Impact of the global economic crisis on the AIDS response – key human rights consequences, considerations, and responses

Introduction
1. The current global economic crisis is the most severe since the worldwide depression of the 1930s. To date, the crisis and its costs and consequences have been considered mainly in an economic frame – little attention has been given to the human rights consequences.

2. Human rights activists have noted that “the global economic crisis is about the shortage of food, jobs, clean water, land, housing and also about growing inequality and injustice. This is a human rights crisis.” As with previous economic crises, the current crisis poses a real threat to the enjoyment of human rights. It is interesting to note that the UN Human Rights Council in its 10th special session addressed the crisis, adopting a resolution calling for the establishment of an equitable, transparent international system with enhanced developing country participation in decisions regarding the economy.

3. The crisis threatens existing levels of global and national funding for achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support (UA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The crisis has the potential to erode many of the gains achieved over the past decade in tackling the HIV epidemic and could jeopardize support to people living with HIV and those populations vulnerable to HIV infection, who are already neglected in many national AIDS responses and failing to receive adequate levels of funding for programmes directed at them. Poor and marginalized communities are likely to suffer disproportionately. Migrant populations, men who have sex with men, transgender people, sex workers, people who inject drugs, and populations of humanitarian concern represent those most likely to experience heightened risk of HIV-infection within the context of the economic crisis, and in many cases are least able to access existing services and support.

4. Based on experiences of previous such crises, the economic crisis will exacerbate gender inequalities. Prevailing gender inequalities in many countries are evident through women and girls’ heightened vulnerability to gender-based violence, and their diminished access to material resources, livelihood options and education – all of which may escalate during the economic crisis, with potentially devastating consequences for HIV risk. Gender-based violence, which has been identified as an important risk factor for HIV infection, occurs across all socioeconomic groups. However, studies indicate that women who live in poverty are more likely to experience such violence.

5. Recent research has documented that the crisis is already impacting antiretroviral treatment (ART) and prevention programmes in a number of countries, and that

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2 www.undp.org/oslocentre/flagship/insight_06_en.html
3 UNDP. Guidance Note: HIV and the Global Economic Crisis (draft) 2009.
4 Ibid.
other countries anticipate a negative impact on availability of treatment this year. Interruptions in treatment scale up would lead to increased morbidity and mortality, have a negative impact on HIV prevention efforts, and further strain already under-resourced health and social systems. Many countries expect the economic crisis to most adversely impact on prevention efforts among marginalized populations - including people who use drugs, sex workers, and men who have sex with men and transgender people. Urgent and targeted action is needed to address critical funding gaps, use existing funding better, monitor risks of programme interruption and plan for uncertainty.

6. Human rights are core UN values. Protecting human rights and promoting rights-based approaches are at the core of an effective AIDS response. At an informal briefing session at the United Nations on HIV and Human Rights, UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé highlighted that human rights are more critical than ever to an effective AIDS response - particularly during the economic crisis. In a recent report, the World Bank and UNAIDS called for protection of legal and social programmes to reduce stigma and discrimination and gender inequality. UNDP, in its guidance to country offices, is promoting support to legal and social programmes to counter discrimination and stigmatization; economic empowerment programmes for women; programmes responding to gender based violence; social safety nets and social protection programmes; and the protection of programmes for men who have sex with men, transgender people, sex workers, people who inject drugs and migrants. In addition, UNDP is supporting countries to link HIV services and support to existing vulnerability reduction policy categories, services and support.

7. In the context of the AIDS response, it is imperative to enhance an understanding of the human rights dimensions of the global economic crisis and to promote human rights protections and rights-based approaches for reducing risk and vulnerability and mitigating the impact of the crisis.

**Question for discussion**

a. How can the Reference Group best support the UNAIDS Executive Director, UNAIDS Secretariat, UNDP and other Cosponsors in their advocacy, advisory support and programming work in the context of the global economic crisis?

**Background document**


This issue paper was prepared by Mandeep Dhaliwal to facilitate discussion at the Reference Group’s July 2009 meeting.

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6 UNDP. Guidance Note, supra, note 3.
7 World Bank & UNAIDS, supra, note 5.
8 Ibid.
9 UNDP. Guidance Note, supra, note 3.