THE INTERSECTION between VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS and HIV/AIDS

A Cutting-Edge Learning Initiative

There is an increasing amount of work being conducted on violence against women and girls and its multi-faceted intersection with HIV/AIDS. A growing body of evidence is demonstrating that violence against women and girls can increase vulnerability to HIV. For example, by impeding the ability to negotiate safe sex. Violence against women and girls can also prevent access to necessary HIV treatment, care and prevention services. Women and girls living with HIV can also be subject to an increased risk of physical, psychological and economic violence as a result of related stigma and discrimination. The UN Trust Fund, with generous support from Johnson & Johnson, is contributing to this work through the establishment of a cutting-edge learning initiative: a group of seven projects (see profiles on page 5) have been brought together to determine effective practices in programming to address the intersection between violence against women and girls and HIV/AIDS. The initiative places particular emphasis on project monitoring and evaluation to generate evidence from experiences across the seven projects that can promote replication and up-scaling. To this end, the seven grantees of the UN Trust Fund have received specialized technical assistance for the development of their baseline studies, selection of indicators, and development of monitoring and evaluation plans, including through two capacity development workshops in 2007 and 2008. During 2009, the projects have been focusing on implementation, with the UN Trust Fund providing individual tailored support to each project, including through site visits. A final convening of the group will take place in 2010, focusing on project evaluations and common emerging themes on the intersection.

Government of Botswana Supports Promising Approach to Reach Communities

Just outside of Botswana’s capital, Gaborone, the community of Molepolole is seeing change: during a customary gathering (Kgotla meeting), a male chief, trained by the Women’s Affairs Department on HIV/AIDS and Violence against Women, encouraged women to participate in the discussions for the first time. Such training is part of the Government-led project which aims to contribute to the elimination of domestic violence and the reduction of the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls. The project is focused on enhancing the capacity of service providers and local authorities to establish an integrated referral system addressing the intersection between violence against women and HIV/AIDS.

As part of the visit, the team met with the Kweneng District Gender Committee, a group established to implement community mobilization activities in Molepolole, one of the two pilot sites. The approach is based on the concept of engaging a group from within the community to advise the Development Committees and other community structures on the various interventions, events and activities geared towards the promotion of gender equality and to mobilize their community, this approach having evolved as implementation activities progressed. The Women’s Affairs Department has strategically engaged influential figures including Councilors, and community leaders (Chiefs) into the Gender Committee, and these are successfully cascading messages down to the wider community. The Gender Committees are designed so as to ensure project sustainability; through engaging members who, by their very position in the community, have a vested interest and responsibility to maintain Gender Committees beyond the life of the project. Initial observations indicate that the activities of the Gender Committee are influencing the behavior of those with leadership positions in the community. The Women’s Affairs Department is continuing to reinforce community-level activities and are moving forth with activities to establish a national referral mechanism together with the Police, Ministry of Health, and Department of Social Services.
Mutapola Framework Inspires ‘Change Champions’ in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the Civil Resource Development and Documentation Center, a Nigerian NGO, is seeking to reduce the level of violence against women by training health, law enforcement and judicial officials, media and other stakeholders to ensure women’s ability to access their rights. The ‘Mutapola Framework’, an appropriate capacity building and empowerment package, aims to develop stakeholders‘ understanding of the issues and needs of women living with HIV/AIDS and the connection of HIV/AIDS with violence, and to mobilize communities accordingly. The Framework has been a key factor in the changes the intervention has brought about thus far. Participating traditional male leaders are taking it upon themselves to act as ‘change champions’ in their own communities by conducting sessions on HIV/AIDS and violence against women. Women living with HIV/AIDS are demonstrating changes in attitudes regarding the recognition of their own rights, compared to those who have attended training with other agencies. This change is complemented on the supply-side with legal and health worker participants expressing a need to work collaboratively on both HIV/AIDS and violence against women in an integrated manner. Women in the community are already seeing results, with a reported reduction in discrimination, particularly when seeking services.

Community Members Come Together to Stop Child Sexual Abuse in Trinidad and Tobago

The Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS), University of the West Indies, is conducting an in-depth action research project, focused on victims of child sexual abuse and the link to HIV/AIDS. The project aims to gain a comprehensive overview of child sexual abuse, to sensitize stakeholders and develop their related capacity. Based on the research component of the project, IGDS has developed a multi-disciplinary community-based pilot intervention. Community participation is an integral part of the project with established ‘community teams’ engaged in a cyclical process of planning, implementation, observation, reflection, evaluation and then re-planning. This has proved vital in the ongoing planning process where communities emphasized the importance of being trained on building their own skills to ensure the continuation of activities beyond the life of the project. A series of tailored skills-building workshops have thus been integrated into community action plans. The research study on ‘Service Provision in Trinidad and Tobago’ will be available shortly, and community implementation activities began in May 2009.

Partnerships in Dominican Republic Set to Address HIV/AIDS and Violence against Women

La Colectiva Mujer y Salud—a local women’s organization—is implementing a project in five border provinces in the Dominican Republic. The overall goal of the program is to reduce both the incidence of violence against women and of HIV/AIDS by creating a strong, well-trained network of service providers in both the health and judicial sector. La Colectiva has been successful in building a range of fruitful partnerships; for example, the project has secured agreements with the regional Attorney General’s Office and with the National Women Secretariat’s ‘No Violence Department’, to integrate HIV/AIDS in the existing data collection mechanism on domestic violence, and are codifying violence according to levels of severity to facilitate civil servants recording of cases. In parallel, outreach activities and capacity development of journalists are beginning to pay off, with the week of activism celebrating AIDS day in Dominican Republic including a focus on the intersection between HIV/AIDS and violence against women.
Communities Mobilized by Radio Program in Nepal

‘It is my right to know things’ says Lalita Rawat, (pictured above). This member of a Radio Listening Group in Kachili Dang explains how through a radio program she came to understand her rights and started participating in related training sessions. This is part of a project implemented by Equal Access—a Nepalese NGO—to educate the public and stimulate discussion on HIV/AIDS and violence against women by using radio to bring the voices of marginalized women to the fore, complementing that with the training of peer educators who are conducting outreach and advocacy activities with women’s groups. Together, the legal literacy training and Radio Programs are mobilizing community members to actively participate in raising awareness on issues of HIV/AIDS and violence against women in their communities. As a result, numerous activities are being held in the target communities including street theater and song competitions. Padma Bhandari (pictured right), a listener from Jarbuta VDC, was unaware of her rights on violence or HIV/AIDS—and less still about their connection. Now she explains that she is able to ‘convince her family of the benefits of women leaving the home and becoming involved in related public matters’. Equal Access’ partners are furthermore reporting an increase in ‘legal service-seeking behavior’ as a direct result of the project’s activities.

In Thailand, Home-visits Tackle the HIV/AIDS and Violence against Women Head-on

The Raks Thai Foundation - a Thai NGO—is implementing a project in the provinces of Trad and Chiang Mai in eastern and northern Thailand, using a network of peer educators who work to strengthen support groups of women living with HIV/AIDS, and partnering with agencies at the district and provincial level to advocate for systemic change at the Ministerial level. Project activities thus far have shed light on the inextricable link between HIV/AIDS and violence; recognizing the challenges faced by HIV-positive women through their economic dependency on their partners, leaving them little negotiating power — particularly with regard to sexual issues. Raks Thai’s established referral system is working effectively through multidisciplinary committees to respond to complicated cases of HIV-positive women facing violence. Peer group leaders trained by the project are conducting home-visits to identified cases, confirming that the majority are experiencing sexual, domestic and verbal violence, and stigma and discrimination. With over 100 visits having been conducted in Trad alone, positive-women are receiving related counseling and referral to government and local administration socio-economic support.

Breakthrough Reports Increased Access to Legal Services

Across three states in India, Breakthrough—an international human rights organization—is using a dual strategy of drawing attention to women’s rights through mass media, including acclaimed campaign ‘Bell Bajao!’ (‘Ring the Bell’), whilst simultaneously developing the leadership of youth and community activists from a range of backgrounds to become agents for social change. Breakthrough is building the capacity of its local partners on issues of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS, including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005. In turn, participants are training community members including HIV-positive women as well as vulnerable and marginalized sections of the community, with a cumulative reach of over 37,000 individuals to date. Breakthrough has secured agreements with local partners who are providing training to ensure project sustainability through continuous outreach. Activities are resulting in an increase in the number of cases of violence being reported by women as well as an increase in access to services provided by Breakthrough’s partners. Continued on page 4
Continued from page 3
For example, in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, and in Dakshin, Kannada, Breakthrough has reported a 10% increase in access to services by partners. The services provided by Breakthrough’s partners include legal aid, counseling, help lines and health care. Breakthrough’s community mobilization efforts have resulted in community members including women facing violence and HIV positive women accessing these services. Breakthrough’s work on the ground has further more been instrumental to the success of the ‘Bell Bajao!’ campaign, a 360 media campaign focusing on an inclusive strategy which urges society—particularly men—to support women in living violence-free lives, and on understanding the intersection to HIV/AIDS, including TV and radio spots, press advertisements, and online campaign. Data from media agency partner Mindshare has shown a reach of 124 million people between January and April this year. The Campaign’s mobile video vans are also proving successful in reinforcing partnerships with grassroots organizations and building community mobilization, travelling through 6 districts and reaching over 2.7 million people so far. In particular, messaging on the intersection between HIV/AIDS and domestic violence is proving successful, with a recent evaluation showing increased related knowledge amongst the community, with individuals demonstrating a willingness to take related action. Breakthrough’s success with partnerships extends across government, with the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare, making possible the nationwide airing of the TV campaign; and with the private sector, Ogilvy and Mather having created the ‘Bell Bajao!’ campaign pro bono, scooping a Gold at the Gaafest Abbys for ‘Best Integrated Campaign’ in April this year.

UN Trust Fund’s Special Window on HIV/AIDS
Between 2005 and 2007, the UN Trust Fund’s Special Window on HIV/AIDS made grants to interventions aiming to reduce violence against women and girls and its consequent risks to HIV/AIDS, and to reduce violence that women and girls living with HIV face as a result of stigma and discrimination; thus enabling the realization of rights including access to services. In addition to the seven grantees which form part of the featured learning initiative, the UN Trust Fund has supported over 20 additional projects focusing on the intersection between violence against women and girls and HIV/AIDS. Projects under this wider window are coming to a close, and their results and lessons will serve to enrich the experience of the seven grantees in this group. Highlights from one such project from this ‘window’ are featured below:

DR Congo: Multi-sectoral Model Incorporated into National HIV/AIDS Strategy
Local NGO RENAFED implemented a project aiming to reduce the impact of the twin pandemics in Eastern DRC until March 2009. It adopted a holistic approach, incorporating medical, psychosocial, economic and judicial support. Of the 1,500 victims of violence who benefited from the project, 27% tested HIV-positive through the VCT services provided by the six ‘drop-in’ centers established by the project. In parallel to the training provided to key stakeholders and to 300 coordinators from local NGOs on the intersection between HIV/AIDS and VAW; RENAFED has contributed to the economic empowerment of victims using a micro-credit scheme; project beneficiary Chantal recounts: ‘I considered myself already dead [...] without hope, abandoned. RENAFED gave me my life back, taught me to work. Now I buy and sell goats, I make money and save, I am independent’. RENAFED’s multi-sectoral model has been incorporated into the National HIV/AIDS Strategy 2010-2014.
The following provides a profile of each of the seven grantees included in this learning initiative on the intersection between HIV/AIDS and Violence against Women. Grantees have been grouped to facilitate cross-case comparisons, and are presented accordingly:

‘Understanding and Influencing Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Men and Women’
Country: India
Implementing Organization: Breakthrough
Project Title: ‘At the Intersection of Gender-Based Violence – Empowering Women Against HIV/AIDS and the Stigma and Discrimination Resulting from Infection’
Grant: USD 300,000
Contact: Sonali Khan, Sonali@breakthrough.tv

Country: Nepal
Implementing Organization: Equal Access
Project Title: ‘A grassroots call to action to end stigma and discrimination on Violence against Women and HIV/AIDS using the voices of affected women’
Grant: USD 200,000
Contact: Nirmal Rijal, nrjal@equalaccess.org

Country: Thailand
Implementing Organization: Raks Thai Foundation
Project Title: ‘Supporting HIV-affected women to reduce and respond to sexual violence’
Grant: USD 300,000
Contact: Sunee Talawat, stalawat@hotmail.com

‘Improving Services and Reducing Barriers to Support and Treatment’
Country: Nigeria
Implementing Organization: Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre (CIRDDOC)
Project Title: ‘Bridges to End Gender Based Violence As Strategy for HIV/AIDS Prevention & Stigma Reduction’
Grant: USD 300,000
Contact: Oby Nwankwo, nwankwooby@yahoo.com

Country: Dominican Republic
Implementing Organization: Colectiva Mujer y Salud
Project Title: ‘Reducing the Risk and Vulnerability of Women to HIV/AIDS and Violence on the Dominican-Haitian Border’
Grant: USD 300,000
Contact: Sergia Galvan, sergiagalvan@hotmail.com

Country: Botswana
Implementing Organization: Women’s Affairs Department, Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, Government of Botswana
Project Title: ‘Reducing the Twin Pandemics of Violence against Women and HIV/AIDS’
Grant: USD 300,000
Contact: Kealeboga Kelly kdambuza@yahoo.com

‘Laying the Foundations – The Contribution of Research’
Country: Trinidad and Tobago
Implementing Organization: Institute of Gender and Development Studies
Project Title: ‘Breaking the silence: Child Sexual Abuse and HIV Infection: A Multi-Sectoral Intervention’
Grant: USD 200,000
Contact: Tisha Nickenig, Tisha, Nickenig@sta.uwi.edu

Baseline Study Findings: Emerging Themes on the Intersection between Violence against Women & Girls and HIV/AIDS

‘Understanding and Influencing Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Men and Women’: Breakthrough, Equal Access, Raks Thai Foundation

• Making the links between violence against women and HIV/AIDS: Respondents in all studies recognized that HIV-positive women can, and do face the risk of stigma and discrimination, although they would not necessarily categorize this as violence against women per se.

• Lack of knowledge on legal framework: In practice, legal recourse was very rarely used in addressing violence, indicating that there are substantial barriers to be overcome.

• Uneven knowledge about HIV/AIDS: Knowledge about HIV/AIDS and means of transmission and prevention varies substantially, not only between but also within countries, although in general it is widely understood that HIV is not transmitted through casual contact.

• Tolerant attitudes regarding physical violence: In all three studies, despite stated negative views about violence against women it appears that even physical forms of violence are still widely tolerated.

‘Improving Services and Reducing Barriers to Support and Treatment’: Civil Resource Development and Documentation Center, Colectiva Mujer y Salud, and the Women’s Affairs Department, Government of Botswana.

• Poor understanding of the intersection: All three studies demonstrated a poor understanding of the intersection of HIV/AIDS and violence against women, outside of the most obvious case of the risk of HIV infection through sexual assault.

• Poor understanding of existing laws: The legal framework in each country is significantly different, but even in cases where there are existing laws, they are poorly understood and not consistently applied in service provision.

• Lack of/poor understanding of policies and procedures in the health and judicial sectors: Service providers in the judicial sector lack consistent policies and procedures for addressing HIV/AIDS risk when dealing with victims of violence.

‘Laying the Foundations – The Contribution of Research’: Institute of Gender and Development Studies

• Lack of policy and procedures for addressing violence against women and its intersection with HIV/AIDS: Consistent with the findings across the rest of the Cohort, a distinct lack of policies and procedures were identified amongst related service providers to address violence, and less still its intersection with HIV/AIDS.

A detailed Brief outlining the key findings of the baseline studies across the Cohort will be available from the UN Trust Fund end July; please contact emilie.rees-smith@unifem.org for further details.
“Through the UN Trust Fund, Governments can give life to a universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: Violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable. As part of my campaign to end violence against women, I encourage all member states to pledge their support.” - Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women, Fifty-second session, 25th February, 2008

The UN Trust Fund is the only multilateral mechanism that channels resources and expertise exclusively in support of regional, country and local-level initiatives to implement laws, policies and programs to end violence against women and girls. It is managed by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) on behalf of the UN Trust Fund. The Fund awards grants through an open, merit-based competitive review process that places a premium on innovative and quality programming. Since its establishment by the General Assembly in 1996, the Fund has supported 291 initiatives in 119 countries and territories with more than US$ 44 million in grants. Its grantees – governments, non-governmental organizations and UN Country Teams – have engaged diverse actors such as women’s, men’s and youth groups, religious and traditional leaders, human rights organizations and the media in action to stop violence against women and girls.

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“In my country, we have known for years that violence against women is fuelling the AIDS epidemic. With support from the UN Trust Fund, the Government is charting new ground in keeping women and girls free from abuse and HIV” - Marty I. Legwaila, former-Director, Women’s Affairs Department, Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, Botswana