

## 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women

### Informal panel

#### “The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in

#### I. Introduction

In accordance with the methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women (ECSOC resolution 2006/9), the Division for the Advancement of Women will organize a panel event in the margins of each annual session to enable a preliminary discussion on the priority theme of the subsequent session. During fifty-second session of the Commission (25 February to 7 March 2008), a panel discussion on “The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS” will be organized in preparation for the Commission’s session in 2009.

#### II. Background

The Beijing Declaration emphasized that equal sharing of responsibilities and a harmonious partnership between women and men were critical to their well-being and that of their families as well as to the consolidation of democracy (para. 15). In the Beijing Platform for Action the issue of unequal division of labour and responsibilities were addressed within the context of the critical areas of concern on Women and poverty

<sup>1</sup>, Education and training<sup>2</sup>, Women and health<sup>3</sup>, Women and the economy<sup>4</sup>, and Women in power and decision-making<sup>5</sup>. It was noted that women bear a disproportionate burden, attempting to manage household consumption and production under conditions of increasing scarcity because of the gender division of labour and household responsibilities; girls and young women are expected to manage both educational and domestic responsibilities, often resulting in poor scholastic performance and early drop-out from the educational system; lack of access to productive resources and inadequate sharing of family responsibilities, combined with a lack of or insufficient services such as child care, continue to restrict employment, economic, professional and other opportunities and mobility for women; women’s unremunerated (unpaid) work is undervalued and under-recorded; and the unequal division of labour and responsibilities within households limits women's potential to find the time and develop the skills required for participation in decision-making in wider public forums.

The Platform notes that a more equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men not only provides a better quality of life for women and their daughters but also enhances their opportunities to shape and design public policy, practice and expenditure so that their interests may be recognized and addressed.<sup>6</sup> The Platform called for the adoption of policies to ensure the appropriate protection of labour laws and social security benefits for part-time, temporary, seasonal and home-based workers; and the promotion of career development based on work conditions that harmonize work and family responsibilities (179 a). It also called on

Governments to ensure through legislation, incentives and/or encouragement, opportunities for women and men to take job-protected parental leave and to have parental benefits; promote the equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women, including through appropriate legislation, incentives and/or encouragement, and also promote the facilitation of breast-feeding for working mothers (179 c).

It was emphasized in the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly that the changing context of gender relations, as well as the discussion on gender equality, has led to an increased reassessment of gender roles. This had further encouraged discussion of the roles and responsibilities of women and men working together towards gender equality and the need for changing those stereot

having to provide care and/or economic support for those infected with HIV/AIDS or affected by the pandemic (51/1, paragraph 31).

The agreed conclusions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child adopted by the Commission in 2007 urged Governments to Identify and address the needs of girls heading households, including in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, for, inter alia, protection, access to financial resources, access to health care and support services, including affordable HIV/AIDS treatment, and for opportunities to continue their education, with particular attention to orphans

such policies have, however, paradoxically been mainly applied to women, thus maintaining the stereotype that the responsibility for caring lies solely with women. For example, in some countries parental leave is only available to women as "maternal leave". Such "family friendly" policies may actually reinforce the existing gender division of labour

What types of **policies and programmes, including family-friendly policies and programmes**, have been developed and effectively implemented **in the context of the labour market** to ensure equal sharing of domestic and caregiving responsibilities between women and men? Has there been any evaluation of family-friendly policies to ensure that the gender division of labour is not inadvertently reinforced?

What innovations – for example in legislation, advocacy, policies, programmes and capacity-building, have been introduced in relation to **parental leave to ensure more active participation of men in caring roles**? What have been the impacts? What challenges remain in this area?

What policies and programmes have been put in place to **increase access of both women and men to care support services** to allow them to access education and training and employment opportunities and participate in decision-making processes?

What types of initiatives have been taken at national level to promote **equal sharing of caregiving between women and men in the context of HIV/AIDS**? What has been the impact of these efforts? What roles have men and boys played to share the responsibilities placed on women and girls to care for HIV/AIDS patients within the home?

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<sup>1</sup> Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 50

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, paragraph 71

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, paragraph 89

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, paragraph 164

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, paragraph 185

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, paragraph 185

<sup>7</sup> General Assembly resolution S-23/3 on “Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action”, paragraph 47

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, paragraph 47

<sup>9</sup> Agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on “The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality”, E/2004/11, paragraphs 3 and 6 9 (c)

<sup>10</sup> United Nations. 2001.