

International Working Group on Sexuality and Social Policy
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Executive Summary

Over the course of recent decades, increasing attention has come to focus on the social and cultural dimensions of sexuality. It has become apparent that sexuality is not only a key aspect of human experience, but that it is linked to and implicated in many of the most important social policy issues of the contemporary world. Whether in relation to sexual health and well-being, sexual education and human development, or sexual rights and diversity, sexuality has become a central area of debate both within the United States and internationally.

Over the course of recent decades, there has been growing concern about the relationship between sexuality and social policy on local, national and international levels. The reasons for this are complex and multiple, ranging from the broad social, cultural, economic and political changes taking place as part of the processes of globalization, to the specific challenges that have emerged in relation to issues such as reproductive health and rights, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the apparent increase in levels of sexual violence and abuse. In countries and communities around the world, important new initiatives have emerged that have sought to address the interface between sexuality and social policy, and major international activities and negotiations (such as the international conferences on population and development and on women, together with their follow-up meetings) have highlighted these issues.

As a response to these issues, the Ford Foundation has developed a plan for “scaling up” a range of program activities focusing on sexuality in order to create the basis for a global dialogue on the social dimensions of sexuality and their policy implications. Central to this plan is support for the development of a number of national and regional Resource Centers (in the United States of America as well as the African, Asian and Latin American Regions) focusing on sexuality. In addition, in the United States, support will also be provided for the development of a national Advisory Council that will focus on sexuality knowledge, information and policy development in that country.

As a complement to these other activities, this proposal would provide support for the creation of an International Working Group Sexuality and Social Policy, in order to build more effective linkages between activities being developed on the local and regional level, as well as a forum capable of stimulating global policy debate related to sexuality, sexual health, and sexual rights. The secretariat for this International Working Group would be based in the Center for Gender, Sexuality and Health of the Mailman School of Health at Columbia University in New York City, but its composition and activities would be global in nature, involving participants from both developed and developing countries in all of the major geographic regions of the world, and developing a series of meetings and related activities taking place internationally.