

DELIVERING FOR THE WOMEN OF SOUTH ASIA

“More than 30 million people are today living with HIV. Globally, women now account for half of all infections”¹

The Context: Gender inequality and violations of women’s rights leave women and girls particularly susceptible, giving them less control over their bodies and their lives. Women and girls often have less information about HIV and fewer resources to take preventive measures. They face barriers in negotiating safer sex, including economic dependency and unequal power relations. Sexual violence, a widespread and brutal violation of women’s rights, exacerbates the risk of transmission. And while it is widely assumed that marriage provides protection from AIDS, evidence suggests that in parts of the world it can be a major HIV risk factor, especially for young women and girls. In many cases, HIV-positive women face stigma and exclusion, aggravated by their lack of rights. Women widowed by AIDS or found to be HIV-positive may face property disputes with in-laws. And regardless of whether they themselves are HIV-positive, women generally assume the burden of home-based care for others who are sick or dying, along with the orphans left behind.

“A recent socio-economic impact study in India shows that there is growing evidence of links between the spread of HIV/AIDS and denial of women’s rights to resources within the family such as inheritance, property and housing”²

UNIFEM in Action in South Asia:

1. **Positive Women’s Network in India (PWN+) – Their voices today are a crescendo:** Today, the Positive Women’s Network operates through 10 locations all over India, supported by human and financial resources provided by the Government, donors, private sector and UN agencies. The journey towards empowerment, which has been truly transformative, continues. Having empowered themselves, the women in the network, are now challenging structures and institutions, and questioning stereotyped definitions that have defined gender relations for too long. From a small self help support group they have emerged to be a highly visible and articulate advocate of the rights of the positive women locally and in regional and global HIV advocacy platforms and all this has been facilitated by UNIFEM through its support and capacity enhancement initiatives.

UNIFEM’s work on Male Responsibility – Using the patriarchal dividend to prevent HIV/AIDS among monogamous women: Working against patriarchy and not against men. This has been the thematic premise of UNIFEM’s work on male responsibility to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. UNIFEM’s current work on working with men to reduce the risk of HIV/AIDS is a natural progression of its past work related to violence against women. Over the years, the journey has moved beyond working with conventional partners like the police and judges, to exploring the interplay between masculinity, gender and violence and working with men in diverse settings. **At**

¹ http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/hiv_aids/

² Study by the National Council for Applied Economic Research supported by UNDP and NACO, 2005-2006

ICAAP – Meet Sujit Modak, Executive Member of Sathi Sangathan (Friends' Association) at the Satellite Meeting 'Men Can Change – Reducing the Burden on Women and Girls and their Vulnerabilities to HIV (August, 10 2009)

- 2. Living up to the mandate of strengthening women's agency in the UN's response to the decisions made at the Millennium Summit:** In India, UNIFEM has partnered with the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) to mainstream gender and HIV issues in one of its flagship programmes, which supports the formation of rural poor women's self help groups. In partnership with UNICEF and FHI, it has set up a HIV cell in MWCD. UNIFEM has actively engaged with the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) for incorporation of gender equality issues at the policy and programmatic levels in the National AIDS Control Programme.
- 3. Partnering with the largest employer in India, The Indian Railways – Towards a Gender Sensitive Response to HIV/AIDS:** Since 2002, in the first experiment of its kind UNIFEM adopted a laboratory approach to set up **Gender Empowerment Zones (GEZ)** in partnership with the South Central Railways of India. The project strengthened the capacity of the Indian Railways in gender sensitive counselling services in order to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS within the sector and also created awareness on gender and HIV/AIDS as a strategy to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in India and stop the violations of women's human rights that stem from discrimination and stigma.
- 4. The Gender and HIV Training Manual – UNIFEM responds to addressing capability poverty across the globe:** Written originally in English, today, it is available in 7 languages in different parts of the world. Over a 100 workshops using this tool have been conducted by various development partners in almost all parts of the globe. UNIFEM itself has used it in Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Kenya, India, Mexico and the Caribbean. The tools of the Manual have been adapted for other development issues like maternal mortality, reproductive child health and even abortion issues. In this sense, the methodology has stood the test of time and has remained contemporary.

UNIFEM has contributed to ensure political commitment towards gender and HIV/AIDS. UNIFEM's efforts in conjunction with UNDP have led to the development of gender policy guidelines for the National HIV/Aids Programme in India.

Gender and HIV scans have been undertaken in Nepal and Pakistan. UNIFEM Pakistan has developed an Action Plan for supporting the National Aids Control Programme and contributes to the Joint UNAIDS Team (JUNTA) to address gender equality concerns in the national response to prevent the further spread of HIV and AIDS.