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Conference Room Paper

Gender-sensitivity of AIDS responses

**UNAIDS Action Framework: Addressing Women, Girls, Gender
Equality and HIV – Note for Record of technical dialogues**

BACKGROUND

1. At its 23rd meeting in December 2008 the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board requested *“UNAIDS to prepare a progress report for the 24th Programme Coordinating Board meeting detailing the work of the UNAIDS Secretariat and the Cosponsors in assisting countries in developing gender equality including needs assessments for women and girls and for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities separately, emphasizing country level action, as well as follow-up actions, including the establishment of an inter-agency strategy to address HIV and women and girls in line with the strategy undertaken with lesbians, gays, bi-sexuals and transgender;”*.
2. In preparing the inter-agency strategy (UNAIDS Action Framework: Addressing Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV) an inter-agency working group meeting was held on 10-11 February with eight of the ten Cosponsors, the UNAIDS Secretariat and UNIFEM. The purpose of the working group meeting was to: coordinate and promote action on gender and HIV; harmonize inter-agency efforts to increase attention to gender in national AIDS responses; enhance mutual accountability; and, develop the interagency action framework. The meeting reviewed input already received from consultation processes to date, in particular the Nairobi consultation on gender guidance for national programmes (November 2007) and the 22nd Programme Coordinating Board meeting (April 2008). All 10 Cosponsors, the UNAIDS secretariat and UNIFEM participated in drafting the Action Framework. The resulting draft framework was signed-off by all the Cosponsors in May 2009.
3. The Action Framework situates itself at the intersection of UN¹ support for gender equality, HIV and sexual and reproductive health, and human rights. It builds upon the lessons learned through a review of gender assessments and guidance in national responses presented to the 20th meeting of the Programme Coordinating Board and a series of consultations held around women, girls and AIDS during 2007 and 2008. It identifies a shared set of priorities, based on the value added of the UNAIDS family and UNIFEM and is designed to help focus attention on the realities of the epidemic from a gender context. The Framework is intended to:
 - Promote empowerment of women and girls and gender equality in the context of HIV;
 - Leverage the strengths and key entry points of different UNAIDS Cosponsors and the UN family as a whole through:
 - providing strategic and normative guidance;
 - facilitating technical support provision and coordination; and
 - strengthening the capacity of local actors to lead their own responses;
 - Address barriers to implementation; and
 - Help translate national commitments into budgeted programming.
4. Recognizing the importance of gathering views and input from other stakeholders involved in the AIDS response, the Action Framework was then shared with

¹ Throughout the document the term “UN” is intended to mean the UNAIDS Cosponsors, UNAIDS Secretariat and UNIFEM collectively.

members of the UNAIDS Human Rights Reference Group² and the Inter-Agency Expert Group on Women, Girls and HIV³ for written comment. The Inter-Agency Expert Group is comprised of 27 gender and HIV experts, who represent geographical diversity and a range of experience in gender and HIV programming, policy and research. Recognizing that the UN alone could not meet all the demands related to women and girls within the AIDS response two technical dialogues were also organized in New York and Geneva on 20 and 29 May respectively with the objectives of widening discussion of the Action Framework to address the following considerations:

- connecting the Action Framework to the broader challenge of achieving gender equality and promoting the human rights of women and girls;
 - ensuring that the right mix of actions be devised, understanding that priorities will and should vary because a diverse epidemic calls for diverse responses, in the context of “knowing your epidemic and response in gender terms”;
 - engaging the broadest possible range of stakeholders, as this is crucial to success - especially focusing on the inclusion of excluded populations, and the need to recognize and build on experience;
 - magnifying the impact of this work through reciprocal capacity building and mobilization; and
 - carefully gearing the response to local realities and challenges to addressing women’s needs and rights.
5. The two technical dialogues in New York and Geneva were attended by a total of 116 participants from a diverse range of member States, including 37 from civil society, including women’s groups and Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), 56 from Member States and 23 from UN organizations.
6. The purpose of this Note for the Record is to provide a synthesized report of the two technical dialogues highlighting in particular issues that will need to be reflected in the Action Framework, areas of consensus, and next steps.

UN ACTION ON GENDER TO-DATE

7. In setting the context for the discussion of the Framework the UN reported on a number of initiatives that had been undertaken:

² Members include Mark Heywood (Chair), Joe Amon, Mabel Bianco, Robert Carr, Michaela Clayton, Jonathan Cohen, Balazs Denes, Daouda Diouf, Anand Grover, Sofia Gruskin, Ralf Jürgens, Anastasia Kamlyk, Michael Kirby, Betty Makoni, Qui Renzong, Gracia Violeta Ross, Meena Saraswathi Seshu, Daniel Tarantola and Mary Ann Torres.

³ Members include Paul Dover, Nicola Brennan, Diane Stewart, Geeta Rao Gupta, Sophie Dilmitis, Adrienne Germain, Daniel Tarantola, Claudia Garcia-Moreno, Kiran Bhatia, Winnie Byanyima, Elizabeth Mataka, Sisonke Msimang, Miriam Were, Placide Tapsoba, Anandi Yuvaraj, Meena Seshu, Robert Carr, Alessandra Nilo, Hossam Bahgat, Svetlana Plamadeala, Rachel Ong, Frika Iskandar Chia, Malu Marin, Dean Peacock, David Plummer, Gary Barker and María José Vázquez.

- grants made to over 25 Joint UN Teams on AIDS specifically designed to assist national partners in strengthening national AIDS strategies and programmes on women and girls, through the gender window in the Programme Acceleration Fund (PAF) mechanism;
 - technical and policy assistance to Global Fund grant applications in over 30 countries, and peer review of over 15 country proposals;
 - continued implementation of an interagency project “Enhancing the capacity of regional technical support mechanisms to strengthen national AIDS responses to address the gender dimensions of HIV”. This project has mobilized an interagency effort to strengthen assistance to countries to address women, girls and gender inequality by intensifying the engagement of the UNAIDS family and UNIFEM, including grants approved, so far, to 7 technical support hubs. Results to be achieved include: strengthened capacity at the regional and country level to provide focused, targeted and effective technical support to countries about how to mitigate the impact of HIV on women and girls and to reduce gender inequality in the context of the national HIV response; greater resources for addressing the gender dimensions of HIV in countries; and more integrated support processes linking global, regional and country levels;
 - activities also underway, for completion by November 2009, include the development of two tools:
 - a compendium of resources that consolidates, synthesizes and summarizes the most effective and accessible tools, materials and assessments addressing the integration of gender into national AIDS strategies; and
 - a user-friendly, succinct and accessible framework or roadmap document providing a “how-to” process for helping national actors conduct an assessment of their current national AIDS response (including the national strategy, national plan and its implementation), identify gaps in programming, and identify specific areas of work that must be enhanced in order to address women's and girl's vulnerability to HIV, to mitigate the consequences of HIV and AIDS on them, and to link national HIV and gender equality strategies toward greater empowerment and protection of the human rights of women and girls.
8. Finally it was noted that the mapping from the last Programme Coordinating Board shows a diverse range of UN action on women, girls, gender equality and AIDS at the global, regional and multicountry level in detail. In September 2008, UNDP, on behalf of the interagency coordination group, had requested all Cosponsors, the Secretariat and UNIFEM to provide an update on gender-related activities at the global, regional and multi-country levels, building on a draft mapping of gender and human rights activities conducted by UNDP in December 2007. Responses covered activities undertaken between 2006-2008 and showed broad coverage at the global, regional and country level, encompassing a range of gender specific issues. More than 200 different activities were identified in three broad categories: technical and financial support, policy development and advocacy and research. Since the mapping was conducted in a short time-frame and without the participation of country offices, the results should be taken as illustrative rather than comprehensive.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS/COMMENTS ON THE ACTION FRAMEWORK BASED ON TWO TECHNICAL DIALOGUES

9. The draft Action Framework was generally well-received although there was a need for clarification of how it will be used. The UN emphasized that this was a tool for accelerated UN action on women, girls, gender equality and AIDS, and was not intended as a programmatic document nor as guidance for the global AIDS response with regard to the integration of gender and the needs and rights of women and girls. Its role is to provide overall strategic coherence to the work on women, girls and gender equality in the context of AIDS for the 10 Cosponsors, the UNAIDS Secretariat and UNIFEM, and to assist the UN in moving from a project approach to one that is larger scale, more strategic, more coordinated and with stronger technical capacity, especially at the country level.
10. The document puts forth a broad framework which would need to be operationalized in a specific national setting, based on “knowing your epidemic and response” – in other words, based on a clear and nuanced understanding of the gender dimensions of HIV in each country. Such a nuanced understanding requires a clear sense of the gender-specific economic, social and cultural determinants of HIV infection in women and girls, since these are different from those for men and boys. As such priority setting and involvement of partners would be tailored to, and dependent upon, the country setting and would need to be predicated first and foremost on the profile of the AIDS epidemic. In this context, the importance of “knowing your epidemic and response”, in social, cultural and anthropologic terms, as well as in health terms, was recognized by all as a fundamental element for a successful application of the Action Framework.
11. The dialogues highlighted a number of issues that were found to require greater emphasis or modified attention in the Framework. UN representatives noted their appreciation of all inputs and indicated that many of the suggestions could constructively be incorporated into the next version of the document. The issues included:
 - More explicit identification of men and boys and certain population groups particularly the vulnerable, marginalized and those of humanitarian concern, and their role in the response;
 - Clarification of terminology such as “gender transformative”, “gender equality”, “vulnerability” and “risk”;
 - Articulation of the vulnerability of women and girls which necessitates a distinct approach;
 - More clearly and explicitly anchoring the Framework in other international agreements such as the Millennium Development Goals (particularly 4 and 5), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 in the main body of the text;
 - The need for the Framework to identify some key priority areas (e.g. stopping violence against women, improving access to sexual and reproductive health services and human rights, etc.) which will make a meaningful change for women and girls

- Need for more explicit mention of the leadership and advocacy role of the UN at the global, regional and national levels to advance work on gender equality and AIDS;
- Making more explicit how operationalization of the Framework will raise the capacity of UN staff at country level. In turn, this will facilitate the development of the skills necessary to maximize UN staff roles in advocacy and leadership, and as honest brokers to better enable UNAIDS Country Coordinators (UCCs) and UN Country Teams to work more effectively on issues related to women and girls and gender equality within the context of AIDS;
- Identification of a number of budgetary issues that could be more fully elaborated, such as: resource gaps; accountability for budgets; barriers to participation of women in Global Fund Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs) and grant preparation; tracking for gender-related budgets; and, the use of PAF to catalyze action;
- In the context of “know your epidemic” to call attention to issues of inter-generational sex, sexual and reproductive health and human rights, violence against women, economic inequalities, structural issues and barriers to gender equality; and the more general impact of cultural and social contexts on gender inequality and vulnerability to AIDS;
- Highlight the need for outreach to key national partners including the engagement of FBOs;
- Inclusion of the core principles in the main body of the text;
- Need for UN Country Teams to address all areas of the Action Framework equally, from knowing one’s epidemic and response to moving towards capacity building and strengthening of national responses;
- Strengthened monitoring and evaluation of the action areas for enhanced accountability; monitoring and evaluation with specified desired outcomes and indicators;
- Emphasis on the comparative advantage of individual UN organizations within a collaborative and relevant response; and
- Clarity on roll-out and financing of the Action Framework.

CONSIDERATION OF THE THREE ACTION AREAS AND PARTNERSHIPS

12. In considering the three action areas, participants of the two technical dialogues were divided into four working groups to examine the relevant aspects of the Action Framework with respect to its strengths (where UNAIDS and UNIFEM can add the most value), gaps at the country level requiring more action; and key partnerships and initiatives. The four working groups included discussion of the three Action Areas as well as a fourth area discussing partnerships. NOTE: points raised under the section above, although reiterated through the working groups, are not repeated.

Action Area 1: Strengthening strategic guidance and support to national partners to “know their epidemic” and response in gender terms

Strengths: the document was found to be well contextualized at the country, regional and global levels with attention given to technical capacity provision and enhancement (with respect to analyzing data and planning for national responses). UN support was identified as needed both for countries to design evidence-based programmatic action in their National AIDS Plans and to mobilize resources through a variety of different mechanisms. It was also noted that the UN was ideally placed to share good practice between countries and to promote south-south exchanges of experience. The UN enjoys good relationships with governments and civil society and is therefore, well positioned to provide leadership on strengthening programming addressing sexual health and gender issues, including advocacy at all levels.

Gaps: it was suggested to further highlight the basics of epidemiological data to include consideration of qualitative evidence, including anthropological and sociological knowledge, and knowledge on sexuality and femininities/masculinities. The disaggregation of data in socioeconomic terms and using different age groupings in data collection and analysis was also thought to be necessary. Partners requested information on the implementation of the Framework including at the regional level (which is particularly relevant to certain population groups e.g. migrants). The need to build the capacity of UN staff at all levels in addressing gender issues was also emphasised.

Partners: these were identified as a range of government ministries and civil society actors with a call for renewed confidence by the UN to build and strengthen relationships. Linking health ministries, national AIDS authorities and ministries of women/gender is another important partnership to support.

Action Area 2: Ensure that national strategies, operational plans, and associated budgets address the needs of women and girls in the context of HIV

Strengths: there exists a clear opportunity for UNAIDS to leverage its advocacy function to encourage countries to adhere to international commitments such as the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS, and to monitor the implementation of such commitments: convincing governments of the need for gender equality in the response to AIDS would go a long way to achieving progress in this area. Assuming a leadership role in gender equality would also allow the UN to stress the need for clear indicators ensuring that gender is adequately addressed in national strategies, such as the number of countries with costed plans for women and girls. Finally, the UN can ensure that all PAF reflects a gender component as a move towards true mainstreaming (not just the gender PAF window) and that monitoring of PAF initiatives is strengthened. A need to build the commitment of UN staff at country level and to ensure that issues of gender and AIDS, particularly to women's and girls' empowerment and rights, are seen as priorities.

Gaps: the need for reinforced linkages was emphasized with respect to co-infection with tuberculosis and malaria, youth, People Living with HIV and Ministries of Women's/Gender Affairs. The multi-sectoral approach was deemed to be key with particular attention to be paid to diversity and responsibility sharing regarding access to services for marginalized populations, stateless persons, and

the disaster-affected. This would require a strong relationship between the Action Framework, the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) in country, and the incorporation of evidence-informed actions in all phases of national planning. The importance of linking to other national planning processes (such as PRSs and PRSPs) was also stressed. Greater discussion about support for mobilization among women's organizations, especially HIV positive women's organizations, was also identified as an important element in ensuring women's and girls' needs are adequately addressed.

Partners: in discussing a range of key partners, such as, Ministries of Health, research teams, those dealing with sexual violence, FBOs and women's organizations, the group recognized the need to prioritize such relationships. Joint AIDS Teams and UN Country Teams have a crucial role to play in assisting national partners in moving the gender dimensions of the response forwards and more clarity on roles and responsibilities was necessary. The implementation of activities with partners should be linked to the evidence base and the issue of gender should cut across broader development policies and civil society: those most affected must be included in planning processes, especially in the case of People Living with HIV (and specifically women living with HIV) when applying GIPA⁴ principles.

Action Area 3: Expanding the capacity of partners to scale up programming on women, girls and HIV

Strengths: the UN has a number of natural entry points that can be used to advance HIV programming for women and girls with specialists in governments, civil society, and other sectors e.g. the business and trades union communities. Such access can be leveraged through the UN's roles as convener, broker, coordinator and facilitator at the country, regional and global levels: more is needed in this regard, particularly bringing countries together. The move towards UN system-wide coherence is perceived as holding great potential, allowing the UN to exert influence across the whole development agenda and beyond sectoral issues such as health. However, the UN cannot achieve everything on its own. Strong partnerships across all sectors will be needed. Helping build the capacity of partners (including women's organizations), supporting their mobilization, and strengthening community systems must be an essential part of a longer-term solution.

Gaps: the call for capacity building for the UN to adequately assist partners in the Framework was noted with a stress that this should be mandatory. The Action Framework went beyond access to services and information to include norms, values, and questions of legislation (such as the criminalization of HIV transmission and inheritance laws for women), in which the starting point must be a shared and common understanding of terminology and what is meant by "gender": the lack of attention to factors increasing men's and boys' risk of infection was also a concern in this regard. Although women are more vulnerable to gender-based discrimination and violence, men may also be affected differently by laws, legal system and economic factors – this should be recognized with a caveat that this Action Framework, whilst acknowledging such issues, would not address them specifically but rather focuses on women and girls. The implementation and

⁴ Greater Involvement of People living with or affected by HIV/AIDS.

funding of the Framework and efforts to monitor its success were also highlighted, in particular the impact of coordination as distinct from an individual action.

Partners: the UN should seek to expand and strengthen partnerships outside its typical sectors such as cultural and religious leaders, the legal and private sectors, parliamentarians and legislators, media, and other government ministries e.g. finance. The UN has an opportunity to leverage the comparative advantage and contacts of its individual agencies to engage with new partners and to increase cross fertilization of existing ones to strengthen their role as agents of change.

UN SUPPORT TO KEY STAKEHOLDERS

13. The fourth working group looked at the issue of the UN role in partnerships in the context of the Action Framework. The challenge at country level often does not appear to be the need for consensus on making national AIDS responses work for women and girls, but in the prioritization, resourcing and implementation of such responses. There was a need for strengthened accountability, particularly of political leaders (the capacity of partners to hold governments accountable, and the capacity of governments to convert planning priorities into budgeting). There is also a need to enhance partnerships on in issues where women are currently not fully engaged such as, on the impact of male circumcision on women and girls. The need for all partners to use common terminology was highlighted, as well as the importance of building communications strategies that are compelling and easy-to-understand.
14. Barriers to implementation include the need to partner for advocacy to translate data gathering into program planning (parliamentarians and grassroots), and as such research institutions need to be strengthened to create a strengthened localized evidence base on issues relating to women and girls – and, as noted above, beyond demographic and health data, inclusive of social, economic and anthropological information. It is not enough to map the epidemic but strategies and actions are needed to mitigate its impact and intensify action. Recognizing that the Action Framework is not a programmatic document it should, nevertheless, include an illustrative package (box) of interventions applicable at the country level.
15. Recognition was given to the existing UN partnerships on women, girls and AIDS, through the Global Coalition on Women and Girls, and inter-agency expert groups, but there remains a need for capacity building with other actors. Working through national AIDS authorities (which are already multi-stakeholder) the UN can play a key role in highlighting gaps in the representation of women (working on women's rights, sexual and reproductive health, and gender-based violence) in national AIDS councils, CCMs and other national fora.
16. Partnerships were also encouraged to provide greater support to networks of People Living with HIV (especially women living with HIV), NGOs with specific expertise in monitoring and evaluation in the context of gender and HIV/AIDS, legal boards for human rights issues (women lawyers associations, other professional associations), groups dealing with men and boys, and, those dealing with young women and girls.
17. The specific issue of the need to partner with bilaterals and recipient governments at the country level was also raised, and to align actions with international agreements such as the Accra and Paris Declarations. Embassies are often active

in donor committees/ forums and can play an important political role in advocating for enhanced attention to women and girls within the response to AIDS. Bilaterals can also play a role in supporting partners (governments and civil society) in creating data on a regional level to assist countries to better know their epidemic and assess their response. Partnership with the Global Fund and assisting countries in Fund processes to help advance funding opportunities for programming on women, girls and AIDS was also cited as a key role of the UN.

18. Finally the issue of monitoring and evaluation of the effect of partnerships was discussed, such as the realisation of support to countries to mobilize resources in the award of Global Fund grants.

MOVING FORWARD – NEXT STEPS

19. In responding to a question on what was needed to allow the UN to work better on gender and AIDS, UN partners emphasized that this Framework goes a long way in advancing UN work on women, girls and gender equality for UN Country Teams. It provides clear and simple guidance that enhances UN action at the country level; a framework to mobilize regional and global resources to support UN action in support of national actors; complements and builds positive synergies with the actions of other stakeholders; and, provides a platform for clear global agenda setting for partnerships and country action. The UN believed that such issues were encompassed in the Action Framework, allowing it to serve as a dynamic tool for the entire UN family at global, regional and country levels to enhance action on women and girls and AIDS. As such it would be liable to change over time to reflect emerging issues and best practice, such as the (potential) recommendations of the UNAIDS Second Independent Evaluation.
20. In preparing for the technical dialogues the Action Framework had been sent to the members of the UNAIDS Human Rights Reference Group and the UN Inter-Agency Expert Group on Women and Girls – many of whom participated in the dialogues – for written comment. Comments in writing were welcome from all group members and dialogue participants with a deadline of 5 June. These comments will be considered for incorporation in the text, along with the comments raised at the dialogues, and a revised text shared with all participants for final review.
21. The final issue for discussion at the dialogues – and on which no consensus was reached – was whether or not the Action Framework should be presented to the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board for endorsement. It was noted that the original Board decision point from the 23rd meeting in December 2008 was not explicit in requesting the Framework (inter-agency strategy) to be brought back and that such a decision would delay implementation of the Framework for at least six months to a year. Some delegates argued for the need to move from discussion to action on an urgent basis but others felt that the political endorsement of the Framework was necessary for its successful implementation. In conclusion the dialogues noted that the Programme Coordinating Board in June 2009 would receive an oral progress report on the production of the Action Framework and would then decide the matter.