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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS

Statement submitted by World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2009/1.



Statement*

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts believes that the girl child must be at the centre of all efforts to combat gender inequalities and to ensure equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV and AIDS.

Unequal sharing of responsibilities in care-giving and in the context with HIV/AIDS

As a result of gender stereotypes and cultural norms women and girls bear a disproportionate share of paid domestic work and caring responsibilities across all cultures and levels of development. But the differences in the burden on women and girls across geographic locations are striking.

Girls who are given a disproportionate share of household and caring responsibilities at an early age are further limited by lack of access to education that would prepare them for working opportunities outside of the home and in the public sphere more generally.

While there is no doubt that care-giving also conveys rewards – it has huge costs for girls and women such as time, energy and potential lack of secure employment, reduced or no access to social protection benefits, high risk of poverty, and lack of legal status, organisation and voice.

It has been estimated that globally, women and girls provide up to 90 per cent of the care generated by HIV and AIDS but receive little or no training or support and face multiple sources of difficulty and discrimination. In many cases, older daughters assume the full responsibility for the household. In some cases, these girl child care givers also suffer from HIV/AIDS, which increases their vulnerability to discrimination and violence.

Vulnerability to HIV infections

Gender roles and imbalances in responsibilities are increasingly recognised as one of the fundamental forces driving the rapid spread of HIV and exacerbating the impact of AIDS.

Girls and young women are particularly vulnerable. There is increasing evidence that abuses of the human rights of girls, especially through sexual violence and other sexual abuse committed by men, contribute directly to the disparity in infection and mortality associated with HIV/AIDS. The practice of having sex with a virgin to “cure” HIV still exists and girl children are all too often unable to protect themselves from unwanted sexual activity. They are also vulnerable due to early marriage to much older men.

The threat of violence and the fear of abandonment are significant barriers for women who have to negotiate condom use, discuss fidelity with their partners, or leave a relationship that they perceive to be risky.

* Issued without formal editing.

Prevention programmes reach less than one in five people who need them, with barriers to access and use of programmes arising from similar imbalances in gender equality and economic power and forms of cultural resistance that lead to risk of HIV infection.

Inequalities on the labour market

Traditional gender roles and stereotypes often narrowly define the division of labour between women and men, and girls and boys in both the private and public spheres. The male breadwinner model is pervasive and affects, for example, the organisation of work, occupational hierarchies and salary levels. Young girls remain particularly disadvantaged as a result of gender development processes that marginalize them from job opportunities.

More women throughout the world are involved in paid work, but there has been very little re-distribution of their unpaid caring and other household responsibilities. While the numbers of female-headed households are growing, such households typically run a higher risk of poverty than those headed by men.

Lack of equal access to gender sensitive education and training

As a result of cultural traditions and social norms that perpetuate stereotypical behaviour which discriminates against women and girls, gender inequality and discrimination continues to be pervasive. In many parts of the world, educating girls is still viewed as a wasted investment. Even when girls go to school, discriminatory attitudes prevail. School curricula, policies and programs too often reinforce existing social roles and gender stereotypes and in too many instances, girls are still subjected to harassment and abuse by classmates and teachers.

Lack of political empowerment and participation in decision-making

The inequalities in the sharing of responsibilities can be further linked to the realm of political power and decision-making. Women have a more limited presence in representative and public decision-making spaces and positions, compared with men. As of June 2008, for example, women's share of seats in national parliaments was only 18.4 per cent.

Women also tend to be more heavily involved in informal domains of activity or those that have less formal power, for example, in community and civil society organisations, and at local and regional rather than national or international levels, and when involved they are more often committee member rather than chairperson.

WAGGGS calls on the United Nations, Governments and civil society to promote gender equality with special reference to equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV and AIDS:

- Promoting education, including non-formal education, for the girl child and society at large to transform attitudes, prevailing norms and gender stereotypes

Ensuring access to education is one of the most powerful responses to the perpetuation of gender-based norms and behaviours that maintain the unequal division of responsibilities between women and men, and girls and boys. Norms as well as values can provide fertile ground to grow gender stereotypes but they can also be at the basis of an educational programme to challenge and change gender stereotypes, like for example in a non-formal values-based setting.

Non-formal, values-based education provides girls and young women with leadership and life skills to tackle gender inequalities. Non-formal education uses role models, peer education and learning by doing to enable girls and young women to discover their full potential and the confidence to engage fully with the world.

- Promoting sexual reproductive health education and HIV and AIDS prevention

Increasing efforts to eliminate gender inequality is a necessary starting point towards a secure environment for young women to take responsible decisions on their reproductive health. To prevent the continuous spread of HIV infections, young people need to have access to comprehensive, objective, non-biased, gender and youth-specific information on HIV and AIDS and to effective methods for protection (such as condoms) as well as supporting organizations involved in promoting HIV and AIDS education, especially for girls and young women.

- Promoting the participation, visibility and empowerment of girls and women

Empowerment requires self knowledge and skills (for example, analysis, organisation, and the ability to make choices), but also a belief in oneself and a sense of self-worth, understanding of the right to control one's life and a belief in one's ability to achieve this and other goals.

Effective strategies to achieve gender equality must include the social, political and economic empowerment of girls through education programmes and job training to prepare them for their critical roles in their families and communities.¹ Curricula need to be rights-based, gender sensitive and empowering. Promotion of gender-sensitive mentoring and training with appropriate materials and methods from the earliest years will assure that the girl child will become an empowered woman.

- Strengthening the role of civil society and organisations for girls' participation and empowerment

The skills, ideas and energy of all girls, especially those from disadvantaged groups, are vital for the full attainment of gender equality. Civil society plays a vital role to ensure that girls have the opportunity to be heard and that their views are valued and incorporated into discussions and decisions, particularly when affecting their lives.

¹ The fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women clearly recognized the important role that education, both formal and non-formal, plays in ending discrimination against the girl child. The fifty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women also noted the need to strengthen education as well as health and social services.

How WAGGGS is addressing the issues:

WAGGGS mission is to enable girls and young women to discover their fullest potential as responsible citizens of the world. As the voice of 10 million girls and young women WAGGGS has identified equal access to education and empowerment of girls and young women as well as the fight against HIV and AIDS as priority issues on which to take a stand and speak out in order to achieve gender equality

- WAGGGS believes that education and empowerment of young people in a formal and non-formal setting is a key approach to challenging gender stereotypes, with special attention paid to the needs of girls and young women.
- WAGGGS ensures girls' and young women's empowerment throughout the organization with policies on the Education of Young Women and Girls, Young Women in Decision-making and through educational programmes for grass-root level on Human and Children's Rights ('Our Rights, Our Responsibilities') and girls' health.
- Leadership development for girls and young women is at the core of our Movement and our strategic direction. WAGGGS is currently developing the WAGGGS Leadership Development Programme (WLDP), which consists of 8 modules, each covering a topic area that enhances leadership skills and personal growth.
- WAGGGS' new Global Action Theme *Girls worldwide say "together we can change our world"* affirms WAGGGS' commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). WAGGGS will produce resource materials to support its Member Organizations as they work with the MDGs and will run through all of WAGGGS' work, including projects, events and advocacy for girls and young women.
- WAGGGS published in 2003, together with other global youth organisations and UNICEF, 'A Call to Action: Children & young people in decision-making.' This call to action underlines that inequalities faced by girls and young women, which prevent their participation, need to be overcome.
- WAGGGS developed, in partnership with UNAIDS, an HIV prevention training module aimed at raising levels of knowledge about HIV prevention as well as increasing WAGGGS' capacity to train girls and young women as peer educators on HIV prevention and stigma reduction.
- Girl Guides and Girl Scouts can earn the AIDS Badge by undertaking activities in three areas of the badge's curriculum: fighting fear, shame and injustice; prevention through change in behaviour; and care and support for people living with HIV and AIDS.
- WAGGGS published 'HIV and AIDS Fighting Ignorance and Fear', which showcases best practice examples of HIV and AIDS projects of Member Organizations in the areas of education, awareness raising and care and support.