SUMMARY OF THE FSN FORUM DISCUSSION No. 36
GENDER AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF VULNERABILITY TO FOOD SECURITY IN HIV/AIDS CONTEXT
FROM 4 JUNE TO 30 JUNE 2009

Proceedings available at:
http://km.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fsn/docs/PROCEEDINGS_Gender_FS_HIV.doc

I. OPINIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Arguing that HIV/AIDS is not primarily a health problem, but also a socio-cultural problem, the question for discussion was how cultural systems influence gender roles, women's sexuality, rural livelihoods, and food and nutrition security, in a HIV/AIDS context. Participants give opinion on the following main issues:

- Women have an important role in household Food Security and Nutrition. They traditionally take the onus of feeding children and the family. Countries and regions where female literacy is low can see higher prevalence of under-nutrition among children (S. Shatak, R. M. Elzaki, M. Maiga)

- Female-headed households increase in both Africa and Asia, when males are affected by HIV/AIDS or have migrated to cities or towns in search of livelihoods. In such cases, access to credit and other inputs of production as well as technology by females engaged in agriculture or farming can determine the level of household food and nutrition security (S. Ghatak).

- Women vulnerability to Food Insecurity is aggravated by inheritance practices. Studies concerning the social roles of widows in African societies have predominantly highlighted their marginality and insecurity in terms of property ownership and economic livelihoods (E. Cooper).

Country cases on the cultural dimensions of women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS

- **The case of Cote d'Ivoire** (M. Maiga): kinship systems like matrilinearity and patrilinearity motivate and increase women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and its impacts on food and nutrition security.
  According to the natives' kinship system, kings and chiefs come from the mother side. This kinship system imposes strongly on women to get children for protecting the sustainability of kingship and chieftaincy. This system exposes women to a sexual freedom (several partners) before getting married, which increases their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.
  In the patrilineal system, girls and women are not allowed to decide about their sexual life, they are most of the time sexually passive. Women most of the times don't ask for safe sex. They accept to risk their life, in respect for their culture. In sum, the matrilineal and patrilineal systems lead to a strong feminization of HIV/AIDS in both natives and migrants communities.

- **The case of India** (S. Ghatak): It is generally perceived by patriarchal societies that women are the carriers of HIV/ AIDS. Males generally take no precautions such as condoms etc. Women's consent is not taken seriously during sexual intercourse. Furthermore, sex education is not considered seriously in mainstream education. Early childbirth and marriages as well as gender based norms affect the overall nutrition status of women.

- **The case of Sudan:** Sudan is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, Afro-Arab country inhabited by a multitude of tribes. Woman's vulnerability to AIDS is differing in North and South Sudan. Women in the North have been relegated to the role of legal minors with the application of Sharia law to govern all aspects of social and political life, the effect of AIDS is rear, except in case of blood transfer due mistake of some investigating of blood in hospital during surgery operations. Women are not allowed to decide their sexual life. Men can have sexual relations with more than one woman, because Islamic law permits to man to married up to four wives. Men are the first tool of transfer of AIDS. In the South, customary practices and denial about the incidence of HIV/AIDS have given rise to a casual approach to the disease. Woman in southern Sudan is more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS". Polygamy and wives inheritances are widely practiced in Southern Sudan, men tend to have more sexual partners than women.

- Currently, the awareness levels on HIV/AIDS and sexuality are very low and the communities do not appear to appreciate the seriousness of the disease.

Points to consider while assessing the impact of HIV/AIDS on culturally defined gender roles: (J. Opio-Odongo)

- Clarify on the nature of food insecurity and the character of its differential impacts on segments of the population, especially women.

- Clarify on the nature of cultural vulnerability in the country and how this has been changing over time, if at all.

- Clarity on the cultural, structural factors that perpetuate women's vulnerability to both HIV/AIDS and food insecurity and malnutrition.

- Careful analyze how increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS and the increasing number of the people with full-blown AIDS: a) divert women's productive time from food production to patient care; and b) reduce the labour productivity of women who may have the disproportionate responsibility for food production as a result of the differential gender roles in society.

- It is essential to articulate the environment-energy relationships for the majority of the population in the country and the manner in which the relationships can translate into an energy crisis that compels people to prefer cooking foods that are less energy demanding. This has serious implications for household nutrition. Increasing distances covered by women in search of biomass energy also reduces the time that women would routinely devote to devote to care, food production and food processing.

II.   REFERENCES

''Impact of HIV/AIDS on Rural Livelihoods and Food Security''
Publication containing information of the impact of HIV/AIDS on women and featuring a short chapter dedicated to the role HIV/Aids plays in worsening existent gender-based differences.
http://www.uneca.org/chga/Ethiopia/Interactive_ethiopia.pdf

''Gender and HIV/Aids: Leadership roles in Social Mobilization''.
Report of the UNFPA-organized breakout panel of the African Development Forum Of special interest is the section by Marcela Villarreal (director of FAO's Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division), "Gender perspective on the impact of HIV/AIDS on Food Security and Labour supply: Leadership challenges''.
http://www.unfpa.org/africa/newdocs/hivaidsbreakoutpanel.pdf

"HIV and AIDS in Africa: beyond epidemiology''

Part III focuses on the socio-cultural implications of the disease also form a gender perspective.
http://books.google.it/books?id=lFouj3lHGXEC&dq=Ezekiel+Kalipeni,+HIV+and+AIDS+in+Africa:
+beyond+epidemiology&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=it&ei=lQYtSriaCsPdsgbcn9nWCQ&s
a=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4#PPR6,M1

An operational guide on the topic prepared by the Canadian Development International
Development Agency (CIDA) and the Inter-Agency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD)
http://icad-cisd.com/pdf/publications/E_MakingtheLink_AIDS_AGRICULTURE2.pdf

Blogpost on the implications of HIV/AIDS on microcredit access.
http://eindia2007.blogspot.com/search?q=aids