

HERA Action Sheets

This page contains a set of action sheets which define the central concepts of the agreements reached at the International Conference on Population and Development (1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995). Prepared by an international group of women's health advocates called HERA (Health, Action, Empowerment, Rights & Accountability), the sheets identify actions to be taken on such topics as gender equality and equity, women's empowerment, adolescents' sexual and reproductive rights and health, men's role and responsibility for sexual and reproductive rights and health, abortion, and sexual and reproductive rights and health.

The action sheets are tools for use in:

- interactions with leaders of international agencies and governments responsible for policy, programme design and resource allocation;
- training government and international agency staff who implement, monitor and evaluate programmes;
- coalition-building and advocacy with community leaders and non-governmental organizations;
- formal and informal education and training programmes concerned with women's health and rights.

Abortion

Adolescents' Sexual Rights and Health

Advocacy

Gender Equality and Equity

Men's Role and Responsibility for Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Health

Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Health

Sexual Health

Sexual Rights

Women's Empowerment

ABORTION

In the light of paragraph 8.25 of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, which states: >...All Governments and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are urged to strengthen their commitment to women's health, to deal with the health impact of unsafe abortion as a major public health concern and to reduce the recourse to abortion through expanded and improved family planning services... Women who have unwanted pregnancies should have ready access to reliable information and compassionate counseling... In circumstances where abortion is not against the law, such abortion should be safe. In all cases, women should have access to quality services for the management of complications arising from abortion. Post-abortion counseling, education and family planning services should be offered promptly, which will also help to avoid repeat abortions, consider reviewing laws containing punitive measures against women who have undergone illegal abortions.

-- Fourth World Conference on Women Platform for Action, para #106k.

Why is access to abortion important?

One of the most significant advances in the definition and understanding of human rights has been recognition of women's rights as human rights, including women's right to control their sexuality and their fertility, their right to health, and other sexual and reproductive rights. During the years that a woman is fertile, she has particular health needs that must be met and rights that must be respected: the right to contraceptive methods that are not harmful to her health; to become pregnant, to have care during pregnancy, delivery, and after birth; and to interrupt an unwanted pregnancy in conditions that protect her physical and mental health, among others. These health needs and rights are inseparable from women's human rights to self determination and to control over their own bodies. When access to safe abortion services is denied, thousands of women die unnecessarily every year and millions suffer severe physical and mental health consequences, due to unsafe abortion.

Actions to be taken:

To ensure women's health and rights, safe abortion services must be available to women in conditions that recognize the woman's right to decide free of discrimination, coercion or violence. Coerced abortion is

never acceptable, whether it results from social pressure to use abortion as a means for sex selection, or from policies of eugenics or population control. Abortion services should be provided within a broader reproductive health service context that offers good technical care, emotional support, and contraceptive information and options, among other services. Women should have access to safe abortion services as early as possible after a woman has decided she does not want to be pregnant. In many circumstances, however, safe abortion services are substantially impeded by restrictive laws, and by ignorance and prejudice among health providers. Nonetheless, abortion is allowed by law in almost all countries at least to save the life of the woman, and in cases of rape or incest.

Action can be taken everywhere to make progress by reallocating and efficiently using public and private funds in support of the following actions:

Education and Information:

Through multiple channels including media, women's organizations, and professional associations, among others:

- Inform the public, and especially health care providers and women, about when abortion is allowed under current laws and regulations and where it can be obtained.
- Inform all women, especially young women, about the signs of pregnancy, about where and how to obtain health services, and about the importance of seeking health services as soon as possible, when pregnancy is suspected.
- Establish sexuality education in schools, health facilities, non-governmental organizations and elsewhere which, among other benefits, will reduce unwanted pregnancies.

Services:

- Make abortion services available to the full extent allowed under existing laws and regulations; ensure that they are safe and provided in the broader context of good quality reproductive health care.
 - Educate health care providers, both physicians and other professionals, about the specifics of abortion laws and regulations, emphasizing providers' responsibility to deliver services to the fullest extent allowed by law;
 - Train providers, including non-physicians, in the safest and most effective techniques, especially vacuum aspiration and medical abortion;
 - Ensure that services are affordable for all women;

- Establish procedures to protect both women and service providers from harassment;
 - Where individual public health providers have a Aconscientious objection@ to providing abortion services, require them to refer women to providers who have no objection, and organize the service facility to provide abortion;
 - Eliminate administrative procedures that restrict timely access to safe abortion.
- Ensure that women with complications of unsafe abortion are treated humanely and in a timely manner.
 - Where access to safe services is legally restricted but women nevertheless resort to abortion, develop ways to ensure safety of procedures and provide pre- and postabortion services.
 - Ensure all women's access to comprehensive reproductive health services including contraception.

Advocacy:

- Where laws and policies are restrictive, collect and widely disseminate to women, to health care systems and to society information on the financial, social and other costs of restricting access to safe abortion.
- Build broad political will, as well as the commitment of health care officials and providers in particular, to ensure that safe services are available to all women to the full extent of existing laws, and to ensure that they are affordable for all women.
- Promote legal interpretations and rulings that facilitate access to safe abortion services.
- Work with health professionals, women's groups, policy makers, legislators and other influential groups to build a constituency for legal changes to allow access to good quality services, and to ensure that such services are available and affordable for all

women, regardless of social class, marital status, parity, educational level or place of residence.

Laws and Policy:

- Remove barriers to access to good quality, gender sensitive, sexuality education at all ages.
- Remove barriers to access to safe, affordable good quality contraception for all, regardless of marital status or age.

- Where abortion is allowed on a range of legal grounds, design and enforce policies to ensure that good quality, affordable services are available to all women.
- Where abortion is allowed only on narrow grounds (life or health of the woman, rape, incest), design and enforce policies to ensure that legal abortion services are actually provided, and modify policies to ensure the broadest possible interpretation of the grounds on which abortion is allowed (e.g., not only physical health but mental health, the woman's socio-economic well-being, rape within and outside marriage).
- Where abortion is allowed, create mechanisms for women who are denied legal services to seek redress.
- Abolish laws that contain punitive measures against women who have had illegal abortions.
- Abolish laws that criminalize providers who perform abortion according to medical standards.
- Make abortion legal, safe, accessible and affordable.

ADOLESCENTS' SEXUAL RIGHTS AND HEALTH

... full attention should be given to the promotion of mutually respectful and equitable gender relations and particularly to meeting the educational and service needs of adolescents to enable them to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality...

-- International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, para #7.3.

Sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, have a devastating effect on children's health, and girls are more vulnerable than boys to the consequences of unprotected sex and premature sexual relations. Girls often face pressures to engage in sexual activity. Due to such factors as their youth, social pressure, lack of protective laws, or failure to enforce laws, girls are more vulnerable to all kinds of violence, particularly sexual violence, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking, possibly the sale of their organs and tissues, and forced labor.

-- Fourth World Conference on Women Platform for Action, para #269.

Who are adolescents?

Adolescents are young people aged 10-19 years.

Why is it important to support adolescents' sexual health and rights:

Adolescence is generally a time of rapid personal, physiological, social and emotional development. It encompasses learning about and experiencing sexuality, and various forms of human relationships, as well as development of self-identity and self-esteem. It is a time of learning about and challenging gender roles and power relations, about social justice, and about life options. For increasing numbers of adolescents, it is a time of severe pressure from peers, the media, poverty, and other forces to become sexually active whether they want to or not.

Adolescents need accurate information and social and emotional support if they are to experience their sexuality in a positive and healthful way, and if they are to absorb and act on the values of gender equality. Parents and institutions are often unable or unwilling to provide the information young people need and may, by their own behaviour, foster a negative and inaccurate understanding of sexuality. Media, friends, and other adults are frequently the source of wrong and consequently dangerous information for young people.

Whether married or not, adolescents therefore need health services and information as well as educational programmes so that they can protect their health and exercise their rights. Sexuality education enables young people to make informed sexual health decisions, including whether to be sexually active or not, and decreases the rates of STDs and unplanned or unwanted pregnancies. Studies show that offering sexuality education delays or decreases adolescent sexual activity. Conversely, withholding information from young people does not foster or guarantee abstinence.

Actions To Be Taken:

Several guiding principles are paramount in the design of gender sensitive, comprehensive reproductive health services. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Cairo and Beijing agreements recognize the primacy of the child's interests and, therefore, young peoples' right to sexuality education and health services, and to privacy and confidentiality in those programmes.

Experience shows that programmes to provide accurate information, education, and services are most effective if young people are involved in their design and implementation; programmes deal not just with sexuality but with gender roles and power relations, take a positive approach to sexuality as an integral part of human life, and treat young people with respect. As much as possible, participatory processes should be used in education and service programmes, e.g.

activity-based learning, not only lectures.

Reallocate and efficiently use public and private funds in support of the following actions:

Education:

- Create comprehensive, gender-sensitive, sexuality and health education programmes premised on gender equality, in and outside schools, appropriate to each age group. These programmes should:
 - support young people to develop self-identity and self-esteem so that they can make their own choices about sexuality in their best interest with respect for others;
 - promote gender equality and respect for social justice in personal relationships, in choices of school subjects and career paths, and in household work and family processes including pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing;
 - foster mutual respect and love in relationships, including sexual relationships, and explicitly reject all forms of gender-based violence, harmful practices such as female genital mutilation or dowry, and discriminatory attitudes such as homophobia or ridicule of those who are not sexually active; and
 - provide full and accurate information about sexuality, contraception, pregnancy and protection against sexually transmitted diseases.
- Provide training for teachers, school officials and health professionals to educate them about the importance of gender-sensitive, comprehensive sexuality and health education and services, and enable them to talk openly and comfortably with their students, as well as to work with parents and community leaders on these issues.
- Monitor and evaluate these programmes to ensure quality and effectiveness, including thorough review and consultation with young people.
- Promote development of programmes and policies that broaden young people's access to skill training, economic opportunities, recreation and other social activities.
- Work with school authorities and policy makers to ensure that pregnant school girls can continue their education, either in school or through special programmes, and to foster responsible and supportive behaviour by the fathers.

Media:

- Using the principles and content described above, work with the media, especially those popular with young people, to provide positive images of sexuality and gender equality, as well as concrete information on where they can go for information and services.

- Involve trained adolescents in media programmes to reach their peers.

Laws and Policy:

- Support training and education programs for legislators, policy makers, lawyers and judges on the importance of gender-sensitive sexuality education and health services for young people.
- Develop, pass and enforce national laws and policies that support good quality sexuality education and services for all young people.
- Review, modify and enforce laws that regulate age at marriage and sexual activity to end early marriage and to ensure that they include and protect mutual consent, respect for human rights, non-discrimination and gender equality.
- Abolish laws and policies that discriminate against or punish young women who become pregnant.

Services:

- Review and modify health system policies, regulations, and service fees to ensure adolescents' access to confidential, good quality sexual and reproductive health services.
- Train health providers to treat young clients with respect and empathy, to ensure confidentiality, and to offer full and accurate information on which young people can base their decisions.
- Assess the extent to which special services for young people are needed, within or outside ongoing health services and, where needed, promote their development.
- Monitor and evaluate services to ensure that these standards are met, including consultation with young people regarding their views.

ADVOCACY

Governments and intergovernmental organizations, in dialogue with non-governmental organizations and local community groups, and in full respect for their autonomy, should integrate them in their decision-making and facilitate the contribution that non-governmental organizations can make at all levels towards finding solutions to population and development concerns and, in particular, to ensure the implementation of the present Programme of Action. Non-governmental organizations should have a key

role in national and international development processes.

-- International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, para #15.8

What is advocacy?

Advocacy comes from the word advocate -meaning to argue your case. Today, advocacy refers to a process to bring about change within a system. In the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights these systems may include health, law, education, parliament or international institutions. Advocacy is a strategic, generally long term process founded on analysis and goal setting. It requires particular sets of skills and strategies. Advocacy is much more than information, education and communication (IEC).

Advocacy can be conducted through specific campaigns, to meet clear objectives, aimed at specific target groups. While advocacy may have as a long term goal a change in attitudes or behaviours, short and medium term goals for specific campaigns may include changes in policies, legislation, budget and resource allocation, or increased media attention. Advocacy for sexual and reproductive health and rights takes place at the local and community, national, regional and international levels. Advocates should be able to operate inside and outside the system, with as much autonomy as is feasible.

Why is advocacy important?

At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, governments committed themselves to advance women's health, empowerment and rights. These agreements were achieved in part through persistent, strategic advocacy by women, targeted at governments, United Nations agencies, other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women's organizations and the media.

As agreed in the ICPD, advocacy is now required to ensure implementation of the paradigm shift from population control to placing individuals' rights and well-being at the center of development. Advocacy is needed to generate understanding of and support for sexual and reproductive health and the human rights in which these are embedded. Advocates for sexual and reproductive rights and health should and do come from many different professions and parts of the community.

Successful advocacy requires:

! A defined issue with specific goals identified, and a strategy to achieve those goals;

! A realistic time frame to reach the goals;

! A political analysis that places the issue, goals and strategy in a context of other issues, advocacy and actors;

! A map of existing institutional involvement, legislation and attitudes surrounding the issue;

! Detailed and defensible arguments to support the advocacy effort, built on information, data and testimony;

! Coalitions with other groups or organizations interested in the issue, where necessary;

! Clearly identified constraints, including time, human and financial resources, lack of skill mix, and lack of access to decision making or media power;

! Knowledge of the opposition -- groups and arguments that they use;

! Clearly identified target audiences;

! Appropriate lobbying tools, including clear and consistent messages transmitted through various media;

! Legal mechanisms that can contribute to the advocacy effort, including litigation to defend rights;

! A process for monitoring and evaluating the advocacy effort.

Questions to be asked when thinking about undertaking advocacy:

! Who is the constituency? For whom are you talking? How direct or indirect is their involvement? How accountable are you to them? How will you remain accountable when compromises or trade-offs have to be made among competing or conflicting values, goals and objectives?

! How much time do you think the achievement of the goal will take? Do you have that time? Do you have the energy, the focus, the support? Can you attract necessary resources that you may not have now?

! Are you willing to commit substantial intellectual, emotional and social energy to this process? Are you prepared for opposition strategies, including attempts to use interpretations of democracy and the rule of law against your issue and advocacy effort?

! Are you ready to accept that getting the media to work for you is a specific skill and

requires training and learning like any other skill? Are you and your colleagues ready to support each other and to be criticized for media and other public exposure you receive?

! Are you able to choose spokespersons and to divide labour within the advocacy effort?

! Do funders of the advocacy effort recognize and accept the legitimacy and autonomy of the advocates? How will you ensure that you do not relinquish control over your message to those who control the resources?

! How will you build and maintain trust with your colleagues?

Actions to be taken by those who undertake advocacy:

! Make a long term commitment to developing skills in the following areas to provide substantial and enabling attributes for successful advocacy:

- political analysis;
- leadership development;
- long range strategic planning;
- fundraising and financial management;
- lobbying techniques;
- alliance building and coalition management;
- media and message development;
- documentation and research; and
- awareness- and consciousness-raising and movement building.

! Develop the following media and communication skills and capacity:

- presentation of complex arguments in an accurate and simple format;
- training and awareness-raising with the media;
- media presentation;

- message development and writing;
- use of electronic media; and
- development of popular and effective IEC materials.

Actions to be taken by governmental and private donors and international agencies:

! Invest in the capacity of women's organizations, movements and institutions to undertake basic work (e.g., health services, training, research) from which data can be gathered, lessons learned and new approaches tested.

! Make long term investments in the development of advocates' skills, and in the basic institutional capacity of organizations that undertake advocacy, including monitoring and assessment of their own processes and accountability to their constituents.

! Support specific advocacy campaigns and activities.

! Consult advocates, and include them in deliberations regarding the agency's policies and programmes, as well as implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes they support.

GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUITY

The human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex, are priority objectives of the international community.

-- International Conference on Population and Development, principle #4.

What are gender equality and equity?

Gender refers to sets of relationships, attributes, roles, beliefs and attitudes that define what being a woman or a man is within society. In most societies, gender relations are unequal and unbalanced in the extent of power they assign to women and men. Gender biases are reflected in a society's laws, policies and social practices, and in the self-identities, attitudes and behaviour of people. Unequal gender relations tend to deepen other social inequalities and discrimination based on class, race, caste, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, language or religion, among others. Gender attributes and roles are not determined by biological sex. They are historically and socially constructed and can be transformed.

Gender equality is a principle of human rights and a development goal. Gender equality requires achieving a re-balancing of power between women and men in terms of economic resources, legal rights, political participation and personal relations. Gender equity requires the full recognition of the specific needs that women may have, whether these arise from historical patterns of gender bias, biological differences or social inequality. The achievement of gender justice requires combining both gender equality and equity principles as a basis for policies and social actions.

Why are gender equality and equity important?

Women's ability to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights requires a legal and policy environment favourable to gender equality and equity. Gender equality is essential for women to be able to have greater voice and control in sexual and reproductive decisions. Laws and policies that aim for gender equality and equity in the distribution of resources, political participation, and decision-making has positive impacts on women's sexual and reproductive health by:

- improving the nutritional and health status of girls and women;
- reducing their excessive work-burdens;
- making it possible for them to access accurate information and supportive education regarding sexuality and reproduction;
- making it possible for them to decide whether to engage in sexual activity, under what conditions, and whether to bear children;
- supporting their ability to demand and obtain good quality, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, and gain greater and more legitimate voice in policies and programmes; and
- addressing the specific needs of particular sub-groups of women who are disadvantaged or discriminated against.

Actions to be taken:

Laws and Policy

- Sign, ratify and remove reservations to human rights instruments such as CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women).
- When interpreting and applying human rights instruments, use the gender concepts in the agreements reached at the world conferences on human rights (1993), population and development (1994), social development (1995) and women (1995).
- Modify and transform existing national laws, in the areas of family, marriage, inheritance, sexuality and reproduction, based on principles of gender equality.
- Review and transform existing national laws in the areas of political participation, labour, and access to economic resources, such as land, credit, and technology, based on principles of gender equality and equity, using instruments such as quotas and affirmative action as appropriate.
- Incorporate gender analysis and gender audits as a standard process in policy design, implementation and evaluation, especially in the area of health.
- Modify information systems to include gender disaggregated data, indicators of gender equality, and special assessments of women's needs.
- Develop and implement guidelines for the participation of women and women's organizations in consultative bodies and in decision making at all levels.
- Incorporate affirmative action strategies into policies and programmes in both public and private sectors.

Services

- Strengthen women's access to legal services that will enable them to challenge gender discrimination and inequalities.
- Enhance gender equity in health services through redressing imbalances in priority setting, resource allocation regarding women's specific needs, and the needs of particular groups of women.

Training and Education

- Promote sensitization about gender equality, train policy makers, health service providers, and personnel within the legal and judicial systems on gender analysis and means to address gender inequality.
- Promote human rights literacy programmes for both women and men that demonstrate the personal and social benefits of gender equality.
- Meet established goals for eradication of female illiteracy and for girls' schooling.
- Educate boys and men to respect women's rights and gender justice.
- Transform school curricula, revise text books and train teachers to promote gender equality.

Research

- Develop and disseminate gender analyses of language used in laws, policy documents, text books, informal education material and the media.

Media

- Provide programmes for media professionals to sensitize them to gender inequality, and increase women's professional participation at all levels of programming.
- Support public awareness campaigns on gender equality and women's rights.
- Portray images and situations that challenge gender inequality and eliminate gender stereotypes.

MEN'S ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND HEALTH

Special efforts should be made to emphasize men's shared responsibility and promote their active involvement in responsible parenthood, sexual and reproductive behaviour, including family planning; prenatal, maternal and child health; prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV; prevention of unwanted and high risk pregnancies; shared control and contribution to family income, children's education, health and nutrition; and recognition and promotion of the equal value of children of both sexes. Male responsibilities in family life must be included in the education of children from the earliest ages. Special emphasis should be placed on the prevention of violence against women and children.

-- International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, para #4.27.

What is men's responsibility in relation to sexuality and reproduction?

In order for men and women to live their lives to their full potential, they need to participate in all levels of civil society, family life, public life, work and leisure. This requires men to undertake many behavioural roles which at present, in most societies, are the sole responsibility of women. This would give men the opportunity to enjoy the pleasures and personal growth inherent in supporting their partners through childbirth, in sharing responsibility for child rearing and domestic life, and in supporting their partner's fulfillment through both family and public life. It allows men to experience the full range of human emotions, including tenderness and vulnerability.

Manhood is most fully experienced amongst men who enjoy and take responsibility for their own sexuality and reproductive choices. Being a man requires rejoicing in the experience of equality with women; promoting women's rights and equal partnerships with women; and supporting

women's reproductive choices and sexual pleasure. However, socialization at present leads men to assume an attitude of privilege and entitlement in relation to women. Prevailing social norms promote double standards for men and women in economic, political, social, cultural, family and sexual life.

Men's responsibility means men understanding and accepting that they are personally answerable for their decisions and their behaviour, based on mutual respect in relations with others.

Encouraging men's responsibility for their own behaviour should in no way undermine women's autonomy over their own sexual and reproductive lives. Work with men needs to be aimed at achieving gender equality and equity. It requires allocation of resources other than those allocated for women's empowerment and women's sexual and reproductive health needs.

Why is men's responsibility important?

Men's attitudes and behaviours, especially in the sexual sphere, too often have a considerable negative impact on women's overall health and well-being. Men's sexual activity frequently does not take account of women's sexual needs; puts women at risk of sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancy; and too often involves violence, including violence against women who try to assert what they want regarding sexuality and reproduction. By contrast, men who recognize their shared responsibility for attaining gender equality and equity support the removal of barriers to women's participation in the labour force, political and community life, and to ensure women's mental, emotional, physical, sexual and reproductive health and rights. Shared responsibility thus enhances men's participation in civil society.

Action To Be Taken:

Reallocate and efficiently use public and private funds in support of the following actions:

Education

- Develop training curricula and train men and women teachers to avoid using stereotypes of male entitlement and dominance in the classroom, and to present options and strategies for achieving gender equality.
- Foster curricula, materials and activities in educational institutions, literacy and other adult education programs, social and sports clubs, trade unions and other places that men and women gather, which:
 - address gender inequality;
 - present images of and strategies for achieving gender equality;
 - promote men's ability to share responsibility with their partners in domestic life,

child rearing and sexual life, among others;

- promote language, examples and strategies for partnership between men and women; and

- promote understanding and support for women's autonomy in sexual and reproductive decision-making.

Media

- Ensure that information, education and communication (IEC) programs, materials and public service announcements portray positive images of male involvement in family responsibilities and do not encourage dominant male behaviours in the private and public spheres.
- Work with government communication agencies, private media and advertisers, and other media professionals to encourage them to present men who are aware of, promote and enjoy women's equal participation in public and family life.
- Persuade men who are political and community leaders to speak out for women's rights, to promote images of men who respect women, to encourage other men to have equitable social and intimate relationships, and to deplore violence against women as well as other discriminatory or abusive behaviour.

Services

- Remove formal barriers, including parental consent and age requirements, to men's access to sexual and reproductive health services; train and support health care providers and managers to reduce informal barriers (e.g., the image that family planning and maternal child health clinics are women's spaces).
- Train staff to promote the concept of gender equality and take every opportunity to support men to take responsibility for their sexual and reproductive behaviour, in particular for preventing unintended pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.
- Provide information about men's and women's sexual and reproductive functions and, in particular, educate men on the importance of health services for women during pregnancy, delivery, and after birth; and on the facts that men's sperm determine the sex of the child, and sexually transmitted diseases cause infertility in both men and women as well as cervical cancer in women.
- Promote and provide condoms and encourage men to use them to prevent sexually transmitted diseases as well as unintended pregnancies, both with their wives or primary partners, and in all casual or commercial sex encounters.
- Ensure contact tracing and adequate treatment for women partners as part of programmes to prevent and manage sexually transmitted diseases.
- Promote vasectomies for men who do not wish to have more children.
- Educate men to respect their partners' autonomy in fertility regulation, choice and use of

contraception, and remove spousal consent requirements in women's reproductive health services.

- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of services, in consultation with both men and women's groups.

Laws and Policy

- Sign, ratify and remove reservations to human rights instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in order to create the enabling conditions for gender equality, and sexual and reproductive rights and health.
- Encourage and pressure governments to review, modify and enforce international, regional and national legislation so that it is, at a minimum, consistent with the agreements of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, particularly in relation to legislation which:

- prohibits violence against girls and women by criminalizing rape (including rape within marriage and rape as an instrument of armed conflict), all other forms of sexual violence, and sexual exploitation;

- obligates men to provide for their children within and outside of marriage;

- prohibits dowry and bride price;

- prohibits early marriage, removes gender inequality in legal age at marriage, and ensures that marriage is entered into with the fully informed and free choice of both people;

- provides for gender equity and equality in property ownership, acquisition, management and administration, in inheritance laws, and in access to credit and employment; and

- provides for parental leave benefits and encourages men to take time off from employment to participate in the birth and care of their child and share household management.

- Train judges, police, lawyers and health personnel on the meaning of such legislation and how to implement it.
- Inform the public, women and men, about this legislation and advocate for the full enforcement of it.
- Support the work of non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations to develop and to mobilize support for such improved legislation; build public sector and non-governmental organizations' institutional capacity to enforce legislation; and monitor and evaluate enforcement.

Research

Collect and analyze data to build understanding of barriers to and means to facilitate men's responsibility for sexual and reproductive health, including such topics as:

- the consequences of male attitudes and behaviours for women's and children's health and well-being;
- men's total fertility by age groups as a means of drawing attention to male reproductive behaviour;
- design and enforcement of legislation which promotes men's responsibility; and
- best practice in programmes to build gender equality.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

What are reproductive rights and reproductive health?

Reproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic rights of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children and to have information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health...the right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion, and violence... International Conference on Population on Development Programme of Action, para #7.3.

Reproductive rights include the rights of all individuals to control their own bodies, to have sex that is consensual, free from violence and coercion, and to enter marriage with the full and free consent of both parties. Reproductive rights are essential for women's exercise of their right to health, and include the right to comprehensive, good quality reproductive health services that ensure privacy, fully informed and free consent, confidentiality and respect.

AReproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when, and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the rights of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable, and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility...

and the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant.@

-- International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, paragraph #7.2.

Reproductive health requires good, basic health and nutrition, protection from violence and reduction of occupational and environmental health hazards throughout the life-span. While the concept of reproductive health applies to both women and men, it has far greater impact on women and, as such, requires preferential allocation of resources to women's health, in particular to reduce health risks that only women face.

Why are reproductive rights and reproductive health important?

Reproductive rights and reproductive health are integral to human rights, and essential for enjoyment of one's full human potential, mental, emotional and physical well-being, enhancement of relationships, women's empowerment and achievement of gender equality. Respect for women's reproductive rights and provision of reproductive health services also provides the basis for neonatal health and survival, for the health and development of children, and for the overall well-being of the family.

Actions to be Taken:

Reallocate and efficiently use public and private funds in support of the following actions:

Services

Effective sexual and reproductive health services require a functioning health system that provides universal access to good quality primary care, as well as effective referral systems for higher level care. These services require skilled health professionals, facilities and resources both to provide preventive information and services and to meet challenges such as obstetric emergencies, or clinical diagnosis and effective treatment of STDs, especially in women who do not have symptoms of infection. To the extent possible, primary services need to be provided at the same place and time with consistent access to health providers. The highest possible standard of care should always be sought. Decisions on whether to introduce new technologies should be based on careful assessment of the capacity of the health system to ensure protection of women's health and rights, as well as their choices, in the use of such technologies.

- Ensure access to reproductive health services, that respect reproductive rights for all

women regardless of age, marital status, income, residence or sexual orientation including:

- information and education on health, sexuality and gender equality;
 - skilled care during pregnancy, delivery and postpartum;
 - contraceptive choices including barrier methods such as the diaphragm and male and female condoms;
 - prevention of infertility and counseling for sexual dysfunction;
 - safe abortion;
 - prevention and management of reproductive tract infections, sexually transmitted diseases and other gynaecological problems;
 - prevention and treatment of reproductive system cancers; and
 - postmenopausal health problems, including osteoporosis.
- Recognizing that sexual and reproductive health services in most countries fall far short of this comprehensive standard, and that hard choices may often have to be made in the allocation of resources and the setting of priorities, involve women's organizations in deliberations and decisions at all levels of policy making and programme design, involve more women in managerial and supervisory positions in government health services, and consult women in the communities to be served regarding their priorities.
 - Invest in the re-training and orientation of health professionals to provide comprehensive, gender-sensitive services and information that are respectful of reproductive rights.
 - Develop and use Aprocess@ indicators to monitor services, rather than relying on narrow Aoutcome@ indicators such as reduction in maternal mortality, and support community involvement in programme monitoring.

Education

- Provide sexuality education in schools and in non-formal programmes, for all girls and women, about all aspects of sexual and reproductive health, about reproductive rights as human rights, and about where to obtain relevant services; give particular attention to how pregnancies and STDs occur, effective means of prevention, facts that help women protect themselves from harm, including their right to decide about sex, the fact that the man's sperm determines the sex of the child, danger signs in pregnancy and when to seek care, and non-directive information and services for pregnancy termination.
- Provide sexuality education in schools and in non-formal programmes, for all boys and

men, about all aspects of women's reproductive health and rights, emphasizing gender equality and men's responsibility to allow and assist their partners to have the health services they need (all should know danger signs during pregnancy, and where and how to get emergency care), to prevent transmission of STDs and unwanted pregnancy, to foster mutual respect, caring and pleasure in sexual relations, and to support their partners' decisions about safe sex practice and contraception; sensitize boys and men to the positive experience of gender equality.

- Train staff of international and national development agencies to support, finance and promote reproductive rights and comprehensive, good quality sexual and reproductive health services.

Media

- Educate management and staff about the importance of reproductive rights and health, and their role in disseminating factual, gender-sensitive information to promote reproductive rights and health as well as gender equality.
- Develop multi-media advocacy strategies and campaigns for the public, including decision-makers and programme planners, that provide accurate information on reproductive health problems, when and where to seek services, including special campaigns on, for example, the danger signs of pregnancy and the importance of seeking care, violence against women, harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, the rationale for and development of laws and policies to ensure access to safe abortion services, among others.
- Encourage investigative and documentary reporting on best practice and on health system abuses relating to reproductive health.

Research

Promote action-oriented research for informed decision-making at all levels, especially on critical or relatively neglected issues, such as:

- documentation of sexual abuse and violence against women;
- nutrition in girls and women;
- woman-controlled methods to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, with and without contraceptive effect; and
- contraceptive safety.

Laws and Policy

- Develop and enforce legislation to ensure all girls' and women's reproductive rights and

access to sexual and reproductive health information, good quality services, and sexuality education, including removal of barriers such as parental or spousal consent; remove restrictions on access to safe abortion, safe contraception and sterilization; and eliminate discriminatory practices based on marital status, age, disability or other factors.

- Develop and support effective national and international ethical review committees to ensure the human rights of participants in research and to prevent introduction and use of untested reproductive technologies, such as the quinacrine method of sterilization, that may be harmful to women's health.
 - Review, modify as necessary, and enforce legislation to end early marriage, remove gender inequality in laws governing age at marriage, and ensure that marriage is entered into with the fully informed and free choice of both people.
 - Develop and enforce legislation to ensure ethical, medical and human rights standards in infertility services.
 - Ensure protection of reproductive rights of women and men in labour laws and standards.
-
- Develop and enforce legislation which protects all women's access to good quality sexual and reproductive health services in the face of health sector reform, fees for services and increasing privatization of health services.

Resource allocation

At a minimum, meet governments' and donors' commitments made in the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, and ensure that these budget allocations are used to build toward and achieve comprehensive, good quality reproductive health services.

- Allocate funds to strengthen basic health systems, prioritizing the facilities, staff and functions needed to meet sexual and reproductive health needs.
- Ensure a sound safety net for low income or other women who cannot pay for services.

SEXUAL HEALTH

The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences. @

-- *Fourth World Conference on Women Platform for Action, para #96.*

What is sexual health?

Sexual health is women's and men's ability to enjoy and express their sexuality, and to do so free from risk of sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy, coercion, violence and discrimination. Sexual health means being able to have an informed, enjoyable and safe sex life, based on self-esteem, a positive approach to human sexuality, and mutual respect in sexual relations. Sexual health enhances life, personal relations and the expression of one's sexual identity. It is positively enriching, includes pleasure, and enhances self-determination, communication and relationships.

Why is sexual health important?

Sexual health is fundamental to the development of one's full human potential, to the enjoyment of human rights and to an overall sense of well-being. By endorsing sexual health for all, legal, health and education systems build a strong foundation for preventing and treating the consequences of sexual violence, coercion, and discrimination.

Ensuring sexual health requires:

- Respect and protection of the sexual rights of all individuals.
- Respect and protection of the right to control one's own body.
- Women's and girls' empowerment, so that they have full decision-making power in situations of sexual intimacy, including deciding whether to be sexually active, and so that they have the ability to insist on consensual sex, safe sex practices, and fertility regulation for the prevention of unwanted pregnancies.
- Equality in relationships to ensure mutual sexual expression, pleasure and respect.
- High quality, confidential health services and a functioning public health system.

Actions To Be Taken:

Reallocate and efficiently use public and private funds in support of the following actions:

Education

- Develop and implement sexual health education programmes for children and adolescents in the formal and informal sectors, which emphasize gender equality, positive self-identity, self-esteem, decision-making and relationships based on equality and respect.
- Ensure that women receive ongoing education from state education, information and health

sectors, women's organizations, the media and peer groups on sexuality and sexual health so that they are able to:

- freely decide and express their sexuality;
- build self-esteem and the ability to decide whether or not to be sexually active;
 - prevent sexually transmitted diseases;
 - use contraception when they want to avoid pregnancy;
 - access safe abortion services in the case of unwanted pregnancy; and
 - challenge and counter the pressures of gender inequality which threaten their sexual health.
- Educate men about sexuality and sexual health so that they respect gender equality and sexual rights and take responsibility for their own sexual behaviour, including:
 - sexual expression based on mutual pleasure and respect;
 - prevention of sexually transmitted diseases; and
 - practice of contraception.
- Train and sensitize health care providers and educators to adopt positive concepts of sexuality, sexual identity and sexual health, in addition to reproductive health, and support them to provide education and services to all groups in society.
- Promote respect for women's human rights including elimination of sexual violence, female genital mutilation and other violations of sexual rights.

Media

- Promote positive and diverse portrayals of women's and girls' sexuality, sexual relations based on mutual respect and autonomy, and informed and safe sex practices.
- Promote positive and diverse male images which highlight power-sharing behaviours, responsible, pleasurable, non-violent sexual practice, and equality between women and men.
- Develop media campaigns on sexual health issues including elimination of violence against women, sexual violence and abuse, and harmful sexual practices including female genital mutilation.
- Encourage investigative and documentary reporting on best practice and on health system

abuses relating to sexual health.

Services

- Provide comprehensive, good quality, respectful and confidential sexual health care throughout the life-span that is responsive to user needs, within existing health services. This includes:
 - education to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS;
 - promotion of safe sex practices, especially male and female condom use;
 - screening, diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases;
 - supportive and active response by health care providers to suspected and actual instances of sexual abuse and violence;
 - efficient referral systems; and
 - respect for ethical and quality standards.

Research

- Investigate under-researched areas of sexuality and sexual health, such as:
 - social, cultural and other barriers to women's full expression of their sexuality;
 - women and HIV/AIDS;
 - safe sex practices;
 - best practice in strategies to support autonomous sexual decision making by girls and women; and
- discrimination against people with disabilities and its impact on their sexual expression.

Laws and Policy

- Provide legal aid services to inform girls and women of their human rights and legal rights regarding sexual health and sexual safety and to support them in pursuing the legal process.
- Remove legal, regulatory and social barriers to access to information and good quality

sexual health services, including age and marital status restrictions, and other forms of discrimination.

- Develop and enforce legislation which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and provide mechanisms of recourse and compensation for those who are discriminated against.
- Develop and enforce legislation necessary to ensure provision of a full range of sexual and reproductive health services, including access to affordable and safe contraception and abortion.
- Develop and enforce legislation that protects girls and women from violence by criminalizing rape, including rape in marriage and in situations of armed conflict, incest, sexual exploitation and trafficking, female genital mutilation, infanticide and gender-based genocide.
- Protect the human rights of all people, regardless of health status or disability, through legislation which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of the presence of disease or assumed presence of disease, such HIV/AIDS.

SEXUAL RIGHTS

The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent, and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences.

-- Fourth World Conference on Women Platform for Action, para #96.

What are sexual rights?

Sexual rights are a fundamental element of human rights. They encompass the right to experience a pleasurable sexuality, which is essential in and of itself and, at the same time, is a fundamental vehicle of communication and love between people. Sexual rights include the right to liberty and autonomy in the responsible exercise of sexuality.

Why are sexual rights important?

Sexual rights enhance mutual respect within interpersonal relationships, and ensure that people are able to enjoy sexuality as deep intimacy between human beings, which is essential to the well-

being of individuals, partners, families and society. Gender equality therefore cannot be achieved without sexual rights, and vice versa. Respect for sexual rights as human rights provides the basis for elimination of violence against women, which violates, impairs or nullifies girls' and women's fundamental freedoms, leaving them at risk of genital mutilation, sexual harassment and abuse, rape, prostitution, domestic battering and sexual slavery.

Sexual rights include:

- The right to happiness, dreams and fantasies.
- The right to explore one's sexuality free from fear, shame, guilt, false beliefs and other impediments to the free expression of one's desires.
- The right to live one's sexuality free from violence, discrimination and coercion, within a framework of relationships based on equality, respect and justice.
- The right to choose one's sexual partners without discrimination.
- The right to full respect for the physical integrity of the body.
- The right to choose to be sexually active or not, including the right to have sex that is consensual and to enter into marriage with the full and free consent of both people.
- The right to be free and autonomous in expressing one's sexual orientation.
- The right to express sexuality independent of reproduction.
- The right to insist on and practice safe sex for the prevention of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.
- The right to sexual health, which requires access to the full range of sexuality and sexual health information, education and confidential services of the highest possible quality.

Action To Be Taken

Reallocate and efficiently use public and private funds in support of the following actions:

Education

- Promote the empowerment of women, including education, for the achievement of equal relationships between men and women.

- Provide sexuality education for all age groups and both sexes, in formal and informal education, and in youth organizations and programmes, which emphasize gender equality and sexual rights, including information on forms of sexual orientation.
- Educate both sexes about sexual rights so that they can make and act on their own decisions in relation to sexual expression, take responsibility for their sexual behaviour and its consequences, prevent sexually transmitted diseases, and practice fertility regulation for a mutually safe and satisfying sexual life.
- Educate human rights workers and advocates to recognize, promote and support sexual rights as human rights.
- Train and sensitize educators and health care professionals about sexual rights and the conditions necessary for those rights to be exercised.

Media

- Disseminate information through public fora and all media, both written and electronic, to create an environment accepting of and supportive to women and men's enjoyment of sexual rights.
- Develop broad-based campaigns which promote respect and tolerance for diversity and challenge sexual stereotypes and homophobia.

Services

- Ensure access, for all women, to the full range of high quality sexual health services, including contraceptive methods, provision of condoms, diagnosis and treatment of STDs, and safe abortion.
- Ensure support for men to take responsibility for their sexual and reproductive behaviour, including information and services for contraception, and for prevention and treatment of STDs and HIV; information and programmes that promote gender equality and elimination of violence against women; and information and programmes to eliminate harmful practices such as female genital mutilation.
- Ensure that health care providers respond effectively to suspected and actual instances of sexual abuse and violence.
- Investigate and document violations of sexual rights and provide legal services to redress instances of abuse and violence.

Laws and Policy

- Sign, ratify and remove reservations to human rights instruments, such as CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women), in order to create enabling conditions for the promotion of sexual rights.
- Review, modify where necessary, and enforce laws that regulate age of marriage and sexual activity to ensure that they prevent early marriage, allow for and protect mutual consent, and ensure respect for human rights, non-discrimination and gender equality.
- Review, modify and enforce international, regional and national legislation so that it is, at a minimum, consistent with the agreements of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, in particular paragraph 96 quoted above.
- Remove legal, regulatory and social barriers to access to information on sexual rights, including age and marital status restrictions, parental consent and other forms of discrimination.
- Develop and enforce legislation to eliminate sexual violence, including rape within and outside marriage and as an instrument of armed conflict, female genital mutilation, infanticide, gender-based genocide, paedophilia, incest, sexual exploitation and all forms of trafficking.
- Legalize the right to form mutually consenting relationships of one's choice.
- Develop and enforce legislation which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and provide mechanisms of recourse and compensation for those who are discriminated against; give legal recognition to same sex relationships on an equal footing with married and consensual unions.
- Develop legal frameworks to ensure safe working conditions for commercial sex workers, including education on sexual rights and health, and support and protection to insist on safe sex practices with all clients.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The empowerment and the autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic, and health status is a highly important end in itself. In addition, it is essential for the

achievement of sustainable development. The full participation and partnership of both women and men is required in productive and reproductive life, including shared responsibilities for the care and nurturing of children and maintenance of the household. In all parts of the world, women are facing threats to their lives, health and well-being as a result of being overburdened with work and of their lack of power and influence... The power relations that impede women's attainment of healthy and fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public. Achieving change requires policy and programme actions that will improve women's access to secure livelihoods and economic resources, alleviate their extreme responsibilities with regard to housework, remove legal impediments to their participation in public life, and raise social awareness through effective programmes of education and mass communication. In addition, improving the status of women also enhances their decision-making capacity at all levels in all spheres of life, especially in the area sexuality and reproduction...

-- International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, para #4.1.

What is women's empowerment?

Women's empowerment refers to the processes by which women gain inner power to express and defend their rights and gain greater self-confidence, self identity, self-esteem and control over their own lives and personal and social relationships. Although the extent and circumstances vary across societies and over time within a particular society, girls and women typically have less power than boys and men in both the private and the public spheres. Women's empowerment is the process by which these unequal power relations are transformed in women's favour.

Empowerment means that women:

- are able to make autonomous decisions about their lives;
- learn to effectively articulate their human rights and their physical and emotional needs;
- gain access to economic and other resources to fulfill those needs; and
- are able to reflect collectively on their experiences, to organize and articulate their demands vis a vis government, other agencies and the private sector, locally, nationally and internationally.

In the process of challenging existing unequal power relations, women gain greater self-confidence, and enhance their own personal skills and capacities to dialogue and negotiate with others, while gaining greater control over the external factors that influence their lives. While the individual woman is transformed, she may also want and learn to work in groups with other women through processes of mobilization and strategizing that releases their collective strength.

In a fundamental sense, empowerment means that women empower themselves. However, external agents in the form of non-governmental activists and organizations, bureaucrats, officials and sympathetic men can and should support women in their empowerment processes. Women empowering themselves also requires supportive legal frameworks and access to information and resources.

Why is empowering women important?

Women empowering themselves is central to women's exercise of their human rights and for achievement of gender equality. Women's empowerment is also important because:

- it builds and reinforces positive self-images, self confidence and the ability to be more effective in all spheres;
- it makes it possible to accurately identify women's needs and to allocate and use family and public resources justly;
- it improves the effectiveness of policies and programmes; and
- it enables girls and women to improve their nutritional status and their health; reduce excessive work-burdens and improve the effectiveness of their work; access accurate information and supportive education regarding sexuality and reproduction; control whether, how, when and under what circumstances they engage in sexual activity or bear children; demand and obtain better sexual and reproductive health services; and gain greater voice in policies and programmes.

Actions to be taken:

Reallocate and efficiently use public and private funds in support of the following actions:

Laws and Policy

A democratic political and institutional environment is a co-requisite for women's empowerment as it facilitates women's possibilities to organize and voice their demands in the public sphere. In all contexts the empowerment of women requires the following actions:

- Design and establish legal frameworks for gender equality and equity.
- Develop and enforce affirmative action legislation, particularly quotas for political participation.
- Remove barriers to the formation of women's organizations and guarantee their autonomy.
- Provide open access to information so that non-governmental and other civil society

organizations can be equal players in policy arenas.

- Create procedures within agencies and governments to facilitate effective participation by women's organizations in policy formulation, design and review.

Services

- Incorporate gender analysis and gender audits consistently into policy design, implementation and evaluation.
- Design and implement guidelines for women's participation in consultative bodies, and in decision-making at all levels.
- Create procedures to allow for effective participation of women's organizations in policy formulation, design, implementation and review.
- Provide financial and technical support for women's empowerment programmes.
- Provide funding and training to develop the institutional capacity of women's organizations to promote and support women's empowerment and to effectively engage with governments and other agencies on policy and programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation at all levels and in all sectors.

Education

- Promote public education campaigns to eliminate gender discrimination and create an enabling environment for women empowering themselves.
- Disseminate accurate information on laws, regulations, procedures, policies, and available resources to strengthen the capacity of women's organizations and to build effective women's empowerment programmes.
- Sensitize policy makers, programme managers and staff to the importance of women's empowerment as a development objective.
- Exchange information and experiences on women's empowerment -- what works and what does not -- across different agencies, ministries and programmes.
- Meet established goals for the eradication of female illiteracy and for girls' schooling.
- Design and implement continuing education programmes for women.
- Design and implement support services, such as child care, to free women's time and enable them to engage in organizing and awareness-raising.
- Transform school curricula, revise text books and train teachers to promote gender equality as a basis for girls' and women's empowerment.
- Identify and create spaces in which boys and men will be able to share and exchange their perceptions of and understand the need for girls' and women's empowerment.

Media

- Design gender sensitization programmes for media professionals and increase women's professional participation at all levels of programming.
- Support public awareness campaigns on gender equality and women's rights.
- Disseminate information on the experiences and achievements of women's organizations.
- Portray positive images of women and girls, and eliminate gender stereotypes.

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