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

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

The equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS, raises important legislative and policy issues. We would like to highlight four concerns:

First, an end to psychological, sexual and physical violence against women (actual or threatened) is a prerequisite for equitable sharing of responsibilities between men and women (1, 8). For example, WHO reports that between 6 and 47 % of adult women worldwide have been sexually assaulted by intimate partners in their lifetime. The vulnerability of young women and girls in conflict settings, violence against sex workers and persons infected with HIV, the trafficking of women and girls are examples of how gender violence underlies women's experiences in the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Second, the diversity of women's status should be understood in the context of social and economic inequality. Parental leave, "family-friendly" policies as well as labour laws may be effective in increasing men's share of care work in developed countries, such as Iceland and Japan (2, 3). However, it is uncertain how similar measures can improve the unequal division of labour for families who work in the informal sector (2) or for the majority of the world's rural women. Similarly, accounting for women's unpaid (or under paid) care work in national budgets is likely to be more significant in countries where gender-based data and national accounting systems are accurate. The question is—how would this approach affect the women working in the rural areas or informal sectors where data is largely absent? How does it affect different types of families such as women heads of household in Brazil (4) and non-traditional households headed by single parents, orphans and the elderly (5)? It is imperative for developing countries to strengthen the database on the wide diversity of women's work and family situations. Also, a life-cycle approach to research is needed on intrahousehold inequality, time-use surveys and the value of care work.

Third, to address the root causes of the unequal sharing of responsibilities between men and women, it is necessary to see how household economics at the micro-level intersects with macro economic policies. As the Millennium Task Force on Gender Equality noted, there are at least seven interdependent strategies that help to empower women. These include: strengthening opportunities for post-primary education of girls; guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health rights; investing in infrastructure to reduce women's and girls' time burdens; guaranteeing women's property and inheritance rights; reducing gender inequality in employment; increasing women's representation in political bodies; combating violence against women; gathering data and developing indicators for monitoring progress; and financing costs of interventions to achieve gender equality. To this list, we would add the importance of adequate access to health services and sex education.

The experience of the emerging industrialized countries illustrates how micro-macro processes are interlinked. In the late 1970's, the Republic of Korea favored investments in social development as a precursor to economic growth. Financing for rural girls' education, reduction of maternal mortality and improved social welfare were all contributors to changing the division of labour within households. Within a decade, rural women's time spent on household work was altered dramatically as labour-saving devices for food storage and preparation, piped water and cheap fuel were provided. Protection of land and property rights through family law reform in

the 1990's further empowered women to claim an equal role in private as well as in public spheres.

Sound development policies, in turn, need to be supported through greater participation of men for gender equality. Behaviour change communications strategies such as "Soul City" in South Africa and "Sexto Sentido" in Nicaragua, Men as Partners in South Africa and Guy-to-Guy project in Brazil are interesting innovations that should be evaluated (1).

Finally, the goal of equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women should be clarified. Some economists may argue that such measures help increase the number of children women are willing to bear while freeing time for salaried work. However, there are more important, and, ultimately, more sound human rights goals. As Amartya Sen would put it, changes in legal and regulatory frameworks of development planning should aim to grant women greater freedoms and liberties (7). Put differently, women should have a more self-determined life. The discourse about equal responsibilities must focus on how changes in the household work towards enabling women to claim their human rights. Strengthening the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the context of decision-making and sharing of responsibilities should thus be a core recommendation (8).

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