethinking. *Nasrin Azadeh, Islamic Republic of Iran.*

d.   Community-level Interventions

Several examples of communities combatting violence against women showed the importance of work at the local level. Communities can develop effective responses to violence through education and activism involving all members of a community, from women themselves to girls and boys.

e.   Masculinities

Confronting violence against women calls for challenge and change to notions of masculinity, recalling that men and boys are both perpetrators and recipients of violence: this affects them, their attitudes and their use of violence.

> We may need to ask what mechanisms have challenged masculinity with regards to violence… So I think our goal should be to change a masculinity that is defined in terms of aggressiveness, lack of empathy, and anti-femininity… Policies that fail to challenge broad ideological structures might actually exacerbate the problem. *Charles W. Lewis II, Glencree Centre for Reconciliation, USA.*

> It seems clear to me that it is at least in part a result of the aggression and "toughness" to which we expose men from birth that violence has become a gendered issue. *Heidi Tabata, Canada.*

2.3   Conclusions

A number of themes running through this discussion point out several priorities for the future.

(1) There is a continuing need for legal reform, reflecting state commitments to international agreements, including the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and CEDAW.

(2) Persistent customs and traditions harmful to women and girls must be tackled at every level. In recent years, a threat to women's human rights has arisen in the name of culture, even though the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women states, "countries should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligation to eliminate violence against women..."

Recommendations:

- Violence intersects with a wide range of issues including HIV/AIDS, conflict, globalization and poverty, an issue which calls for systematic attention. In particular, studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between property ownership and lower levels of domestic violence.
- To address violence against women, we must challenge the male domination institutionalized in governmental and social structures – the very institutions with which women's organizations must work. We must work with men and recognize supportive aspects of masculinity.

3.   Findings of the online discussion on Trafficking in Women

3.1   <u>Background statement</u>

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime organized the online discussion on Trafficking of Women from 22 November to 17 December 2004. The Moderator was Silke Albert.

Trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual and other forms of exploitation is a highly lucrative business, largely controlled by powerful criminal organizations. Most vulnerable to being trafficked are women and girls, who are often subject to multiple gender-based discrimination. There is clear agreement that the global scope of trafficking requires a concerted international response, which addresses the root causes and considers the different actors involved.

The Beijing Platform for Action explicitly addresses trafficking, in the context of violence against women, under strategic objective D3: "Eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking." Other sections of the Platform for Action also refer to trafficking, recognizing that the problem is multidimensional and connected to issues such as women and health, and women and armed conflict.

In 2000, the General Assembly adopted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, together with the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

The United Nations Trafficking Protocol provides for the first time an internationally-agreed definition. It seeks: to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, especially women and children; to protect and assist the victims of such trafficking with full respect for their human rights, and to promote cooperation among States Parties in order to meet these objectives.

The online discussion on trafficking in women provided an opportunity to examine achievements and the possible counter-productive effects of some initiatives, and above all to name gaps and challenges. The discussion also produced proposals for future activities. Contributors had expert knowledge in the field of human trafficking and related areas and often cited their own experiences.

3.2   <u>Summary of outcomes</u>

a.   Preventing trafficking in women and girls

Participants in the discussion highlighted various aspects of prevention strategies and agreed on the need for simultaneous implementation of a wide range of actions.

> Preventive measures should include legislation, education programmes to raise awareness among communities about the dangers of trafficking in persons, programmes to address poverty alleviation, and training of police and the judiciary. *Vanessa von Struensee, USA.*

Participants generally saw awareness-raising and training as important; campaigns should be understandable, but not patronizing or discriminatory.

> I suppose the issue is also how to raise awareness about trafficking without re-enforcing gender discrimination and hindering the integration of returnees. *Jill Alpes, intern with UNESCO.*

Awareness-raising campaigns can be targeted to different risk groups as well as the general public. The Global March against Child Labour was cited as an example of a successful awareness-raising campaign with strong symbolic value. Participants felt that hotlines to report trafficking were useful so long as they were operated by competent personnel. Continuous training of hotline operators would therefore be essential. Consular officials needed regular training and should also have information on victims' profiles and trafficking patterns, as well as related reports from NGOs.

Trafficking in women and girls is often described as a high-profit, low-risk crime. Offenders are frequently prosecuted under legislation on smuggling, prostitution or other offences, allowing them to get off lightly.

Participants made it very clear that addressing the exploitation of domestic helpers and child labour would help prevent trafficking. Factors such as poverty, cultural stereotypes, absence of specific legal remedies, poor enforcement of rights, and the invisibility of the work should be addressed.

To combat child labour, participants felt that governments should have their own code of conduct for employers and a national action plan, including for example ratification of relevant international agreements; establishment of relevant legislation; and adequate assistance to exploited children. Governments should guarantee education for children from poor backgrounds and supply their basic needs.

Some participants advocated curbing the use of the internet as a medium for trafficking and child pornography. Prevention strategies should also encompass data collection and data sharing, with regard not only to trafficking in persons, but also to abduction, domestic servitude and missing children. International organizations should share data, closing the gap between organizations working on child labour and those working on sexual exploitation of children.

Participants emphasized programmes for the reintegration of female victims, to avoid their turning to trafficking. They also highlighted a neglected issue, the need to tackle the demand side of trafficking.

Economically stronger countries often restrict legal migration to professionally qualified and skilled persons, but migrants may be driven by human rights violations in their own countries as well as attracted by economic opportunities. To avoid migrants falling prey to traffickers, nations have to work together to increase opportunities for legal migration.

An underlying argument in many contributions was the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking. Women encounter discrimination in the labour market, within the family and in society as a whole, and women and girls are often more affected by poverty. Decreasing their vulnerability would contribute greatly to a decrease in trafficking.

b.   *Assistance and protection*

Participants referred to programmes and activities to assist and protect victims. They felt that support for empowerment and rehabilitation should offer a holistic solution.

> The need for good counsellors, who can understand the background the victims had come from and also give them enough time to settle and give psycho-social support to settle down, is important. Holistic rehabilitation which includes health, legal protection, care, counselling, family reunion and suitable alternative livelihood with dignity has to be looked at very seriously. *David Raj, Programme Officer, Catholic Relief Services, Hyderabad, India.*

The online forum produced an interesting discussion on the relationship between prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation. Participants felt that it is important to get the support of sex workers to identify and support victims of trafficking.

Participants pointed out that governments should not deport persons to countries of origin if their lives are in danger.

> Currently the end result of being rescued or arrested remains the same in most countries, it ends in deportation. Our experience is that many women only begin to feel like victims of trafficking after they are "rescued" and deported! *Liz Hilton, Thailand*

c.   Criminal justice responses to trafficking in women and girls

Participants felt that law enforcement and judiciary approaches should be centred on victims, encouraging victims to appear as witness, rather than pushing them to testify. While national anti-trafficking strategies and action plans could guarantee a concerted and consistent approach, participants emphasized that protection of victims' rights should be the main focus of all activities.

d   Assessment and research

Comprehensive assessment of the problem is essential to a successful anti-trafficking strategy. Yet despite countless publications and growing awareness of the problem, knowledge of the crime remains limited. Not all trafficking is for sexual exploitation. Participants saw a need to study the various forms of exploitation, most of which are not properly researched.

Women and girls who are trafficked usually come from highly discriminatory environments, calling for better data on, for example, ethnic backgrounds. In addition, some trafficked women originally wanted to leave their countries of origin as refugees. Research on victims' profiles should look into this issue.

The discussion also showed that very little was known about traffickers. Participants emphasized the need to pay more attention to the organized crime element, and to the contribution of corruption at all levels of government. The demand side of the crime also calls for more attention.

Recommendations:

- A national referral mechanism and fully developed coordination for the assistance to and protection of trafficked women and girls.
- A human rights approach towards the victims; national action plans have to ensure permanent training for police, public prosecutors and judges, as well as local authorities.
- Rigorous research of the different factors that permit trafficking to occur, and analysis of both demand and supply.

4.   Findings of the online discussion on Women and Health (including HIV and Human Rights)

4.1   Background statement

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) organized the online discussion on Women and Health in three phases from 10 November 2004 to 24 January 2005. The Moderator was Subidita Chatterjee.

Section C of the *Beijing Platform for Action* states five strategic objectives for Women and Health

- Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services;
- Strengthen preventive programmes that promote women's health;
- Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health issues;
- Promote research and disseminate information on women's health;
- Increase resources and monitor follow-up for women's health.

The Platform for Action highlighted the need to ensure universal access to appropriate, affordable and quality health care and services for women and girls as one of the 12 critical areas of concern requiring urgent attention by governments and the international community.

During its forty-third session in 1999, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women proposed further action. These included the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all policies and programmes in the health sector, recommendations on women and infectious diseases, mental health, occupational and environmental health – areas that had received little attention at the Beijing Conference.

The Beijing+5 outcome document conclusions on women and health could be briefly stated as follows:

- Women's lack of equal access to primary health care, and specifically life-saving obstetric care, continues to kill a woman every minute from childbirth complications.
- The gap between contraceptive availability and use remains high, although awareness and use of modern methods is increasing.
- Unsafe abortions continue to imperil women's reproductive health.
- Cultural beliefs and taboos, insufficient knowledge about their bodies and inability to negotiate contraceptive use with partners expose women more than ever to the dual risk of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.
- Young, poor, rural, and uneducated women remain the most vulnerable.
- HIV, Malaria and TB continue to be the major threats to women's health.
- Malnutrition, often caused by gender discrimination in food distribution, presents a grave threat to the health of women and girls. Anaemia and iodine deficiencies top the list.
- In some countries, increased female life expectancy and changes of life style, certain non-communicable diseases, such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases and osteoporosis, have become more common, in particular among older women.
- Poverty, domestic isolation, overwork, powerlessness resulting from low levels of education and economic dependence, and violence in all its forms have an impact on the mental health and general well-being of the majority of women.
- Greater involvement of men in areas of women's health is increasingly important.
- Mainstreaming gender perspectives into health policies and health services remains one of the major challenges.

4.2   Summary of outcomes

The discussion was organized in three phases:

> Phase 1:   General and health systems issues (including communicable and non-communicable diseases)
> Phase 2:   Sexual and reproductive health (including HIV and human rights)
> Phase 3:   Rights, needs and support for HIV-positive women and girls and those vulnerable to the virus.

There were 601 participants in all, from national machineries for the advancement of women, United Nations entities, faith-based organizations and women's groups. They included women activists; academics; policymakers; gender equality researchers and practitioners; health-care providers; people living with HIV/AIDS, and other members of the international community.

a.   General and health systems issues

- Health Services for Women -

The postings focused on the challenges of reforming health care, keeping in mind that gender impacts every aspect of health care and thus needs to be an organizing principle for planning health care services.

> Women experience morbidity differently from men and the circumstances that shape their needs and experiences are not adequately addressed by the way the health care services are designed. *Renu Khanna ,SAHAJ ,Gujarat India*

> The result of the current health system reforms should ensure that the essential minimum health package for women is available in rural areas, so that private health insurance and credits schemes are avoidable. It should be carefully worked out to avoid shifting of the costs of basic health care to the poor women who are the majority. *Lucas Machibya, Kasulu, Kigoma United Republic of Tanzania*

Concerns included:

- giving women access to information regarding where to go and when to go for health check-ups;
- making women aware of the value of timely intervention including for chronic diseases;
- having comprehensive health care under one roof to include preventive, curative and palliative medicine;
- improving infrastructures in the broadest sense:
  - better roads and vehicles for geographical access
  - legislating reforms on practices that harm women's health needs
  - taking into account the special needs of refugees and women in conflict situations
  - having enough staff to cater to the needs of service delivery
  - developing policies and norms that incorporate gender concepts into health systems;
- having accessible disaggregated data by sex and age to engender health systems;
- involving communities and opinion leaders before making health system reforms;
- training health care providers to be more compassionate to the needs of all women from adolescence through old age, including marginalized women;
- ensuring greater privacy, respect, confidentiality within the health system, particularly with regard to HIV status;

- encouraging more time for counselling to ensure full comprehension and better adherence to treatment.

- Men's Role in Women's Health -

There is a growing consensus that forging partnerships with men and accepting men as partners in women's health are essential to improving women's health. In many societies women cannot leave the home or seek health services without the permission of a father, husband or brother.

> There is increasing local, national and international interest in the importance of the role of men in the promotion of women's health, an area traditionally seen as a women's-only concern. This has been reflected in, inter alia, Para. 25 of the Beijing Declaration…there is a growing belief that approaches directed at ending the underlying social structures, institutions and relationships on which health inequalities are based necessitate the involvement of men – the very resistors of change, and gatekeepers of the current gendered health order – if they are to be truly successful. *Tim Shand, Technical Officer, WHO, Geneva.*

Most family planning programmes focus solely on women, forcing women to take a disproportionate responsibility for safety, reproductive health and family size. The result is not only an extra burden on women but a closed door to men. When appropriate, men need to be accepted in counselling sessions together with women, be it for check ups, delivery or operative procedures.

> When they accompany their partner to a facility, men may find no programmes that encourage or allow them to participate in reproductive health decision-making with their partner or in addressing their own reproductive and sexual health-care needs. *Lissette C. Bernal Verbel, EngenderHealth.*

Engaging men during their wives' or partners' deliveries and surgeries may instil a sense of responsibility for her health. It could offer men an opportunity to discuss their own sexual and reproductive health needs.

Though the contraceptive prevalence rate has increased in many countries with greater involvement of men in family planning, men need to be involved in helping to reduce maternal mortality by becoming partners in the health of their wives.

> By assigning a role and with it a certain level of responsibility/accountability to men, some of the antagonism on the part of men is removed. There exists a need to stress that gender-sensitive programmes would have benefits to men as well. *Mandi Chikombero, Ohio University, Athens.*

- Women as Caregivers -

Women have the multiple burdens of taking care of family members, doing household work, and earning a living. Few countries offer economic incentives or training to women who provide home-based care. There is an informal support system in communities wherein women help each other provide care.

> In many countries, cutbacks in home-care support and "reform" of the system has largely been at the expense of women caregivers, especially older women who look after spouses and other family members when they are sometimes ill themselves. *Peggy Edwards, Canada, Consultant with WHO, Geneva.*

- Issues Affecting Older Women -

> All countries and regions are experiencing the feminization of aging … Older women need ready access to gender-sensitive quality health services that are also "age-friendly".
> *Peggy Edwards, Canada*

Postings from Western countries demanded more care for older women, programmes to address their specific health needs, including home care and improved training for health-care providers. These messages also highlighted the fact that many of the diseases prevalent in older women, which are often considered a part of normal aging, require medical attention. Older women and care takers should be made aware that dementia, arthritis, cancer and osterposis are illnesses that can be treated. Battering of older women was mentioned as another social issue that needs immediate intervention.

- Women and Communicable Diseases -

Recent studies found that communicable diseases affect the sexes differently. Distinct gender differentials are now available for diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS – the three biggest killer diseases.

> The poor women are always beaten by malnutrition, malaria, tuberculosis, mental disorders, poor maternity services and currently the HIV/AIDS pandemic along with STIs. The factors influencing food as perceived by the community are mainly not owned by women. These include access to land and means of food production – mostly owned by men, food crops versus cash crops – the resultant cash is monopolized by men, dietary deficiencies due to seasonal variations and natural hazards, preference for modern dietary patterns, animal protein as a perceived major food, household expenditure on food, capacity of sick women, children and the elderly to absorb food nutrients and food sharing among household members. *Lucas Machibya, Kasulu, Kigoma, United Republic of Tanzania*

Malaria – participants noted that women were particularly vulnerable to malaria during pregnancy because mosquitoes seem to be attracted to pregnant women: the validity of this finding, however, was heavily debated.

Mosquito nets are an effective way to protect women against malaria. The discussion focused on the accessibility of nets and the observation that though they are often given away, women seemed to prefer more attractive, larger and colorful nets for which they are willing to pay. Posting also expressed optimism about a vaccine to protect pregnant women from malaria in the near future.

Tuberculosis (TB) – Women seem to respond better to treatment against TB than men However, TB is a major cause of death for reproductive-age women. Women tend not to seek treatment and harbour coughs for longer periods. This could be the result of the stigma associated with the disease, women's lower socio-economic status or constraints in accessing treatment.

Researchers who participated in the discussion suggested a multi-site investigation to develop a generic protocol for TB. Studying gender differentials seems an essential part of TB research: strikingly different and often unexplainable results are obtained once data is disaggregated by sex.

Other infectious diseases – In the last decade neglected diseases like schistosomiasis, African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness), dengue, trachoma and others have been identified either as women's

health issues or as meriting closer study of how they impact on men and women. Onchocerciasis (river blindness) which is currently threatening pregnant and lactating women is endemic but neglected.

Participants mentioned factors contributing to the spread of communicable diseases, including ignorance and misunderstanding of symptoms, which often result in stigma. For example, genito-urinary symptoms are often taken as a sign of sexually transmitted diseases. Queuing to submit urine and stool samples for testing is embarrassing to women from conservative cultures.

- Women and Non-Communicable Diseases -

Rapid socio-economic and demographic changes in developing countries have changed lifestyles and brought problems that until recently only existed in developed countries. Health systems in low income countries are ill equipped to bear the burden of chronic diseases, and lack policy guidelines and funding. Women and community health workers seem to lack knowledge about symptoms of non-communicable diseases and treatments available. Some participants suggested including gender-sensitive programming for non-communicable diseases in the curricula for medical and nursing training.

Mental health – postings about mental health mentioned cultural and social issues such as infertility that contribute to mental illness among women. Violence was cited as a major cause for mental breakdown in women, along with pressure to use drugs and alcohol. Considering the broader economic, legal and environmental factors, behaviour therapies might be more successful than drugs in addressing women's mental health problems.

> Only by responding to the complexities and particularities of women's lives can health promotion strategies hope to increase the opportunities women want and need to control the determinants of their health. *Michelle Funk, Dept. of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, WHO Geneva.*

Anaemia and malnutrition – Participants mentioned numerous contributing factors, among them, nutritional deprivation of the girl child; lack of programmes to combat iron deficiency among adolescent girls, cooking techniques; taboos against intake of nutritional foods, lack of diagnosis for hookworm, absence of health-seeking behaviour; and lack of access to health services as a result of poverty.

> Most of the programmes address nutrition during the first six years of life, and then skip directly to pregnancy and lactation. Adolescence, which is the period of additional nutritional requirement, is not addressed through these programmes…There is no mention at all on the importance of creating awareness in the family and community about women's nutritional needs. What strategies could work here? *Excerpts from Anaemia and Women's Health by Indu Capoor Jyoti Gade CHETNA, India.*

Heart disease – Participants mentioned a variety of factors that contribute to heart disease among women. Breakdown of traditional systems, changes in eating habits, consumption of alcohol and a rapid increase in the use of tobacco by women have contributed to increasing prevalence of heart disease.

Significant gender differentials exist in the management of coronary heart disease. Developing countries have fewer funds to address it.

> Women have difficulties with access to care, particularly in the traditional patriarchal cultures in the developing countries: this gap is widened by the paucity of available resources to cater for the needs of those suffering from cardiovascular disease in these low-resource settings… The key is effective advocacy to create global awareness

appropriate to the magnitude of the issue. This should ideally be coupled with the ongoing efforts to move cardiovascular disease higher up the health agenda of countries as part of the initiative to reorient health policies to match global shifts in health trends.
Sania Nishtar, Chair, World Heart Federation

Occupational and environmental health – Women from developing countries mentioned carrying heavy loads, exposure to chemicals and pesticides, migration, discrimination in jobs requiring travel, reluctance of employers to hire competent women because their reproductive roles contribute to the perception that women are a liability.

Women in developing countries talked about lower pay, unemployment, disability benefits keeping women out of the labour market, discrimination by employers and medical professionals to keep women out of the labour market. Lower wages for women in the unorganized sectors and sexual harassment were universal.

b.   Sexual and reproductive health, the rights-based approach and culturally sensitive programming

The contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) has improved in many developing countries and family planning has seen greater male involvement. The average number of children per family has gone down to less than three in developing countries. The development and enforcement of laws have improved the situation of women in many countries

To continue this progress, women regardless of age or marital status need better access to sexual and reproductive health services. Unwanted adolescent pregnancy, untreated STIs among women and a high rate of maternal mortality continue in most developing countries. Sexual and reproductive health, in addition to being a human right, is also a tool for the empowerment of women and needs further support and resources.

- A rights-based approach to health -

Despite achievements, many countries lag behind in accepting the global agreements for health and human rights for women. Participants noted tensions between the human rights paradigm and polygamy, female genital mutilation or cutting (FGC), and other practices. For example, some qualified doctors and nurses have started doing FGC under sterile conditions in hospitals (reported from Kenya). This is encouraging some parents to go for the procedure for their daughters. Though medicalization of the procedure could save lives in the short term, it brings in an aura of safety and legal sanction with the procedure and is against the ultimate health objective.

Policy-makers must resolve tensions between local traditions on one hand, and on the other practices that are increasingly accused of representing foreign values and promoting an individualism that threatens families, communities and national identities.

Participants mentioned that pressure groups and faith-based organizations are working to undo the rights-based approach for the health of women, young girls, and men by spreading misinformation and pseudo-scientific warnings against certain methods of self protection from devastating illnesses, for example, speaking against using condoms for HIV/AIDS prevention.

Some postings commented on the fact that many countries encourage child bearing among the richer sections of the population while discouraging it among the poorer ones. They emphasized that reproductive and sexual health policies differ markedly among high fertility and low fertility countries.

What constraints on reproductive choices are developing as a result of public policies aimed at raising or lowering fertility patterns of different groups? For example, Singapore provides disincentives to childbearing for the poor and less-educated segments of its population, while encouraging it among more affluent and better-educated groups. The U.S. uses "family cap" policies to discourage childbearing among recipients of state aid, while it encourages it among higher income families by means of tax credits. How do we advance reproductive rights for all sectors of the population in the face of societal concerns about fertility and workforce profiles? *Vanessa von Struensee, USA*

Among suggestions for the way forward, there was a strong feeling that sexual and reproductive rights should have been included in the Millennium Development Goals while "population" should continue to be included in the PRSP as it has been in many countries (UNFPA, State of World Population Report, 2004). To address the barriers of religion, governmental policies, economic constraints and donor policies it might be necessary to redefine the objectives of the Platform for Action. Along with initiatives for funding, the underlying structural factors that nurture gender inequality need to be addressed.

Among other points raised:

- the creation of enabling environments for NGOs/civil society participation in governance is important for the development of sustainable democracies, to bring in changes of transparency and accountability and implementation of strategies and global agreements.
- Public-private partnerships should not be a substitute for investing in public health development in low income countries. Along with improving the supply side management, it is mandatory to prepare the demand side to be able to take up the services in developing countries.

We see a chasm between the people who plan and execute and those who live on the other side of the fence to receive services. These two sectors may be called "government/private sector" and the other "people"; the chasm is very selectively mediated by civil society organizations, some may claim. The emphasis of both the sectors is supply side management with neglect of the demand side. We increase supply without improving receiving mechanism for the utility of the increased dose of supply. *Zubair Faisal Abbasi, Pakistan*

- Gender needs to be looked at in the context of equity and equality, ending socio-cultural norms which reinforce women's status as cultural minors.
- Women need to be empowered and made aware of their own capability to stand up for their rights towards health.

Women need to be taught that they are already powerful. …The outward manifestation of the power women possess will follow once women stop to question the systems that they so far have been willing to die for. *Simone Tredoux, women's rights activist.*

- The various United Nations organizations and NGOs active in prevention of FGM/FGC need to come together and issue a position statement against medicalization of the procedure.
- There is a need to mobilize the global consciousness against the harm being done to human rights by conservative attitudes coupled with unscientific information.

- Culturally-sensitive programming -

Reproductive and sexual health rights, issues and programming must be addressed at the grassroots level, must be owned by the communities and must be perceived as compatible with people's cultural and religious frameworks. Ensuring that these principles are integrated into national programming remains a challenge.

To move forward, participants suggested

- dialogue with different sectors of communities – opinion leaders, religious and cultural leaders, local change agents, women's, youth and other groups, including often marginalized voices;
- birth attendants should belong to the same religious and socio-cultural background as the women giving birth;.
- talking of roles that give value to the life of women other than childbearing can help dismiss myths which favour high fertility;
- Identifying how to use the positive in religions to work with sexual and reproductive health;
- Discussing sexual health separately from reproductive health. When women are allowed to open up and speak about their sexuality, they seem to understand the issues around it and control decisions about their sexuality in a better way.

None of the village families called these skilled birth attendants and continued with the untrained (unskilled) traditional birth attendants … we found that the criteria that these women found necessary were belonging to the same religious and cultural backgrounds, or those who had been more popular through generations for working as TBAs, better communication skills etc. and not technical skills alone. *Samadrita Mukherjee (Sardar), Kolkata, India.*

We did bring in different people with different points of views whose presentations affirmed the strength and power that they have as women… they finally agreed that women bring much life to this world through their children, but … that it is important and possible to limit the number of children that they can have and continue being powerful through the participation of other roles in the society. *Euphrasia Nyaki, Brazil.*

All religions are not against condoms, it is a problem of interpretation, (where and how it is being used). So we chose some moderate religious leaders in the group and they helped us very much and the meeting passed on very well. A committee of religions was created and since today this committee works very well against the STD/HIV in Mali. *Mohamed Toure, Mali*

I have never met women who, once they have been allowed to come out of their silence, have not expressed how rich their lives might have been if their sexualities had not been constrained. *Esther Corona, Mexico.*

- Safe motherhood -

A decade after Beijing, maternal mortality remains at 529,000 deaths per year and 10-15 times that number suffer injury or illness. The poorest women are still the least likely to receive care in pregnancy and childbirth.

Factors that could substantially reduce the incidence of maternal mortality include: making available emergency obstetric care; skilled attendance at birth; referral services; meeting the unmet need for contraception and avoiding early marriage. Men need to be involved by becoming partners in the health of their wives.

Messages also highlighted some of the underlying direct causes of maternal mortality also known as the "three delays" model: delay in deciding to seek medical care; delay in reaching appropriate care; and delay in receiving care at health facilities.

Some culturally-sensitive practices are:

- Allowing women to give birth in any position (squatting, vertical) that is convenient to them instead of always urging them to give birth horizontally, and to bury the placentas in their compounds instead of disposing of them by hospital authorities;
- Allowing a supportive person to accompany women during labour;
- Discouraging harmful traditional practices like delaying cutting the placenta after delivery by a woman of lower caste;
- Encouraging health care providers to be sympathetic to the customs, beliefs and needs of poor and disadvantaged women;
- Discourage unnecessary invasive procedures such as caesarean sections and episiotomies during childbirth.

- Family planning, abortion, needs of older and younger women and quality of care -

As many as 50 per cent of pregnancies are unplanned, and 25 per cent are unwanted. The target approach, incentives and disincentives have been the greatest barriers to quality of care for family planning services. Participants pointed out that outreach clinics where sterilizations are usually done have inadequate facilities and staff to provide good care. Women are often operated on without adequate preoperative check-ups and contraceptive methods are forced on them without proper consent. With informed consent compliance has been much better.

> It really is important to think and realize that the policies of incentives and disincentives and reproductive rights contradict each other. Are direct and indirect incentives and disincentives not contradictory to the non coercion policy on fertility? *Manmeet Kaur, India*.

Providing clients with a range of effective contraceptive methods and responsive counselling could reduce unplanned and unwanted pregnancies by half.

Laws in some countries allow abortion only if it jeopardizes the health of the mother. These laws overlook unwanted pregnancy as the result of rape, coercion, mishap or lack of education. These laws deny women the right to health, to control over their own bodies, and often force them into situations of dishonour and economic hardship. In addition, it contributed to the dangerous practice of illegal and unsafe abortion.

> Their plight is indeed heartrending as they are faced with either carrying an unwanted burden or facing an illegal abortion. Their choice of abortion, mostly supported by the male partner in the case of married women, can be their death sentence. *Janaki Abeywardene, Plan International, Sri Lanka.*

Older women's sexual health concerns, including menopause, obstetric fistula and genital tract malignancies, are being recognized, but few donors are willing to address them.

> Many women diagnosed with gynaecological conditions are too ashamed or embarrassed to seek support. They need to know that talking about their genital organs is not dirty but a need for proper health. *Kath Mazzella, Australia.*

High rates of teenage pregnancy and STIs among young people are raising concern as the value system in conservative societies is changing.

Some participants reiterated that young people need adolescent-friendly health services and condoms to protect themselves from pregnancy and disease once they get sexually active.
Peer education should cover risks of pregnancy and HIV and advise on condom use. Some countries were refusing funds for "abstinence-only" programmes for young people.

> In Brazil some municipalities are using the argument that with the less than 18 years old, their parents are responsible for them (that is true), so they are requesting the presence of their parents to consult for contraception. This is the best way to stimulate to have sex without protection *Margarita Díaz, Reprolatina, Brazil.*

> With the age at marriage for both females and males at 28 years, an increasing proportion of young people are at risk for unwanted pregnancies and for STD transmission, particularly in a country that counts several thousand migrants and hosts close to 6 million tourists a year, and where value systems are changing, as elsewhere in the Arab world. *Mourad Ghachem, Tunisia*.

> Because there are lots of people who are living, not with HIV, but from HIV, many people working on AIDS in the countries will not share resources and information because they are taking care of their jobs. Even in the civil society networks, there is resistance to involve young leaders. This is why in Bolivia, we call those leaders who dominate the AIDS fight, the "sacred cows". As long as their responses are divorced with the [actual] reality, there will not be changes. *Violeta Ross, Bolivia, HIV-positive women activist.*

c.   HIV/AIDS and STIs

- HIV prevention, vulnerability of women and girls -

The premise for HIV prevention for women and girls needs to be re-thought, particularly in light of the disproportionate HIV infection rates among young women aged 15-24: of young people aged 15-24 years living with HIV, 76 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and 71 per cent in the Caribbean are women. Young women are at much higher risk than men the same age.

Many prevention programmes focus on the messages of abstain, be faithful to one partner, and consistently use condoms (ABC). To be successful this demands the cooperation of both partners. Women are often not in a position to abstain or insist on condom use, particularly within marriage. Unequal power relations, especially in conditions of conflict, further limit a woman's ability to protect herself from HIV.

Women are exploited sexually; sex has become a weapon of conflicts/wars. Why does not the international community protect them in such moments? *Adelphine Mukashema, National General Secretary, YWCA of Rwanda*.

Women living with HIV suffer great stigma and discrimination within their communities, because infection is perceived to be linked with socially unacceptable practices, such as promiscuity, sex work or intravenous drug use. Education is needed to correct this stereotype and elicit compassion for women living with HIV/AIDS. Data from low prevalence settings is needed to assess changing trends.

d.   Rights and Needs of Women Affected by or Vulnerable to HIV/AIDS

- Prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) -

Mainstreaming PMTCT into existing reproductive health services has motivated service providers, encouraged men to get involved, increased community awareness about the matter and gave greater access to services by women.

Women are often the first in the family to be diagnosed, at antenatal clinics offering PMTCT services. Their fear of violence, stigma, and abandonment deters them from disclosure. Voluntary counselling and testing programmes targeting women, through PMTCT or stand-alone programmes, should consider incorporating screening, counselling and referral services for domestic violence.

> The benefits of services for prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission (PMTCT) go far beyond providing antiretroviral drugs. Introducing PMTCT into existing maternal/ child health services, including antenatal care, can contribute to a more effective response to HIV/AIDS by motivating health providers, improving HIV/AIDS knowledge in the community, getting male partners more involved in HIV prevention and the health of their families, and facilitating clients' access to HIV/AIDS care and support. *Carolyn Baek, Horizons/Population Council.*

- HIV and Violence against Women -

Violence, a pervasive risk to women, increases their vulnerability to HIV. 20-48 per cent of girls aged 10-25 years report that their first sexual encounter was forced. Legal frameworks which fail to give equal rights or equal protection in marriage, divorce or property rights to women and which fail to prosecute cases of rape or to recognize domestic violence as a crime all make women less likely to take initiatives to leave a dangerous or violent relationship and increase women's vulnerability to HIV.

Some participants quoted instances of young girls coming out of their passivity to accuse the perpetrators, to be joined by other women in their fight against injustice (Reported from Nigeria.)
Banning honour killing in Pakistan has been a step towards protecting women's human rights. More heads of state should come up with such bold steps to end women being terrorized by violence.

> Domestic violence reduces women's control over exposure to HIV. Women are in a poor position to question their husbands about their extramarital encounters, negotiate condom use or refuse to have sex. Girls are more likely to be raped or coerced into sex by someone older, including sugar daddies, who are physically and/or more financially powerful. Men often believe that young girls are free of HIV infection. *Wilberforce Sekirime, Uganda.*

- Female Condoms and Microbicides -

Women need access to female-controlled HIV prevention methods that they can use without permission or dependence on their male partner. Presently the only method available is the female condom. It is not widely available, even in developed countries, and costs 4 to 6 times as much as a male condom. UNFPA reports that only 52 per cent of countries have female condoms available.

- There is a great need for better statistics – numbers of users, increase in overall protected sex, reductions in STIs, contraceptive method mix, impact on quality of care, and how to increase the coverage.
- Female condoms need sponsorship till national governments take over.
- Adequate supply would eliminate the problem of reuse.
- Research has shown no adverse effects if the female condom is left in situ for long periods – possibly useful where women are at high risk of rape and self protection is an absolute necessity.

Some women and clients liked it while others didn't. The problem of reuse seemed not to be so much a problem when supply was adequate. The messiness associated with reuse was un-inviting to many sexworkers, other than those women for whom it was the only life saving option. *Patricia Weisenfeld, Female Health Foundation*.

Early data from a project with sex workers from India showed them to be using female condoms with their "regular" partners, as well as with non cooperating male clients. Project staff and sex workers were trying to present female condoms as something special to the regular clients and training the sex workers to exercise negotiating skills for anti-male condom clients and drugged clients who can't put on male condoms. However to overcome these difficulties these sex workers needed support and participatory interventions. *Patricia Weisenfeld, Female Health Foundation*.

In Cambodia, some sex workers charged more for using female condoms, advertising the special "heat" it gave out. They also found it convenient to use during menstrual periods when they would otherwise lose their earnings. *Patricia Weisenfeld, Female Health Foundation*.

Considerable funds have been raised to continue field trials of microbicides (chemical agents which can be inserted into the vagina to prevent HIV infection). Early trials show considerable hope for the future. However, additional funding is urgently needed to ensure that clinical trials on an effective microbicide can continue. The International Partnership for Microbicides (the policy forum) suggested that actions need to be taken to avoid regulatory logjams in making safe and efficacious microbicides available to women in resource-poor, HIV-prevalent settings. Generally women seemed to lack knowledge about microbicides.

As of today, we don't know that people who practice dry sex will use microbicides; but neither do we know that they won't. *Review article by Elizabeth McGrory and Geeta Rao Gupta, Preparing for Microbicides Access and Use, Rockefeller Foundation, November 2001*.

- Rights and needs of HIV-positive women and vulnerable women populations -

Achievements in the last decade include global and regional alliances of HIV-positive women. Many networks of HIV-positive women and people living with HIV have been formed as support groups and to

advocate for their rights and access to services. The International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW) has agreed upon the necessity of the following human rights for HIV-positive women.

- Education and information -

Women living with or vulnerable to HIV lack information about protecting themselves and their partners, or about care and treatment

> Members of Positive groups need to be given the necessary information for their health, wellbeing, ARV drugs and where available, safer sex and bearing children and such information should not just be kept in books or documents produced by international organizations. Ways of spreading the necessary information through media/interactive meetings etc should be there and fast enough before it is too late. *Kath Mazella, Gain, Australia.*

- Right to sexuality (marriage, safe childbirth, counselling) -

HIV-positive women should have the legal power to contract marriage, choose whether or not to have a baby and the necessary information and services to exercise their choice.

- Right to own and inherit land and property -

Widespread exclusion of women in developing countries from owning or controlling property denies them the resources to improve their chances of preventing HIV infection or mitigate its consequences. Lack of economic options prevents women from leaving violent marriages. Despite many accounts of women's vulnerability, there is limited data on the scale of "property grabbing" by relatives after a husband's death from HIV. Forced remarriage after a husband's death violates women's rights and can spread infection within an extended family.

National governments must guarantee women's equal rights in marriage, property and inheritance, and judges and community leaders trained to uphold and enforce them. The international community should encourage the process. The World Bank and IMF should make the elimination of women's property rights violations a central part of PRSPs.

> [Women] told of … death threats and abuse if they dared to assert their property rights; and of grave health risks, such as contracting HIV/AIDS from their so-called inheritors and not being able to afford health care and shelter after losing all their assets. *Janet Walsh, Human Rights Watch*

The domestic relations bill from Uganda was quoted as model legislation

> It addresses women's property rights in marriage and women's right to negotiate sex on the grounds of health, sets the minimum age of marriage at eighteen, prohibits FGM and criminalizes widow inheritance. …The bill criminalizes marital rape and provides for civil remedies, such as compensation and "restricting orders." The grounds for divorce are equally applicable to both spouses and alimony is provided for. The Domestic Relations Bill continues to exclude cohabitation from the presumption of marriage, but provides parties to such relationships with certain rights, including the right to register the fact of cohabitation and particulars of any monetary or non-monetary contributions made. A competent court may then distribute the property equitably in accordance with those contributions, and may do so even when registration has not taken place. Polygyny is also

strictly regulated by guidelines that provide for the economic support of all wives. The bill also provides for equal sexual rights and establishes more equitable grounds for divorce. However this bill is yet to be formally accepted and faces hostility because it entails a commitment to dismantling a patriarchal framework. In the interim, women suffer. *Vanessa von Struensee, USA.*

- Right to safety – protection from intimate partner and other violence -

Rights in property and economic opportunity would permit women to avoid or leave violent unions. Gender violence should be prosecuted as a crime.

Participants suggested education for young boys to respect the opposite gender, involving them more in family talk time or discussions about the issue in and out of school.

There should be widespread knowledge about emergency contraception to protect women from pregnancy following sexual violence, and of women-controlled methods to help women protect themselves from HIV. Uniform laws to define the age of consent and rape were suggested.

I also feel we still have the challenge to involve women in the grassroots level in these discussions. This e-forum was available only for those speaking English and having enough access to internet and time to read the discussion. We are missing the link with communities in many ways, both, the UN agencies and the civil society leaders. *Violeta Ross, HIV-positive women activist, Bolivia*

- Care and Support Needs of HIV-positive Women -

Home and community care including support for caregivers
The majority of caregivers in home-based and community-based settings are women. Many AIDS-affected countries depend on family members or unpaid volunteers to do this job, often without adequate training and resources. The issue of food security is closely linked with care, and both have the common thread of poverty and HIV/AIDS.

A recent UNIFEM forum cited four key areas requiring attention:

- Increased visibility and valuing of care work,
- Access to information,
- Access to basic resources – nursing materials, soap, food, etc. and
- A supportive and appropriate policy framework.

Participants call for transforming the "community-based" approach into a "community-oriented" approach, as in Uganda, because "the intense cooperation between hospitals and NGOs in Uganda has reduced the burden on voluntary caregivers."

We argue that specific public sector roles and responsibilities need to be defined by national governments so that the viability of their populace can be protected …. Care, we argue, provides fundamental public goods and therefore needs appropriate remuneration and support. A strategy of simply downloading responsibility for care onto women, families,

and communities can no longer be a viable, appropriate or sustainable response. Review article Expanding the Care Continuum for HIV/AIDS: Bringing Carers into Focus[1] *Sherry Hutchinson, USA*

Caregivers need to receive better training, similar to that of nurses, to be able to administer basic medication. Otherwise, the ways in which they can help AIDS patients in their homes are very limited, *Patience Mavata, KwaZulu-Natal. Posted by Kanya Ndaki, IRIN Plus News, Zambia.*

It was suggested that farmers of the region be encouraged to plant fast growing fruit trees and perennial legumes for quick food production to help food security for the communities. *Zimbabwe*

- Equal access to care and treatment for women -

WHO estimates that currently only 10 per cent of those needing treatment for AIDS in developing countries are receiving it. Women's restricted mobility, difficulty in accessing transport and lack of information about treatment have further reduced their access. Ninety per cent of public health facilities lack staff to deliver anti-retroviral drug treatments, and stigma remains in the minds of health care providers. As treatment becomes increasingly available in developing countries through national programmes, attention to ensure that women and men benefit equally and equitably must be taken.

- Treatment preparedness and literacy -

Treatment literacy programmes must address women's particular needs–for example how treatment affects safe conception, menstruation and breastfeeding. Women often do not have the cash or child-care services to allow them to travel to health clinics for treatment or check-ups. Treatment programmes must also address women's particular concerns. Some international organizations working in treatment for AIDS highlighted how more research needs to be done to produce proper tools for managing in resource poor countries.

- Greater involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS -

Very little progress has been made towards ending stigma and discrimination. Stories of couples or widows being expelled from villages or stoned to death are still not uncommon. Women from marginalized sections of society – lesbians, women sex workers or women drug addicts have no refuge. Health care providers are especially discriminatory and often do not attend to their health needs.

The discussion provided the following recommendations: Workshops in remote areas should focus on the fallacy of stigma, by allowing HIV-positive women to share their stories, and challenge the practice of blaming infected women for HIV/AIDS. Care programmes need to be devised for people from marginalized groups at higher risk. Wives of drug addicts, wives of bisexual men and wives of clients of sex workers need to be educated about their special vulnerability.

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[1] Expanding the Care Continuum for HIV/AIDS: Bringing Carers into Focus By Jessica Ogden, Simel Esim, Caren Grown. Available at http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/horizons/xpndngcrcntnm.pdf

Essential steps suggested include advocating governments to take up legal reforms to support the rights to care for HIV-positive women, promote programmes that involve civil society and advocating that heterosexual men join efforts to reinforce the status of women.

5.   Findings of the online discussion on Education and Training of Women and Girls

5.1   Background Statement

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) organized the online discussion on the Education and Training of Women and Girls from 10 January to 4 February 2005. The Moderator was Kate Lifanda of UNESCO.

This online discussion merged two strategic objectives from the Beijing Platform for Action: Objective B: Education and Training of Women, and objective L: the Girl-child, with responsibility to UNESCO and UNICEF respectively.

The Beijing Platform for Action calls for universal access to and completion of primary education, including access for young mothers, pregnant girls, and rural women; removing barriers to sexual and reproductive health education; eradicating illiteracy among women; promoting equal sharing of family responsibilities by girls and boys.

The Millennium Development Goals (2000) and the Beijing Platform both emphasize the importance of education in promoting gender equality and the advancement of women. Yet in the milestone year of 2005 at least 70 countries will fall short of the goal of gender parity in primary and secondary education.

5.2   Summary of Outcomes by Main Topics

a.   Universal access to education

Participants discussed the causes of low enrolment, transition and retention for girls and women at all levels of education in early childcare, primary, secondary and higher education and in non-formal and literacy programmes.

Contributions on this topic addressed a range of issues: socio-cultural and religious practices; availability of water; hygiene and sanitation; financing education; pregnancy; relevance of education programmes; distance from school, and lack of security.

Almost all contributions said that negative social attitudes and cultural practices hindered female participation in education, as the following examples illustrate.

> It is generally believed that the family name is preserved in the lineage of the male child. Hence the male child should be better equipped than the female in order to get a good job and provide for the family. It is believed that women are mainly for the purpose of reproduction and domestic activity, hence no need to educate them, as it is a waste of resources. *Obote Karo*.

> Patriarchy maintains on one hand domination structures against women and children and in the other hand a certain type of socialization that maintains a kind of "masculinity" in boys and men that militates against the possibilities of constructing an equitable society. *Vernor Munoz, Latin America*.

While not unanimous, some participants indicated religion as a major hindrance to the education of girls and women. It was generally agreed that religion could easily be misinterpreted and used to prevent female participation in education.

Several participants cited lack of funds as a barrier to female participation in education. Household poverty discourages parents from enrolling children in school or forces them to withdraw their children once the demand for fees becomes impossible to meet. Governments may be unable to provide adequate funding for school infrastructure or operation. Poorly-funded educational institutions provide low-quality education. All who can afford it send their children to well-funded private schools, reinforcing disparities between rich and poor in access, retention and completion. This is especially true for female learners who already start from a cultural and social disadvantage. The situation is worse in rural areas, where schools are fewer and money is scarce.

> The challenge does not lie in numbers but the quality of education. There is a small minority of girls and boys receiving quality education in private schools while the majority in public schools are languishing in overcrowded, understaffed classrooms with very few teaching and learning resources. The situation is even worse in the rural and urban slums. In my view it is poverty that we should be addressing. *Joyce Abonyo, Kenya*.

Participants noted that the courses and subjects offered could be a limiting factor for female participation. Gender streaming often discourages girls, since boys take the more challenging subjects with high market returns. Participants noted that pregnancy prevented some girls from completing their education. Several gave examples illustrating innovative policy and community interventions to reintegrate girls into the school system.

A number of participants highlighted progress:

- Governments and civil society have increased advocacy for female participation in education.
- Involving women in school activities either as teachers or mothers has a positive impact on female education.
- Involving the community in policy development, particularly when it concerned culturally sensitive issues such as pregnant school girls, also has a positive impact.
- Income generating activities supplement household income and help meet the cost of education. The group activity provides women with social encouragement and economic support.

b.   Quality of education and its impact on outcomes

Judging from the comments and level of discussion, participants seem to have had difficulty defining quality education and therefore identifying what has worked and next steps.

Some participants linked quality to the choice of subjects and ability to find jobs, while others linked quality to content. Others linked the quality of education to evidence of its impact on the lives of women and girls.

> Education is just for building the personality of girls and women and enables them to organize their lives and have all their basic rights. So when education has a positive impact on the lives of girls and women, we can say that "This is quality education" and it would definitely have good impact on outcomes. *Shahzada Din*.

A number of participants raised the issue of indicators to measure quality in education.

> Four measures have been used to develop the scorecard as a weighted index: these are girls' attendance rate at primary school; girls' survival rate over 5 years in primary

schooling; girls' secondary net enrolment ratio and a country's gender development index. *Chloe Challender and Elaine Unterhalter, University of London, UK.*

Some participants questioned whether education should be tailored to the needs of the individual for use in her environment. They raised questions such as, what are girls educated for? And what kind of education for girls?

A number of participants pointed out that emphasizing quality was essential, to evaluate outcomes and move beyond access and numbers. This point was clearly illustrated using examples of gender streaming in subject choices at all levels of education, but particularly in post-secondary education.

> Saudi Arabia is a clear example of a country where access and availability is NOT enough. All education is gender separated, curriculum actually emphasizes women's subordinate role to men, and university programmes clearly discriminate against women in the fields that are offered. The new Prince Mohammed University that is due to open soon paraded the fact that engineering classes will be offered to both men and women. However women are only taught architecture, while civil, mechanical and chemical engineering classes, as well as architecture classes are available to men. *Hanaa Almoaibed.*

The quality of training for teachers, their preparedness and gender sensitivity were identified as important to ensuring quality education for girls. Female teachers in positions of responsibility such as career advice are crucial to girls' full participation. The content of the curriculum and its relevance to the students' life is also important in engaging their interest and consequently their assimilation of what is taught. Curricula should have a gender perspective and take into consideration, nationality, language and ethnicity of the target population.

c.   *Political and financial commitments of governments and the international community*

Education is the responsibility of governments, and when governments fail to invest in education the system fails and quality education suffers. Countries in which governments have made financial and political commitments in education have shown remarkable benefits and growth in their development.

> Regarding education, financial support provided to the Ministry of Education is still a small amount and detrimentally affects the quality of education and the capability of public schools. It is estimated that primary school teachers receive $20 – 30 a month and secondary school teachers receive $40 – 50 a month. Many NGOs in Cambodia have established programmes to fill the gaps in education. *Phally Hor, Cambodia.*

Political and financial commitment to gender equality in education is minimal in many countries. Governments have not sufficiently addressed the issues that inhibit female participation in education, either by reviewing legislation or by mainstreaming gender issues in education policies. Budgetary allocations to education are low and very little is invested in female education.

> If our governments continue to be gender blind and insist on allocating peanuts to the education sector then we shall continue to reap poor performance in sectors of our development index. *Phosile Sichinga, Zambia.*

Governments are investing less in education, relying on private sector providers to fill the gap. As a result education is becoming increasingly expensive and unavailable to the poor. Some participants felt that

governments have a duty to encourage women to take up positions of responsibility. Women in positions of responsibility tend to be more sensitive to girls and women's needs and can act as positive role-models.

Although developing countries and donors alike acknowledge the importance of gender parity and equality in education, governments lack the tools for gender mainstreaming and indicators to measure progress. As a result gender issues are not effectively mainstreamed in education policies.

Given that girls and women are starting from a position of disadvantage, governments must put in place special measures to encourage female participation in education. These could include scholarship programmes, single sex schools, leadership programmes, maternal and child care programmes etc.

> Another way in which the government will change the status quo in women/girl child education is by setting up scholarship schemes to encourage the outstanding female students and those offering the so called masculine courses in school, and also to take care of those that could not afford to go to school financially. *Ijeoma Obidigbo, Nigeria*.

Education touches on different aspects of life and can be denied by a number of factors outside the education sector. Implementation policies and programmes should use an intersectoral approach, engaging actors within and outside the government. Female education needs to be high on the government agenda and should be politicised in the same manner as other issues considered pressing and crucial to development.

d.   Education and empowerment of women and girls

This topic aroused a great deal of discussion, mostly on empowerment, its use and definition in education. A number of participants gave examples of positive changes in the education sector over the last few years, citing advances in education policies, behaviour change in society and progress in women's empowerment.

Female education is still lagging behind male education for reasons that go beyond access, for example absence of childcare facilities. Many scholarships to study abroad do not make allowance for families to travel, so women with children tend to turn down the opportunity.

Empowerment generated a heated debate – some participants felt the term was too strong for use in some cultures and proposed alternatives, while others tried to explain the significance and importance of the word.

> The subject empowerment is not a good word to deal with women's condition for it is linked to the concept of power, which in turn implies conflict. I would prefer the word shared responsibility because it implies cooperation…. The "empowerment" of women lies within the scope of human rights, which express a special concern for the weak and the suffering, whatever his or her gender, class, race and so on...The empowerment of women should therefore be based on the recognition by society of the different specificity of the woman in her contribution to society (through her job as well as through various commitments, notwithstanding the upbringing of children, the weaker among human beings. *Maylis Gillier*.

In response:

> Please be informed also that concepts such as "shared responsibility" even when exercised are acts that operate on a hierarchy of power; especially in the light of who

decides whose responsibility it will be to do what. … It is true that the empowerment of women lies within the scope of human rights, but it is a scope that has always related to issues of power, and those (males) who have the power have always controlled the prescriptions of those rights. *Evette Burke-Douglas.*

Participants also debated the issue of education as a tool for empowerment, not only defining the term empowerment but also questioning the type and quality of education necessary for female empowerment. Can economic empowerment without social empowerment be considered empowerment?

Many participants pointed out that the type of education a girl or woman obtains is often determined or dictated by society following gender roles and stereotypes.

> People around you will be kind enough to give you suggestions, most of the teacher's families and friends will suggest that as a girl it is enough to get the Master's Degree, saying, "It is hard for a female doctor to find a husband"; or. "It's hard for a female doctor to find a job" They also say, "It's better to find a good husband rather than a good job." *Tu Liya.*

Gender streaming and gender stereotypes in education mean that there are fewer women in science and technology courses. There is also a preference for male enrolment in these courses. The few women who take them are without role models to follow, and may suffer discrimination.

> In terms of vertical stratification, in science and technology for example, women's participation decreases as the level of decision-making increases even in countries where female participation in the sciences is close to 50 per cent . In Argentina, for example, women make up 62 per cent of university personnel in the lower academic levels, but less than 30 per cent at the highest category. Agencies promoting science and the university's administrative staff have even less representation of women inside their evaluation organs and political structures. *Maria Elina Estebañez Researcher at Centro de Estudios sobre Ciencia, Desarrollo y Educación Superior, Buenos Aires, Argentina.*

Many participants were conscious of women's important role in promoting female education. Women do not live in isolation but are formed by the cultural norms and values promoted in society.

5.3   Conclusions

- Given the varied causes of poor enrolment and dropout, research is needed to identify them and find appropriate solutions.
- Collect accurate data disaggregated by gender and by locality and age to identify the groups most affected and target resources accordingly.
- Use distance learning and radio, particularly for rural women. Many participants mentioned distance learning. Unfortunately, family, time and lack of information are major constraints.
- Identify the many good examples of what works in girls' education, publicize and upscale them.
- Encourage partnerships between civil society, governments and donors to promote and increase awareness in education and participation.
- Support back to school projects in an enabling environment for dropouts and pregnant girls.
- Encourage scholarships or the elimination of fees for girls.

6. Findings on the online discussion Women and Armed Conflict

6.1 Background Statement

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia organized the online discussion on the Women and Armed Conflict from 15 December 2004 to 29 January 2005. The Moderator was Naila Nauphal.

Armed conflict is a gendered activity where most fighters are men and women suffer differently and disproportionately. Sexual violence, among other war strategies, targets women and girls specifically. Yet their plight remains invisible; they are silenced and stigmatized. The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action acknowledge this terrible reality, while insisting on the full involvement of women in prevention and resolution of conflicts, and their role in post-war reconstruction. The Platform for Action identifies six strategic objectives:

- Increase participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts under foreign occupation.
- Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments.
- Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations.
- Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace.
- Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women.
- Provide assistance to the women of the colonies and non-self-governing territories.

The 23rd special session of the General Assembly in 2000 identified key achievements and obstacles. These included a wider recognition of the differential impact of armed conflict on women and the need for a gender-sensitive approach; and steps taken to address abuses against women including ending impunity for crimes against women in conflict, such as in the work of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

The obstacles include: under-representation at all levels of women in decision-making positions; failure to provide sufficient resources and distribute them to refugees, who are mostly women and children; and failure of international assistance to keep pace with the growing number of refugees.

6.2 Summary of Outcomes by Main Topics

a.   Methodological and Research Issues

- Access to Information -

Echoing UN Security Council resolution 1325, which recognizes the importance of understanding the impact of conflict on women and girls, many participants stressed the need for more research in this new field. Some proposed that more context-specific evidence is required to understand the diverse roles and needs of women, especially in the design of post-war reconstruction policies.

Others argued for developing a collective and inclusive concept of gender equality, which would reflect the diversity of understandings. For some women, equality would mean sharing a meal with the husband while for others it is a matter of professional promotion. This should be based on a collabourative and shared effort.

The question of identifying categories of women for the purpose of research and intervention is fundamental, since women cannot be addressed as a cohesive and homogenous group. So how can NGOs and IGOs avoid the creation of programmes which assume the uniformity of women's needs, interests and resources?

The categories used, such as displaced women, women victims of gender-specific forms of violence, women heads of household, women in poverty and so on, fail to address the complexity of women's experience in conflict. A displaced woman may fall into poverty; she may be responsible for other family members, and she may also become victim to sexual abuse and exploitation. A woman head of household has different needs if she is in charge of young children or dependent elders. It is important to break down categories of women into meaningful groups for the purpose of thoughtful and effective intervention which puts people's needs rather than donors' interests first.

b.   Pre-conflict Measures

The Beijing Platform for Action states that "while entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict and terrorism, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society and their sex". There is growing recognition not only that the treatment women receive in conflict reflects society's attitude towards them, but that armed conflict exacerbates existing power imbalances between women and men. Participants argued that it is essential to address unequal access to resources and power in times of peace, in order to lessen the impact on women during a possible conflict.

c.   Measures during Armed Conflict

- The Role of UN and IGOs -

Participants were asked when, as in most cases of armed conflict, the rule of law has broken down and the state apparatus has collapsed or has failed its duty to protect its own nationals; or when the state is the main oppressor, who then can provide protection and assistance to women?

This question raises the issue of intervention by the international community in times of war or of flagrant internal violation of human rights. Some perceive this as a breach of state sovereignty. However, the right to intervene claimed by the United Nations Security Council is based on Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, "Action with respect to threats to peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression". This involves the delimitation of a legitimate sphere of intervention on the economic, political and military levels. Some took the view that the Security Council is mandated to prevent conflicts and violations "that shock the conscience of humankind".

The protection of women, their family members and their livelihoods in conflict areas should mainly be the responsibility of the United Nations, which is mandated to promote conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence. However, if the UN cannot stop aggression, at the least it should provide observers that can ascertain the adherence of the combatants and occupying forces to human rights and humanitarian law.

- Peacekeeping Operations -

Repeatedly the issue of urgency and lack of time was raised when it came to planning interventions. It was argued that too often the "urgency to save lives" was used as an alibi to justify the neglect of what seems a very secondary concern, namely the question of women's protection or participation.

The process of selection of peacekeeping forces should always include a verification of the domestic crime records of candidates. The same scrutiny should apply to countries: some argued that it is preferable to exclude countries with poor human rights records from providing peacekeeping troops. Codes of conduct – which establish expected standards of behaviour from these forces – should be drawn up and enforced by the United Nations. Offenders should be prosecuted. Publicly naming and shaming culprits is an effective strategy to put an end to impunity and hopefully deter others from further abuse.

- Humanitarian Operations and Personnel -

Humanitarian workers should be informed about specific protection needs, especially concerning sexual abuse, of women and girls during armed conflict. It was further suggested that soldiers as well as field workers or UN peacekeeping forces should undergo training in humanitarian law and gender awareness before being sent to the field. Humanitarian workers should be subjected to the same rigorous selection process as peacekeeping forces in order to avoid abuses against women.

Humanitarian workers also need to be sensitized to the special vulnerability of women and girls in camps where they face an increased risk of sexual violence. Protecting women in this context requires training for camp staff; increasing the involvement of women in the management of camps, and the recruitment of women guards. It also requires simple but effective measures on the ground such as the careful design of camps: for instance, accommodation should be segregated, and women's lavatories and sanitary facilities should be easily reached. Access to camps should be denied to outsiders at any time. Perimeters should be well lit and female guards should participate in patrols.

d. *Post-Conflict Measures*

- Informal Peace Processes – the Role of the Local Community and NGOs -

It is essential that a peace process is locally owned and it is vital to involve women in these processes. This is not merely to advance gender equality, but to capitalize on the special knowledge, skills and resources women possess, and add to in time of war. Often during an armed conflict, because of the absence of men and their increased burden and suffering, women know best the needs and aspirations of the civil population and especially their own communities.

The role of women's groups and networks in the promotion of peace at the grass-roots level is only starting to be recognized and supported. Women have organized for peace or for a common plight such as finding their "disappeared" sons or husbands, or around a social status such as being widows (in Kosovo, for instance where widows organized to ask authorities to investigate the disappearance of their husbands. The same is true in Lebanon and Palestine).

Women's leadership roles are very significant for promoting peace at the community level. The cases of Sri Lanka, Sudan and Afghanistan have shown the significance of building on existing organizations and networks so as to involve local people in all peace initiatives. Such cases also stress the importance of the international community in promoting women's participation and encouraging their involvement at the local level.

- Formal Peace Negotiations -

The main question remains of how to bring women's activism for peace to the negotiating table. Often women are excluded from formal peace negotiations because they were not part of the decision-making process before and during a conflict. They are excluded from leadership positions in political parties or militias and the military hierarchy. Yet the example of Hanan Ashrawi in the Palestinian-Israeli

negotiations in Oslo should be an encouraging example for the involvement of women at formal peace talks.

One suggestion was the revision of the role of the official mediator in peace talks. During peace negotiations the role of the mediator is crucial. He can be a catalyst for the inclusion of women at the negotiations. For instance in the Somali peace talks, the Kenyan mediator Bethuel Kiplagat, was helpful in trying to include women in the process.

- Post-Conflict Reconstruction -

Post-conflict reconstruction can lay new foundations for a society since it usually involves the drafting of a new constitution, the reform of laws and the formulation of new policies. Yet in most cases, the specific plight of women and their contribution are systematically ignored in the planning and implementation process at the aftermath of conflict.

Many participants argued that one should go beyond worst-case scenarios and look at the opportunities armed conflict can open for women. The temporary or permanent inability of men to fulfil their traditional roles as household providers forces an increased number of women to provide for their families.

These new experiences are provoking new ways of thinking and challenge the traditional definitions of women's roles. However, as is often the case, post-war policies fail to address, let alone incorporate, these shifts in gender roles. Many contributors warned that unless policies identify these changes, capitalize on them and integrate them into emerging social structures, there is the risk of reverting to previous narrow definitions of women's roles and to traditional structures. In many cases, because of this oversight, the positive shifts in gender roles and the gains have been reversed and the opportunities to change social attitudes as a result of conflict have been lost.

6.3   Conclusions

This discussion addressed the major strategic points raised by the document: the protection of women in situations of armed conflict; their increased participation at decision-making level, and the provision of assistance to women in conflict areas. But there was no input on the question of reducing military expenditure or control of armaments. Covering all the strategic objectives in depth would have required much longer than the four weeks allotted to each discussion.

One remark that could be made on the approach to Women and Armed Conflict in the Platform for Action is that it ignores the relational impact conflict has on both women and men. While the Platform for Action acknowledges that both sexes are affected differently, it does not address the dynamic aspect of this relation.

Yet, some argued that in order to establish a more sustainable society after conflict, there is a need to broaden the understanding to include the differential impact that armed conflict has on men and women. In other words, one needs to include the differences between women and men in terms of their activities during conflict, their access and control over resources and their involvement in decision-making processes in the aftermath of conflict.

Recommendations:

The need for a reform of the Security Council was deemed necessary especially with regards to the veto system. It is perceived as a biased and "politically motivated organ".

Most peacekeeping operations do not include a commitment to gender equality. Another measure to increase women's safety would be the involvement of women in peacekeeping forces. In addition, mandates should make explicit references to women and the different impact of armed conflict on them.

7.   Findings of the online discussion on Women and the Environment

7.1   <u>Background Statement</u>

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) organized the online discussion on the Women and the Environment from 10 January to 4 February 2005. The Moderator was Irene Dankelman.

Sustainable development is not possible without the empowerment of women and gender equality. The active participation of women and the integration of gender issues in environmental policies and actions are critical determinants for the implementation of the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), and the Millennium Development Goals. Although the crucial roles of women in environment and sustainable development have been recognized widely, discriminatory structures and attitudes still result in deeply entrenched patterns of gender inequality in these areas.

Women and the environment, is reflected in Section K of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action identified three strategic objectives in the critical area of women and the environment:

- Involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels.
- Integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development.
- Strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

Following the 5-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action in 2000, major achievements in the field of women and the environment are:

- A positive, albeit tentative, trend towards greater participation and involvement of women in environmental decision-making positions.
- Steps to incorporate a gender perspective in international, national and local environmental activities, policies, plans and legislation, as well as in institutional arrangements.
- Increase in women's capabilities in the environmental field, including their knowledge, skills, and organization.
- A growing quantity and quality of gender-sensitive environmental research and data.
- A more holistic approach that incorporates poverty eradication and women's economic empowerment in environmental conservation and management.

However, during Beijing+5 a number of obstacles to further progress on women and the environment were also identified. These include:

- Low participation of women in environmental protection and management, and in the formulation, planning and execution of environmental policies.
- Insufficient numbers and inadequate influence of women in responsible positions and a male monopoly in the management of environmental resources.
- Under-representation of women in research and teaching in the natural sciences.
- Lack of gender-sensitive environmental policies, programmes and research.
- Absence of deliberate strategies to ensure women's participation in decision-making, including lack of funding and monitoring.
- Low level of management and technical skills among women.
- Women's limited access to resources, information, education and training.

These factors are mutually reinforcing and contribute to gender inequality. They in turn hinder the realization of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002).

7.2   Summary of outcome by main topics

a.   Emerging issues

Apart from areas such as gender aspects of biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, water and land management, the following emerging issues on women and the environment were identified:

- Environmental health -

Participants called for a focus on environmental health problems in urban and rural areas. A large proportion of city-dwellers in the world are young slum women. In agriculture, women's exposure to pesticides and herbicides causes major environmental health problems as well as problems in sustaining livelihoods of local communities. Air pollution caused by traffic is another environmental health problem in many cities. This has major implications for environmental health policies and programmes.

- Energy choices and use -

Energy is an issue often submerged in the discussion about women and environment. Gender aspects of indoor air pollution in developing countries have received much attention: the WHO has ranked indoor air pollution fourth in global health problems. There are other energy-related issues, such as women carrying heavy loads of fuelwood, physical and psychological violence against women gathering fuel, and vector-related diseases from energy production. Women and their families face problems when they are displaced by large energy projects such as the dam in Uttaranchal, North India.

- Conflict and environment -

Conflict situations create many environmental problems for women. The civil war in northern Uganda, for example, has displaced many people, resulting in food insecurity, increased health costs and disintegration of the environment. Taking another example, Colombia's conflict is directly related to the control and access of natural resources: land, forest, oil, water and minerals. In this conflict women feel the impact of violence directly, as combatants or victims.

- Natural and man-made disasters -

During emergencies women are less likely to have access to crucial information than men. In Bangladesh, for example, women suffered the most following the cyclone and flood of 1991. Among women aged 20-44, the death rate was 71 per 1000, compared to 15 per 1000 for men. But women also play an invaluable role in rebuilding communities affected by natural disasters. This can also be seen in the aftermath of the recent tsunami in Asia.

- Mining and extractive industries -

Mining is conventionally seen as a male activity. However, including the service industry that flourishes around the mines shows that about 60 per cent of African mine personnel are women,. Women are often the weakest and poorest among the mining communities, they are often the most affected by the adverse impacts of mining, and they are responsible for the survival of their families. We still know little of the

roles women play, their status in the production process or their control over resources, and how these roles affect their family roles.

- Fisheries -

In the past 20 years the issue of women in fisheries has become increasingly important, and needs attention from an environmental perspective. It underlines not only the role of women in fishery-related industries, but also the position of women in fishing communities.

- The role of indigenous women -

Indigenous women have increasingly raised their voices on environment-related issues. They are knowledgeable about ecosystem management; they have historically defended indigenous territories against unsustainable exploitation of resources, and they have promoted conflict resolution and peace-building. However, indigenous women continue to suffer various forms of discrimination. Their independence as self-reliant food producers, healers and artisans has been jeopardized and eroded. They are being displaced, their property rights have been neglected, and they have been targets of genetic engineering.

- Alternative livelihoods -

Sustainable income-earning initiatives make the link with environmental conservation and improve the position of women. Ecotourism for example plays a key role in environmental conservation. In areas such as East Africa women are highly involved, earning income by managing sustainable resources.

- Impacts of environmental protection programmes -

Participants expressed concern throughout the discussion that environmental protection and conservation activities do not always benefit women. Experience in Nepal showed the negative impacts of environmental protection programmes and development policies on resource-dependent communities. Monitoring the adverse effects of environmental programmes is urgently needed.

Participants stressed that these issues all need immediate attention from a gender perspective.

b.   Gender Mainstreaming in the Environment

Women have a key role in preserving the environment, natural resources management and enhancing sustainable development. On the other hand they suffer first and most severely from environmental degradation and natural disasters such as floods, droughts, tornadoes and cyclones.

Lack of a gender policy to guide environmental management impedes the fair distribution of resources and a better quality of life for men and women. A gender policy makes more efficient interventions possible.

Social capital created by women is a major resource for poverty alleviation. Committees and organizations for natural resource management managed by women are more efficient, transparent and effective. Gender mainstreaming can be "win-win" in some situations, but it can also highlight conflicts or trade-offs in objectives. Gender equity policies, however, can ensure that the benefits and costs of conservation are distributed fairly between men and women.

- Institutional diagnosis -

Gender gaps still manifest themselves in environmental organizations, in the form of lack of activities of interest to local women; low budgets, and decision-making without a gender balance. There are still few women in senior positions in ministries of environment and natural resources management. Neither environment nor gender issues are priorities on the political agenda.

Many environmental institutions, including governmental departments and NGOs, have taken no steps to mainstream gender, and do not use gender analysis routinely in environmental projects.

Recommendations:

- Gender mainstreaming needs organizational change; commitment at the highest organizational level; a sense of common responsibility; a gender equity policy and action plans, and holistic and culture-sensitive approaches.
- Well-documented information, for example bibliographies; studies and research on gender and environment; guidelines; sectoral studies; documentation of best practices and positive examples, is essential.
- There is an urgent need to develop and use instruments, tools and methodologies for gender mainstreaming. Disaggregation by gender is a basic requirement. All environment projects should use gender analysis to identify women's and men's roles, resources, control over assets, and to indicate the potential for transformation in gender roles.
- Budget allocation, including funding for catalytic initiatives, is a crucial aspect of gender mainstreaming.

- Human capacity -

The promotion of women to staff and decision-making positions by a equal opportunity policy is important to mainstreaming gender in environment programmes and enhancing gender leadership in environmental organizations. Staff will need education and training to improve knowledge, motivation and commitment to mainstreaming gender. It is also necessary to involve local women as stakeholders in policy decisions, planning and implementation. Change agents who bring a gender perspective to the environmental field need emotional and physical support.

Recommendations:

Environmental policies should address women's household concerns such as energy; water; protecting health and pricing of safe products, as well as their development needs such as access to credit; extension, training and employment.

Gender-sensitive policies require that environmental conservation is linked to poverty alleviation. Concrete actions and policy measures that improve women's access to environmental resources, and equality in access and control over resources, should be promoted. Technical assistance should flow towards women's groups. The local governmental level is often an important starting point, working together with NGOs and women's organizations.

Efforts so far seem to have an effect on only a limited number of women. Once the motivating force is withdrawn, the impact often disappears. As long as NGO agents are working in the field women feel empowered and confident; but as soon as the outsiders withdraw they lose the initiative. It is essential to guarantee continuity in women's leading role.

<u>Pitfalls:</u>

- A major pitfall is to assume that women's participation automatically integrates a gender perspective, or that integration of gender at the institutional level automatically improves the position of women at the grassroots. Women are a diverse group, and have different capacities and needs.
- Participants warned that gender mainstreaming can be misused as propaganda. Approaches meant to enhance environmental conservation can disempower women. Commitments without funding produce policies without practical strategies and follow-through.
- It is important to address inequity among nations and classes of people from a gender perspective. Global markets are compromising sustainable resources used and managed by women.

c.   Women's Empowerment and Participation in Environment

Participants saw women's empowerment and active participation in environmental issues as important ways to enhance both environmental conservation and gender equity. Women already make many contributions to environmental management. Women are the invisible managers of natural resources, leaders and agents of change. They have essential skills, information and wisdom; they are the carriers of indigenous knowledge; they give early warning of environmental emergencies such as forest fires, and maintain the local environment.

Women's leadership in environmental matters is reflected in their response to major environmental issues and their search for far-reaching solutions; organized women's groups are fighting deforestation and other forms of environmental degradation; and an increasing number of women's groups and self-help projects are regenerating natural resources, for example cleaning up water sources and afforestation.

Participants mentioned the need to ensure women's access and control over resources, and made suggestions for changing land tenure systems. Science in natural resources management and related sectors should be founded on women's wisdom and indigenous knowledge and heritage.
Education for women and girls is essential to overcome sustainable development challenges. There is a need to critically evaluate areas in environmental education which exclude women, in order to address the causes of exclusion.

The role of men and other NGOs in recognizing women as major players in the environmental conservation and management was stressed throughout the discussion.

d.   Strategizing for the Future: institutions, policies and actions on women and the environment

- Practical needs -

- Allocate funding for women and environment issues
- Guarantee access to cleaner forms of energy by all vulnerable groups, especially. women.
- Promote renewable energy sources and sustainable resource management programmes aimed at environmental conservation and poverty eradication.
- Create new business opportunities and jobs in sustainable development, moving to low-carbon economies.

In the final discussion participants placed emphasis on a human rights approach to gender and environment, calling for action to:

- Link the issues of women and environment, for example sustainable environmental management, to CEDAW.
- Recognize and enshrine the right to water as a human right that entitles everyone to safe, adequate and physically accessible water for personal and domestic uses.
- Advocate both for environment and democracy: enhance green human rights – the right to a healthy environment under democratic governance.
- Strengthen the involvement of women in human security, using food and water security as an example.

Recommendations:

- Assess the impact of policies and programmes of environmental and conservation organizations on women, and all people living in poverty.
- Stop policies and projects that impact negatively on local women and the poor.
- Advocate for national policy changes and institutional capacity building, to use the potential of natural resources for the benefit of disadvantaged people and to alleviate poverty.
- Change aid policy and practice from onsite biomass stock increase to social justice based on sustainable development.

Specific recommendations regarding gender and water management:

- Ensure community ownership, control and management of local resources, with at least 50 per cent women's participation.
- Examine water policies and programmes from a gender perspective and make provisions to address gender differentiation and social inequalities.
- Create institutional space for women to own, control and manage water.
- Ensure representation of women and women's groups at all levels of decision-making about water management. Wherever women's groups are successful the state should develop long term partnerships and not put water management out to annual contract or tender.
- Ensure a holistic approach to water resource management and improve coordination among different departments
- Create new catchments and strengthen existing ones to build and strengthen local communities.
- Allocate adequate financial resources for capacity building, gender sensitization, community management, awareness raising, building local water source structures and distribution systems.
- Establish national water resource centres, easily accessible to all stakeholders and liaise with existing networks such as. Cap-Net India, Gender and Water Alliance.

Participants made several suggestions for follow-up to the discussion:

- Make the environmental sector an area of concern for the UN Commission on the Status of Women.
- Put women's involvement in environment-related policymaking and implementation issues much higher on the agenda.
- Join and support existing gender-environment networks and organization.
- Ensure a gender-environment perspective in forthcoming conferences and policymaking events, such as CSD13 (water/sanitation/human settlements), CSD14 and 15 and the MDG+5 Review.

Participants identified the following research and information needs:

- Explore the links between gender equality and sustainable development.
- Undertake quantitative and qualitative research; publish findings on women's roles, experiences and challenges and expectations in environment.
- Collect national and international data on women's roles in making decisions about environmental and natural resources management.
- Disaggregate data by sex to measure how inclusion of women in natural resources management is progressing and what can be done to increase their inclusion and perspectives.

Several participants suggested continuing the online discussion, or starting a network of contributors and subscribers to the online discussion.

8.   Findings of the online discussion on Women and Poverty

8.1   Background Information

The World Bank organized the online discussion on the Women and the Environment from 10 January to 4 February 2005. The Moderator was Josette Malley.

The Beijing Platform for Action identified four strategic objectives for women and poverty:
- Review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty;
- Revise laws and administrative practices to ensure women's equal rights and access to economic resources;
- Provide women with access to savings and credit mechanisms and institutions; and
- Develop gender-based methodologies and conduct research to address the feminization of poverty.

Women and Poverty is a broad, multi-dimensional topic, unlike most of the concurrent discussions which focus on sectoral issues such as health, environment, and education.

The all-encompassing nature of Women and Poverty is reflected in the wide range of concerns discussed in the 49 contributions posted by 19 participants. Many participants provided extensive analyses of issues related to trade and labour, property rights, and legal interpretations of women's rights, together with detailed examples, mostly from Africa. They gave examples of innovative efforts, but also noted that there was no sense of great progress.

Overall, participants emphasized the continuing gap between rhetoric and reality in women's rights, in their influence on policies and decision-making, and in their access to property, resources and services. Clearly, discriminatory practices at all levels continue to prevent poor women from taking full advantage of any economic opportunity that could help pull them out of poverty. As a result the contributions to this online discussion are similar to the conclusions reached in the 2000 Outcome document (Beijing+5): that progress was being achieved in some areas but that overall economic inequalities between men and women were widening, for many reasons.

8.2   Summary of outcomes by main topics

a.   Macro-economic policies

Week 1 focused on macro-economic policies related to poverty reduction, including poverty analysis and trade and labour policies. The participants discussed these topics and also highlighted women's formal and actual legal rights, as well as their limited influence on policy decisions. Throughout Week 1 and Week 2, participants discussed the interactions between the legal framework, customary laws, and cultural and religious beliefs that ultimately create limits to women's rights and opportunities.

- Macro-economic policies on trade -

Many participants analysed the linkages between international agreements, macro-economic and legal policies at the national level, poverty strategies, and their impact – or lack thereof – on women's actual rights and access to resources at the local level. Participants discussed how women workers and entrepreneurs in both the formal and informal sectors are vulnerable to external forces – such as changing trade patterns – as well as to discriminatory policies and practices. The impact of changing trade patterns is especially timely in the current context of reduced import restrictions on Chinese textile exports, as

required by previous trade agreements. How might this affect – positively or negatively – women workers in China itself as well as those in competitor countries throughout the world?

One participant gave an example of the situation of women workers and entrepreneurs in the Nepalese garment industry, highlighting how women quickly took advantage of a new opportunity; how some women entrepreneurs were highly innovative; how these efforts were not recognized by the government or industry services, and therefore how these efforts did not reach a scale where they could survive when the trade environment became less favourable.

- Labour and economic policies -

Several participants described discrimination against women workers, both directly, through restrictions and discriminatory practices against women, and indirectly through policies that support sectors where workers are mostly men or that hamper sectors where workers are mostly women. The fact that a country has ratified international agreements regarding discrimination against women (including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against All Forms of Discrimination against Women – CEDAW – and ILO convention No. 111, which calls for eliminating discrimination in employment) does not guarantee equal access to jobs.

- Women's representation and leadership -

Participants highlighted the continuing low level of female representation in the types of positions where they could influence policies, directly or indirectly. One participant cited data from Africa showing that women remain under-represented in national parliaments and in regional and local structures. But she also documented some progress in the number of women in the judiciary and the media.

b.   *Women's land tenure and access to financial services*

The second week focused on land tenure and women's access to financial services, with the expectation that ways of increasing productivity of women farmers would be an important area of the discussion. However, participants continued discussing the interactions between the implementation of macro-economic policies and the specific issues of women's access to property and services. Following some of the discussion from Week 1 on how various levels of legislation address women's rights, participants deliberated on the interactions between formal and customary laws, cultural practices, and their impact on women's property rights and inheritance patterns.

- Women's rights: discrepancy between formal and actual rights -

Participants said that the reality may remain highly discriminatory for women, in terms of rights, legal representation, access to property, and access to services. Again, this is true even in countries that have signed various conventions guaranteeing the rights of women, including CEDAW, and in countries in which the constitution guarantees women's equal rights, including access to property.

Several participants working in Africa gave detailed examples of such discrepancies between the constitutional rights of women and their actual control over resources or access to property rights and financial services. Examples from Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, and Ghana showed how women's rights can be blocked in many ways, even when the country's constitution guarantees gender equality.

> In many tribes here in Tanzania, land is considered as an asset which cannot be possessed
> by women. This phenomenon is connected with the tradition that women themselves are

the men's properties – so how can a property own another property? *Imelda Salum, United Republic of Tanzania*.

The recurrent theme in these comments was that customary laws and lines of authority can have both positive and negative impacts on women's rights; they can be supportive of their rights or discriminate against women. They are sometimes ignored, sometimes applied, and sometimes used as justification for keeping women from owning property and from enjoying the rights guaranteed them in national constitutions or legislation.

- Personal status and rights: marriage, divorce, and inheritance -

Participants also gave specific examples of how the gaps in actual rights have many negative consequences for women – especially widows – in terms of access to economic resources and services, as well as for their social status and family support. The impact of customary laws on women's status and on their rights is very serious. This is particularly true for access to land.

Customary law in much of Sub-Saharan Africa stipulates that married women have access to land for cultivation, but they remain unlikely to have title to it. This makes it difficult for them to obtain financial services in their own name. Furthermore, married women lose their rights to land that they have been cultivating if they separate from their husband or become widowed. Widows are also vulnerable to many other forms of discrimination, with negative consequences for their economic and social status and that of their children. Several participants described the consequences in the context of HIV/AIDS:

- Married women are likely to remain in abusive relationships so they do not lose access to land, their primary mean of income;
- Widows suffer terrible economic and social consequences as they lose access to their husband's land, and may be "forced to engage in sex work or transactional sex in exchange for survival items such as food, protection and cash;" and
- Young girls may be forced to marry when their mother looses access to land; they have to quit school, will become pregnant younger, and are put at increased risk of HIV infection.

The discussion on widows and land led to a broader discussion of inheritance systems, as well as polygamous households. The positive and negative impacts of various cultural practices were also mentioned.

- Relationship between gender inequalities and HIV/AIDS -

In this part of the discussion, one participant posted testimony presented to the United States Congress on HIV/AIDS and women's property rights violations in Sub-Saharan Africa, describing the complex links between women's subordinate status, customary laws on land, widowhood, and inheritance, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

> [Women's] subordinate status increases their vulnerability to HIV infection... A complex mix of factors underlies women's property rights violations in Kenya, many of which are common to other sub-Saharan countries: Discriminatory laws: Kenya's current constitution permits discrimination in personal and customary laws… Discriminatory practices: … prevent women from seeking redress… Biased attitudes… "We don't trust women. Women could go and sell the land." Unresponsive authorities [when women try to report violations]… Ineffective courts:… [that] do not apply laws on inheritance and division of family property. *Janet Walsh, USA, posted by Vanessa von Struensee.*

Examples of positive efforts to help poor women

Participants cited a number of positive efforts at the grassroots to help poor women, often through the support of NGOs or professional women's groups.

- Using information technology. Several participants showed how information technologies may open new ways to reach poor women, through electronic networking, television, and the use of rural community telecenters to disseminate information tailored to local needs and grassroots groups.
- Targeted support for widows. Several participants described how NGOs and grassroots groups are interacting with some of the poorer widows. In India, some local NGOs are stepping in to help millions of Hindu widows who left their families to devote their lives to the souls of their departed husbands in religious cities. Traditional support networks have deteriorated over the years.
- Partnerships among NGOs, public agencies and traditional authorities. Participants gave examples of positive partnerships between NGOs, government agencies, traditional authorities and women's organizations.

..Self Employed Women's Association, SEWA, a large and respected NGO working in Gujarat, has taken a special initiative to partner with the Government of India on the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program…because of the number of complaints of the high cost of this illness on their women members, They had …discovered that a large number of their women members incurred debt owing to tuberculosis. *Suneeta Singh, USA*

- Monitoring and evaluation of poverty reduction -

The third week focused on how women's equality can be strengthened through monitoring and evaluation. The moderator's welcome message noted some trends in recent years which should be beneficial for poor women: monitoring and evaluation activities are increasingly participatory, measures of poverty are more multi-dimensional, and evaluation work focuses more on measuring results and impact. Participants focused on the use of indicators adapted to capture the realities of women's lives.

- Innovative indicators: legal decisions -

- Following up on the legal and property issues discussed during Week 2, participants suggested some innovative indicators of the legal system. These indicators can be used to monitor the extent and nature of litigation with a gender dimension, as well as how the courts handle these cases.
- The caseloads of legal services providers reflect over time the type of problems encountered by their clients, in terms of both the legal problems that bring them to seek redress in the first place, and the outcome of the legal procedures, and was suggested as a useful indicator. Another indicator suggested was the court dockets themselves: the listing of cases presented to the court and the decisions. These show how judges interpreted both the legal statutes and customary laws, and how this changed over time.
- Participants noted another example of how changes in legal interpretation can be used as indicators. In India, personal law is governed by the traditional laws of various religious communities, while criminal law is uniform over the country. The Supreme Court made a momentous decision in 1985 when it referred to criminal law (which allows maintenance for divorced women), rather than personal law in a divorce case. The Court was explicit in wanting to influence the legal system through a case decision.

- An example from Uganda is a programme comparing changes in the well-being of women with the changing well-being of the household as a whole. A key lesson is that women added some personal indicators to the more standard indicators used to measure well-being at the household level.

Some of the higher institutions of learning are monitoring gender and poverty impact in some districts in Uganda and the indicators of deprivation or well-being have been derived from analysing interviews with representatives of households and separately with women in these households. In both cases, each provided their own understanding of what poverty entails.

Examples of indicators for household well-being included quality of housing; land or other sources of income; ability to send the children to school; use of casual labour or hiring out household members as casual labour.

Women gave some of the same indicators, plus others which differed from household well-being indicators in two respects: first, they reflected the women's own individual status, for example whether she had her own income, and took her own decisions about it. Second, they reflected gender relations influencing the woman's status, for example who in the household influenced decision-making.

In addition to monitoring household and women's well-being every three years to track charges, the exercise will include qualitative impact studies to analyse the impact of different kinds of agricultural support on different members of the target group. *Mary Mayende, Uganda*

c.   Emerging issues and opportunities

To encourage specific suggestions rather than general statements, the welcome message for Week 4 made two very specific requests. Participants were asked to indicate what emerging issues and emerging opportunities they were observing in their area. They were also invited to draw from their own experience as well as from the discussion over the preceding four weeks to list the top three priorities for reducing women's poverty that they thought the Commission on the Status of Women should highlight in its Beijing+10 review. Their suggestions are summarized below.

Three major emerging issues were discussed extensively. Participants noted that these issues concern a great number of women in many countries and should be highlighted in Beijing+10:

- Changing trade patterns and labour policies and their impact on women workers and entrepreneurs: the recent lifting of import restrictions on Chinese textile exports will affect women workers in China and in the many countries competing with it. Also, economic and labour reforms in Eastern Europe continue to have different impacts on men and women, as well as on retirees in these countries.
- Women's lack of security in property rights remains an important issue in some countries. Contributions to the discussion highlighted the plight of widows in many African countries, where some customary laws or practices and the HIV/AIDS epidemic create a crisis for a woman at the death of her husband. The contributions detailed the negative consequences for the women themselves and for their children. Participants called for support to the UNAIDS work on property and inheritance.

- The continuing discrepancy between the recognition of gender equality in national constitutions and reliance on customary law underlies women's lack of secure property rights. Also the fact that a country has signed conventions on women's rights is no guarantee that these rights are actually applied, or even actually incorporated in legislation.

- Emerging opportunities -

Participants noted how continuing progress in information technology is providing new opportunities for tailoring information dissemination to the needs of grassroots groups and associations. Several participants shared their experience with using new technologies to make information available at the local level, through telecenters which are, or will soon be, available to provide the local community with access to television, internet and email communication. The technology also provides more opportunities for women's professional associations to support local groups and even individual women.

8.3 Conclusions, strategies for the future, recommendations and emerging issues

Participants' diverse response to the call to list their three top priorities for action at Beijing+10 confirms the multi-dimensional nature of women's poverty. They fall into three broad categories: education; economic opportunities; and the protection of women's rights and control of their vulnerability:

Recommendations:

- Promote access to primary and secondary education, fight illiteracy, and use information technology to reach rural populations
- Increase economic opportunities by improving access to land and services and by curbing discriminatory legislation, regulations and practices. A key priority is the right to own and inherit land, as discussed earlier in this report.

Several participants also give priority to access to financial services, especially for women in remote areas who are not reached by the usual sources of loans, or only at very high cost. Several participants discussed the continuing burden on women of household tasks and recommended investments in labour-saving devices, which can decrease the many hours women must spend on manual tasks. They said infrastructure investments for water supply and rural roads sometimes have a dramatic impact on women. These investments may also open up new economic opportunities for some women, individually or through women's groups. Participants called for women's increased access to work opportunities in the formal and informal sectors of the economy:

- Protect women's rights, and control factors that increase their vulnerability
- Several participants called for ensuring that women can exercise the rights they are entitled to under law, and for controlling various sources of vulnerability which hurt women and prevent them from reaching a reliably stable economic situation.

Several participants mentioned health care, including family planning and safe motherhood. One participant added that women are very vulnerable to any long term or costly disease, which will lead to loss of income and even debt.

Polygamy was mentioned as a factor contributing to vulnerability among women. Child labour and child servitude within the household were also mentioned.

9.   Findings of the online discussion on Women and the Economy

9.1   Background statement

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) organized the online discussion on Women and the Economy from 11 October to 11 November 2004. The Moderator was Isabella Waterschoot.

Section F of the Beijing Platform for Action presents six strategic objectives for Women and the Economy:

(1) Women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources.
(2) Facilitate women's equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade.
(3) Provide business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income women.
(4) Strengthen women's economic capacity and commercial networks.
(5) Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination.
(6) Promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men.

The Beijing+5 Outcome Document, emphasizes among key achievements increased participation of women in the labour market and gains in economic autonomy. However, the document also states that obstacles persist and hinder the achievement of gender equality in many areas of economic life: lack of recognition and systematic mainstreaming of gender issues in macro-economic policies; slow or absent career mobility with respect to men's position in similar jobs; equal pay for equal work with men; lack of fulfilment of property and inheritance rights, and unremunerated work.

9.2   Summary of outcomes by main topics

The discussion on Women and Economy was the first of the eleven online discussions and did not have as diverse a list of participants as the other discussions. Input was mainly from current or former United Nations employees in the form of document extracts or reports on UN efforts in areas related to the weekly topic.

a.   Policy approaches to enabling women's economic and social rights

The discussion opened by addressing approaches to enabling women's economic and social rights were addressed. Participants wrote about policy approaches to foster women's economic and social rights and gave examples of ratification (or non -ratification) of CEDAW and ILO Conventions and their implementation.

> … In terms of ILO's Convention, analysing labour market discrepancies in Islamic Republic of Iran suggests amendment in labour law for establishment of labour unions comprising real representatives of labour. The status of labour unions and labour laws should be examined in the absence of freedom of association, where Labour Islamic Councils who act as representatives of labour force are not structured to put forward the actual issues. *Nasrin Azadeh, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran*

b.   Women and the economy in the context of the MDGs

The second week looked at how the Millennium Development Goals can address the topic of women and the economy. The first of two substantive contributions provided an exhaustive list of indicators under

MDG Goal 3. The second, a contribution from UNDP Cameroon, discussed the process of compiling the MDG report, demonstrating a weakened Government commitment to the systematic provision of gender equality indicators.

c.   *Women and Globalization*

The third week focused on how globalization has affected gender equality and the empowerment of women. How can the lack of recognition of linkages between gender issues and macro-economic issues be addressed? Is it a failure of the whole mainstreaming approach or does it merely indicate the need to strengthen advocacy, capacities and monitoring? Issues might include the dichotomy between rural and urban sectors, but also least developed countries, small island states, and the need to adequately address women's and gender issues in war and post-conflict and recovery economies.

> It is only a recent phenomenon in Bangladesh that women participate in public works, garments, develop their own enterprises to supplement family income or maintain dependents. UNDP in Bangladesh is supporting a project called Entrepreneurship Development of Women with the aim of establishing a strong national policy advocacy forum to support women entrepreneurs to flourish and grow in number. *Stefania Sini – UNDP Bangladesh*

d.   *Partnerships between the public and private sectors*

The final week discussed linkages between the public and the private sector and the situation of women and gender equality. What have the major challenges been? How can civil society, including NGOs, the private sector etc. contribute, and how can governments and the United Nations, including international financial institutions, make greater use of their contributions to advance the situation of women in the economy?

> Some people argue that private corporations are socially responsible to ensure the viability of the communities in which they operate by giving back to the communities – corporate social responsibility... A bureau within the Ministry of Gender should be established to deal directly with economic empowerment issues such as helping women understand the process of starting a business – capital availability, registration, taxes, banking, etc. Another means is local banking institutions (as part of their corporate responsibility to the community empowerment) establishing a revolving fund to invest in small women-owned businesses under a scheme like the Grameen Bank. An Internet Service provider could give back by creating a space for women to become computer literate and take advantage of the Internet to explore trade opportunities. *Musu Stewart – Gender Activist, USA*

10. Findings of the online discussion on Vision of Young Women and Men for Gender Equality

10.1 Background statement

The Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized the online discussion on the Vision of Young Women and Men for Gender Equality from 17 January to 6 February 2005. The Moderator was Elizabeth Coombs.

At the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and at its follow-up session in 2000, Governments made commitments to promote the role of young women and men in achieving the goal of gender equality, addressing both the vulnerability that they face in many areas and their capacity to build a better future based on equality. Questions were posed to participants to encourage a youth perspective on roles, rights, particular concerns on gender equality.

10.2 Summary of outcome by main topics

This last discussion lasted three weeks but had more of a free-flowing format as participants were encouraged to write about issues that concerned them. They shared not only their personal experience on issues of gender inequality but also the role of political structures, culture and religion in the formation of their perceptions. They describe their experience with disparities between men and women in social, economic and political contexts and propose possible solutions. Common themes were: (1) legislation vs. education, (2) exogenous interventions: the role of the west, (3) sexuality, (4) economic activities, (5) gender and religion and (6) gender and the public sphere.

- Legislation vs. Education -

Participants debated which has more impact on gender dynamics, the State or mechanisms of socialization. In discussing the causes of gender inequalities (discriminatory laws and political systems and familial and societal influence), participants proposed the following possible solutions: (1) education and awareness and (2) restructuring of political systems and laws.

- Socialization -

Many claimed that we learn the "correct" forms to express our "maleness" or "femaleness" in the home. These expectations are then perpetuated by mass media and society in general.

> Family is the primary agent of socialization. Children learn how to behave and communicate with each other from their families. They see different styles of behaviour within the family and then reproduce them in their life (when they communicate with other children, later in their young families, I mean husband-wife relations and nurturing their children). *Anna Zaytseva, Ukraine*.

> One of the most influential means of youth socialization is no doubt mass media. In my country communication media and television play definitely a determinant role in process of youth socialization forming models and stereotypes of mass culture oriented on an implantation of "Western-way-of-life" valuable in its primitive and light representation. *Olena Chumachenko, Ukraine.*

For many, this led to the conclusion that education is the primary way to tackle gender inequality. By making people "aware" of gender roles and stereotypes and how they affect individuals and society in general, we can slowly break the transmission of traditional discriminatory practices.

Others emphasized more the role of the State and formal rules in shaping policies that can either help or harm gender equality. Their main thesis is that if the laws on which a country is based establish or reinforce discriminatory practices, civil society has little room to make an impact. Many described examples of discriminatory laws and policies, positive government initiatives and specific areas in which government interventions can be especially effective.

> As a Kenyan citizen, I recently went to enquire about endorsing my children on my passport as they are considered underage for their own passport by Kenyan authorities. To my shock and amazement, I was informed that the Kenya government does not have a provision that recognizes those children as mine, and therefore not Kenya citizens, because their father is not Kenyan. Even if the father were Kenyan, I would need to have his authorization to have my children endorsed on my passport, while it is the expected procedure that they would automatically be stamped on his. *Elizabeth Kayembe, Kenya/UK.*

- Exogenous Interventions: The Role of the West -

Participants, mainly from developing countries, expressed wariness of the role of the West or outsiders in attempting to implement gender equality without understanding local gender dynamics and traditions. However, some programmes promote grassroots initiatives, which enhance positive aspects of local gender relationships and take advantage of local spaces for men and women to promote on gender equality.

> Recommendations coming from the western world should work with and for the populations rather than imposing their ideals that do more harm than good in the long run. Where there is evidence of community cohesion, one should look at ways of eliminating the odd ills that still persist without ruining the fabric of the entire community. *Elizabeth Kayembe, Kenya/UK.*

> The fight against gender inequalities cannot be dominated by just one view point (i.e. Western view point). I think Bell Hooks puts it best when she said: "the sexism, racism and classism that exist in the West may resemble systems of domination globally, but they are forms of oppression that have been primarily informed by Western philosophy, they can be understood within a Western context, not via an evolutionary model of human development. *Hodan Nur.*

The significance of Western-influenced mass media in propagating stereotypes or images of women, which don't reflect local realities, were also an important part of the debate.

> Even in today's media depictions of the "modern India," where middle-class women hold high-paying jobs, follow Western fashions, and date men before marriage, the traditional pulls of wifehood and motherhood dictate several women's lives. *Veena Srinivasa, India.*

- Sexuality -

Personal and sexual relationships between men and women were also repeatedly brought up in the discussion, with themes such as who controls sexual behaviour and how shifting gender dynamics are modifying sexual behaviour.

In the sexual aspect, I can say that there is a big discrimination here. Girls MUST NOT lose their virginity, or it will be a disaster. I just hate the way it is. I don't say that being a virgin is good or bad. It belongs to our cultural perception. But that doesn't mean people can judge girls by their sexual activities. And what's worse? They know that they're doing the unjust but they just continue. I had a big quarrel with my mom about this a month ago. I said many boys lose their virginity but nothing happened to them and chances are that 90 per cent of sex before marriages are caused by males. Then my mom replied: We couldn't tell if a boy is a virgin or not – c'est la vie. You can't imagine how angry I got. *Ly Ngo, Viet Nam.*

Sexual behaviour and control were repeatedly connected with the transmission of HIV/AIDS.

There was a lot of advocacy for the integration of men in gender equality programmes, especially those dealing with HIV/AIDS, to decrease sexual power imbalances.

Many participants discussed the importance of dealing with gender issues in terms of couple and family dynamics. Women and men must work together to create personal relationships in which both partners can enjoy equal opportunities and live up to their potential.

I think that the beginning point of what we should do for the future is to move the campaign from the realm of brotherhood and sisterhood to the great realm of couplehood. The realm in which men and women can become one is in marriage. Even though this view is likely to attract condemnations from several quarters of the world, the truth remains that "true marriage" holds the key to human equality. *Raphael Ogar Oko, Nigeria.*

However, others found the perspective closed-minded in that it did not encompass the diversity of human relationships and the ability of women to live happily without men.

- Economic Activities -

Many participants felt that the notion of "women's work" is detrimental to gender equality for two reasons. First, society considers it less valuable; second, it limits the integration of women into more formal labour markets. Participants proposed programmes and policies that could encourage women to enter positions of greater responsibility and higher pay.

I think there should exist special credit organizations giving credit only to women. The organization can work in several dimensions: 1. Economic education. 2. Small credits for individual and group of women. 3. Consulting. 4. Monitoring. 5. Evaluation conference/lessons learnt. This kind of organizations could function temporarily in developing countries until they may help women become compatible in the labour market. *Ruzana Aleksanova, Georgia.*

For example provisions enforcing fair and equal pay for similar positions among men and women might increase the likelihood of women choosing higher education professions. In addition, providing child care facilities at work can also help increasing the female. *Lina Al-Eryani, USA.*

- Gender and Religion -

Many participants felt strongly about the influence of religion in shaping gender roles. They expressed concern over the discriminatory practices that religious entities often use as their foundation and the difficulty in contradicting and interpreting religious doctrine and rhetoric.

> Official religion in Georgia is Orthodox Christianity which has very strict rules. Many women are told by their priests not to wear pants and be obedient to their husbands/parents. *Ruzana Aleksanova, Georgia*.

> Religion – Islam, Catholicism (such as only men priests) , Protestants, and probably many others, reinforce these beliefs by constantly reminding followers of the dominant role of men. For example that men are the heads of households. *Christina Arellan, USA.*

Others expressed the importance of religion within their lives and the need to work within religious contexts to improve the status of women.

> I am a Muslim first and foremost and a woman second. Therefore my priorities are a little different. It is the words of Allah that I adhere to, not to those of any man or woman. Before I can accept any theory, I have to be first able to reconcile it with my religious beliefs. This is true of all practising people of faith or of people with a faith-centred view of the world. *Hodan Nur.*

> I personally think, it is time to shed more light on the issue of women/men sexuality in the Islamic societies. Further attention needs to be given to this issue through more research/education and out-reach projects to bring much needed awareness to the grass-root communities in the most respectful and culturally relevant manner. *Shakila Khalje.*

- Gender and the Public Sphere -

An interesting debate in the discussion was the access of women to political and public spheres. Not only are women underrepresented in formal political positions, but they also lack visible and active positions of power.

> Although I think unions have become better at accepting women in the ranks overall, it is still very much an "old boys club". On staff, women do a lot of the grassroots grunt work; they may even rise to lead positions. But when it comes time to hammer out major contract negotiations, or to meet with politicians, or give a quote to the New York Times, it is the men – and predominately white men, I might add – who are out front doing these things. *Erica Dobbs, USA.*

Other questions that participants addressed were: "How does leadership and political behaviour change with the more active participation of women?" and "How do women have to change to access these political positions?"

Several participants expressed the need for an increase in women's political power to reduce gender inequality through quotas.

> I'm a strong proponent of quotas for women to access elected positions. Empirical evidence on how candidates are chosen in Latin America shows that countries with quotas have increased significantly the participation of women in public positions.

However, many questions emerge from this kind of interventions: (i) Is the quota system really improving women political situation? Or is it just another way to make evident that the social structure precludes women to overcome discrimination by their own efforts? *Orazio Bellettini, Ecuador.*

However, there was a concern that policies which artificially place women in positions of political power are not enough to make a difference.

10.3 Conclusions

- Socialization is the primary cause of gender inequality: programmes that deal with education and awareness can reduce the prevalence of gender roles and stereotypes.
- More women politicians and policy makers will help the transition to gender equality. This can be achieved through quotas in government, or programmes to prepare women for leadership.
- Gender equality programmes should either be grassroots or widely integrate local perspective and systems.
- Gender stereotypes about sexual behaviour facilitate the spread of HIV/AIDS and limit women's opportunities in personal relationships. Men need to be integrated into HIV/AIDS and gender equality programmes to decrease power imbalances.
- Women's economic dependence on men increases gender disparities.

11.   Findings of the online discussion on Institutional Mechanisms

11.1   Background statement

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific organized the online discussion on the Women and the Environment from 12 January to 4 February 2005. The Moderator was Beverly Lynn Jones.

The first World Conference on Women, in 1975 called for the establishment of national machineries for the advancement of women. In 1987 a national machinery was defined as a body "recognized by the Government as the institution dealing with the promotion of the status of women". Its functions were described as supporting the effective participation of women in development; promoting women's education and participation in political decision-making and the economy; ensuring the highest level of Government's support; combating negative cultural attitudes and stereotyping of women in the media; and facilitating research on the status of women and collecting sex-disaggregated data.

Section H of the Beijing Platform for Action, on institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, describes what a national machinery for the advancement of women is, what its role should be and where in the government structure it should be placed. That section also contains three strategic objectives:

- Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies;
- Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects; and
- Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation

By 2004, 165 Member States of the United Nations reported some form of national machinery. At its 1991 and 1999 sessions, the CSW considered the role and structure of national machineries as a priority theme. In addition, various expert group meetings have been organized around the topic of national mechanisms. In meetings on national machineries over the years, they have been described as uneven in their effectiveness; often marginalized in national government structures; frequently hampered by unclear mandates, lack of adequate staff, training, data and sufficient resources, and lacking support from national political leadership. However, they have some achievements to their credit. It is important to asses what has worked, what has not worked and why.

11.2   Summary of outcomes by main topics:

While a number of issues were raised, they were generally not clearly linked to the role of national mechanisms. Several focused on ways in which women continue to be discriminated against because of beliefs, attitudes and practices.

a.   Accomplishments and progress made

One message was posted concerning cultural practices, power relations, especially in countries hard hit by AIDS, and the need for social change.

> NGOs, policy makers and international agencies are beginning to address the role that men play in driving the epidemic. Since changing sexual behaviour is at the heart of reducing the spread of HIV, and since in the majority of countries men have control over this behaviour, this approach could be seen as a pragmatic realisation of the limits on women's ability to change existing power relations… Present interventions focusing on men are still not really confronting the causes of male social, political and economic

power and the consequent vulnerability of women and widows that is at the heart of the spread of HIV. Pragmatic short-term programmes must be matched by long-term social change if both the spread of HIV is to be reduced and the rights of women and widows respected. *Vanessa Von Struensee, USA.*

b.   *Partnership with civil society and other stakeholders*

The same participant posted messages on the important role of human rights networks in changing attitudes harmful to women and the need for human rights organizations to be more inclusive. She also highlighted the failure of states to address inequalities and discrimination against women which are largely based on attitudes and cultural practices and beliefs.

> The persistence of traditional and religious practices detrimental to the health and status of women … signifies the failure of the responsible governments and international community to challenge the sinister implications of practices which violate women's right to health, life, dignity and personal integrity. For a long time these issues were considered sensitive cultural issues beyond international interference. Violations of women's rights are still often sanctioned by cultural practices and traditional customs. The continued failure of governments to address such inequalities undermines efforts to provide women with constitutional protections, greater political representation and improved access to justice. *Vanessa von Struensee, USA.*

Another participant wrote of the need to involve the state, communities and NGOs in the process of socialization, as well as early and non-formal education of men and boys, as a way of supporting the national machineries and the implementation of CEDAW to deal with the challenges of culture. However, she stressed the

> need [for] more systematic preparation towards integration and synergic result. Culture was created by personal values and norms of society through years, even centuries, such as in the patriarchy system…. *Erna Surjadi, Indonesia.*

She described such a tri-partite approach, citing as an example a recent law for the elimination of domestic violence, to implement which the Women's Ministry encouraged community participation. A local government unit in Jakarta worked together with NGOs such as the Hospital Crisis Center and Women's Crisis Center, local firms and social workers, religious leader and, community leaders to help victims of violence against women and children.

c.   *Legal and policy framework*

A number of messages were posted, all from one participant. She wrote about the need for countries such as Ghana to consider introducing affirmative action law reform as a means of improving the representation of women in elected and non-elected political positions. She described the discrimination in property rights that many women, especially widows, face in Sub-Saharan African, citing United Republic of Tanzania and Ghana as examples. She also cited the ineffectiveness of international legal instruments to eliminate discrimination against women. She writes,

> The violation of widows' human rights also implicates the state's failure to ensure equal access to education (CRC 28, CEDAW 10); failure to remove legal or social barriers to equal access to health care (CEDAW and ICESCR 12); failure to take steps necessary for the prevention of epidemics (ICESCR 12.c); failure to modify laws and the social behaviour to eliminate customary practices that discriminate against women (CEDAW 2f

and 5a); failure to take effective measures to abolish all traditional practices involving children (those under 18) that are harmful to their health (CRC 24.3); and failure to ensure the right to marry whom one pleases (CEDAW 16, ICCPR 23).

The same participant wrote:

> Human rights instruments define the relationship between the individual and the state. Attempts to bring human rights from the public into the private sphere, where they are most pertinent to women and widows, have had little success. Unfortunately CEDAW is one of the least effective of the international instruments, despite its high ratification rate.

> Solving the problem of widows in Tanzania and other countries will mean addressing the inequitable property regime; the practice of polygamy; apathy on the part of the police, the administration, and the judiciary; the absence of any law specifically addressing the problems of widows; and the general avoidance of drafting wills, coupled with the absence of effective means for enforcing wills. Fundamental contradictions inherent in the Tanzanian legal system – as in many African systems where statutory laws coexist with Islamic and traditional customary laws and practices – has created a complex and confusing legal regime under which women are denied legal rights. Many African governments, due to the complexity and enormity of the task, and perhaps due to their own resistance toward female empowerment are slow to enact meaningful reform, preferring to allow for extreme decentralization in matters of family or personal law.

III. CONCLUSIONS

This forum has allowed the United Nations to reach out to individuals, groups and networks who will not be able to attend the session of the CSW and have no other way to participate and contribute to the appraisal. An important objective was to provide a forum for exchanging experiences, views, concerns and priorities, sharing good practices, assessing progress and considering new initiatives for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women since the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Most of the discussions had exceptional participation with contributions made on several current and emerging issues on the critical areas of concern addressed. The promotion of the discussions though various listservs, NGO and UN networks proved successful in bringing in a diverse audience from different regions, occupations and age groups.

Annex: Online Discussions on WomenWatch

	Discussion	Dates	Sponsor agency/ Moderator	Number of Participants
1	Women and the Economy	11 October - 11 November 2004	UNDP **Isabella Waterschoot**	**147**
2	Human Rights of Women	8 November - 3 December 2004	OHCHR **Lucinda O'Hanlon**	**235**
3	Violence Against Women	8 November - 7 December 2004	UNIFEM **Melissa Connor**	**595**
4	Trafficking in Women	22 November - 17 December 2004	UNODC **Silke Albert**	**146**
5	Women and Health	10 November - 21 January 2005	WHO, UNFPA and UNAIDS **Subidita Chatterjee**	**602**
6	Education and Training of Women and the Girl-child	10 January - 4 February 2005	UNESCO/UNICEF **Kate Lifanda**	**230**
7	Vision of Young Women and Men for Gender Equality	17 January – 6 February 2005	DAW **Elizabeth Coombs**	**205**
8	Women and the Environment	10 January – 4 February 2005	UNEP **Irene Dankelman**	**195**
9	Women and Poverty	10 January - 4 February 2005	World Bank **Josette Malley**	**125**
10	Women and Armed Conflict	15 December - 6 February 2005	ESCWA **Naila Nauphal**	**121**
11	Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women	12 January – 4 February 2005	ESCAP **Beverly Jones**	**42**