ANNEX 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Putting Gender Back into the Picture

The Task Force endorses a gendered approach to understanding the problems of women and girls. This approach has borrowed heavily from the work of Geeta Rao Gupta. Gupta's "Conceptual Framework for Assessing HIV/AIDS programmes"[117] forms the basis of much of the Task Force's thinking as well as its recommendations. Gupta suggests that existing HIV/AIDS programmes fall into five broad categories:

First, many programmes focus on *stereotypes* of women and men. These programmes promote images of men as forceful and powerful (for example, condom promotion focusing on male assertiveness),[118] while women are portrayed as 'powerless victims'. They often depict sex workers as a source of infection, and feature messages such as "good girls wait to have sex". Such images and messages reaffirm the idea that men are active in sexual relationships and women are passive and confirm stereotypes that prevent women and girls from asking questions or speaking out about their sexuality. They often also (incorrectly) identify marginalised groups (such as sex workers or truck drivers) as the driving force behind the spread of the virus. Stereotypical programmes also often focus on women and men from marginalised communities and portray them in a negative (often racist or ethnically unacceptable) light.

The second type of programmatic response is referred to as *gender-neutral*. These programmes are aimed at the general population and do not distinguish between the different needs of women and men. These types of programmes include messages such as 'Abstain, Be faithful or use a Condom' ("ABC"). While these programmes do not seek deliberately to exclude women, they are often based on research and messages that have been tested on men, or work better for men. Gupta suggests that a gender-neutral approach 'does no harm.' On the other Hand, Tallis[119] argues that they are often harmful and need to be challenged. This is largely because the bulk of AIDS programmes fall into this category. This means that most of what women and girls hear and learn about HIV/AIDS through peer education, or through the mass media, does not wholly apply to them. This has the overall effect of leaving women and girls under-equipped to protect themselves against HIV infection.

The third category examines *gender-sensitive* programming. Gender-sensitive approaches respond to the different needs and constraints of individuals based on their gender and sexuality. Many current AIDS programmes operate at this level, where women's practical needs are identified and attempts are made to meet those needs through service delivery. Examples of gender-sensitive programmes would include those that provide the female condom or focus on income generation or increasing women's access to health services. Other types of gender-sensitive initiatives work with men by providing education that is based on their roles as decision makers in their relationships with women. Such programmes often help men to look at how they can make better, safer decisions to protect themselves, their female partners and their children. However, they do so within the paradigm of men's roles as providers and heads of the household.

Traditionally, gender-sensitive programmes also include an element of empowerment, ensuring that women are part of project decision-making structures, and providing training that helps women to build assertiveness and skills, with an emphasis on participation. Gender-sensitive programmes impact on the immediate lives of women, but seldom directly challenge the gender status quo. In this regard, they fail because they do not question men's ability to hold decision-making power and use their masculinity to control the sexuality and rights of their partners.

While Gupta includes *empowerment* as a particular category of programmes, Tallis suggests that empowerment can be seen as an end in itself, as well as a means to an end – i.e. the transformation of gendered power relations. When women and men are empowered, they are able to take the necessary actions at various different levels – personal, group/collective, 'community,' institutional and broader societal – to confront, address and shift the inequality within gender power relations.

The last category of programmes in Gupta's model is the *transformational* approach, the key objective of which is to transform gender relations between women and men so that they are equitable. Gupta argues

that transformational programmes focus on radical change at the personal, relationship (including the redefinition of heterosexual relations), community and societal levels. Transformational programmes address the systems, mechanisms, policies and practices that are needed to support such genuine change.

Transformational approaches include changing laws such as those governing property and inheritance, domestic violence and marital rape, changing the attitudes of men and women about male and female behaviour, and empowering women to access credit, employment and other opportunities for broader development.

Is Gender Transformation Possible?
Transforming society in order to realise the rights of women and men to healthy and productive lives is a long-term goal. Within many NGOs, there is contention about whether HIV/AIDS programmes should focus only on being gender-sensitive, or whether they should attempt to challenge the status quo and ensure that women and men achieve equity and equality.[120]

For governments and for the United Nations, there can be no debate. The right to equality has been enshrined in international law since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Additional rights have been guaranteed by such instruments as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). These rights form the basis of the commitments made by governments in the Declaration of Commitment of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS in 2001. The Declaration states:

> *"Empowering women is essential for reducing vulnerability.*
> By 2003, … have in place in all countries strategies, policies and programmes that identify and begin to address those factors that make individuals particularly vulnerable to infection including…. poverty, lack of empowerment of women, lack of education, social excusion, illiteracy, discrimination, lack of information and/or commodities for self-protection, and all types of sexual exploitation…. Such strategies, policies and programmes should address the gender dimension of the epidemic, specify the action that will be taken to address vulnerability and set targets for achievement."

It is on the basis of these instruments that the Task Force makes its recommendations. The Task Force recognises that the challenges facing women and girls are not simply about how best to programme for their needs. They are fundamentally about their human rights. Using a human rights-based approach has allowed activists and governments alike to use widely respected instruments to advocate for the human rights of people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. It has placed clear obligations on governments to respect, protect and fulfil these rights. And it has ensured that women, girls, men and boys have a say in decision-making, ensuring more strategic, structural interventions.

MOVING FORWARD
Throughout this report, the Task Force highlights the necessity of finding realistic strategies that address the twin challenges of HIV/AIDS and gender inequality. The focus of the report is informed by an analysis that suggests that there are several levels on which all concerned actors should be working. The first is the personal level of self-esteem and confidence for women and girls, and respect and self-awareness for men and boys. The second level involves the formulation of laws and policies that are non-discriminatory. The third level focuses on the provision of accessible primary and sexual and reproductive health services for all women and men.

As this report uncovers the findings of the regional assessment, the focus is on ensuring that each of these levels is appropriately addressed. At the same time, the report points to critical macro issues that must be addressed if the needs of women and girls are to be met in the midst of the crisis wrought by AIDS.