



Jill Lewis

# Mobilising Gender Issues

Report from the  
**Living for Tomorrow** project on youth, gender and  
HIV/AIDS prevention

The **Living for tomorrow: Youth, sexual health and the cultural landscapes of gender and sexuality in Nordic/Baltic/N.W. Russian times of transition: an HIV/AIDS era** initiative was a three year action research project (1998 - 2000) funded by NIKK, the Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research. The project has produced the following resources:

## Reports

**Challenging Gender Issues: report on findings from the Living for Tomorrow project about young men's and young women's attitudes to men, women and sex** by Jill Lewis & Stephen Clift, NIKK, Oslo, 2001.

The report presents and reflects on the perceptions of gender and sexual relationships between men and women, gathered by self-completion questionnaire from a sample of young people living in Tallinn. It also explores how perceptions of gender influence young people's thinking about sexual relationships and actual sexual behaviours.

**Mobilising Gender Issues : report from the Living for Tomorrow project on youth, gender and HIV/AIDS prevention** by Jill Lewis, NIKK, Oslo, 2002.

This is an overview of the project - what concerns it had to consider, and what issues it had to navigate. It discusses the wider challenges faced in developing its focus on gender issues, describes its vision, planning, building, designing and different actions it undertook to achieve its ends. It presents the outcomes and discusses some of the learning processes the project brought into focus.

## Booklet

**How to Bridge the Gap between Us? Gender and Sexual Safety**, NIKK & The Living for Tomorrow NGO, Tallinn 2000.

A booklet written and illustrated by Estonian and Russian teenagers. Themes include: Being man or woman, Attraction, Stereotypes, Jobs men and women do, Why young people have sex, HIV/AIDS, Marriage and the family, Condoms; Excuses, excuses. The text is in English, Russian and Estonian – and the booklet ends with a vocabulary of words to do with gender and sex. Copies are available from NGO Living for Tomorrow, c/o AIDS Prevention Centre, Narva Mnt 48, Tallinn 10150, Estonia, e-mail: aek@aids.ee, tel: +372 6273500.

## Web resources

All documents can be ordered and/or accessed from the Living for Tomorrow website:  
<http://www.nikk.uio.no/forskningsproject/livingfortomorrow>

**The Living for Tomorrow Questionnaire on Young People's Attitudes to Men, Women and Sex**, 1999 & 2000.

This questionnaire was used by the project. A version was revised by sexual health educators and gender researchers from 8 countries – as a cross-cultural tool that can be used and adapted as desired for teachers and researchers anywhere. The questionnaire is a useful tool as a basis for discussion within groups of young people.

**The Living for Tomorrow Bibliography**, 2001.

A bibliography of background information useful to the project.

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**Notes on the author**

Jill Lewis was Project Co-ordinator and researcher at NIKK, the Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research, and has been in charge of the design, development and implementation of strategies of the Living for Tomorrow Project. She has been actively involved in HIV prevention initiatives with young people since the mid 1980s. To undertake the NIKK project, she was on leave from her position as Professor of Literature and Gender Studies at Hampshire College, Amherst, MA in the United States.

## Contents

Reflections from inside the LIVING FOR TOMORROW project .....	7
Acknowledgements .....	9
Introduction .....	11
Part I: Background contexts and concerns of the Living for Tomorrow Project .....	13
1. Contextual imperatives: HIV/AIDS .....	13
1.1 Of gender and HIV/AIDS .....	13
1.2 Issues haunting the HIV/AIDS pandemic .....	15
1.3 Difficulties mobilising concern about HIV and AIDS .....	16
1.4 Emerging Post-Soviet HIV/AIDS epidemics .....	17
2. Challenging dilemmas .....	19
2.1 Top-down delivery: educational methods and strategy .....	19
2.2 Top-down delivery: strategic priorities and resourcing .....	20
3. Problems in taking up “gender” in promoting sexual safety .....	23
3.1 Absence of a “gender” focus .....	23
3.2 Problematic forms of gender focus .....	23
3.3 Working with a gender focus in a post-Soviet context .....	26
3.3.1 Words and concepts in cross-cultural collaborations .....	27
3.3.2 “Gender”? What’s that? .....	28
3.3.3 Images of “feminism” .....	29
3.3.4 How men are positioned and perceived .....	29
3.4 Working with a “gender” focus with young people .....	31
4. Relating to and from “The West” .....	33
5. The post-Soviet divides: ethnic polarisations .....	35
5.1 Independent Estonia: a residue of separated populations .....	35
5.2 Working against Russian/Estonian tensions .....	36
5.3 Textures of 1990s ethnic polarisations among young people .....	38
5.3.1 A vivid sense of “otherness” .....	38
5.3.2 Willed and loaded differentiations .....	39
5.3.3 What they wanted to go on record .....	42
Part II: Overview of what Living for Tomorrow undertook .....	43
1. Framing the project .....	43
1.1 The importance of links and networks: .....	43
1.2 Building resources for the future .....	46
1.3 Specific Estonian contexts: input and anchors .....	46
2. Implementation processes .....	48
2.1 Clarity in strategy: philosophy and aims, evaluation and monitoring .....	48
2.2 Building local collaboration for implementation .....	48
2.3 Capacity Building: the initial “training” workshops to establish a “core group” .....	48
2.4 Design of the Capacity Building: programme and methods .....	49
2.5 The Core Group .....	51
2.6 The Youth Workshops and youth initiatives .....	52
2.7 Consolidating skills and sustainability .....	54

2.8 Wider networking: locating the project's work within international efforts.....	55
3. Research processes .....	57
Part III: Challenges and achievements .....	59
1. Gender Issues .....	59
1.1 The urgency for more engaged gender focus in HIV prevention .....	59
1.2 The challenges of working with gender: no quick fix.....	59
1.3 The importance of cultural framings of gender: contexts of real lives .....	60
1.4 The need for a "theory" of gender.....	60
1.5 Working against very real currents of resistance.....	61
1.6 The importance of educational strategies and framework in addressing gender.....	61
1.7 Gender issues on the move .....	62
2 Research + action.....	63
2.1 The importance of a research framework.....	63
2.2 Education processes .....	64
2.2.1 Asking questions, not delivering pre-given analysis.....	64
2.2.2 Practising what you preach .....	64
2.2.3 Practical ways of working .....	65
2.2.4 Allowing for differences .....	56
3. Reflections on difficulties and challenges.....	66
3.1 Recruitment issues.....	66
3.2 The question of boys and men.....	66
3.3 Bridging academic research and educational implementation .....	67
3.4 Under-estimation of challenges of bridging differences between people.....	67
3.5 Impermeability of international bodies as experienced "from below" .....	68
3.6 Time and energy.....	69
3.7 Uncertainty of progress at any one point: need for more flexible resourcing of time.....	69
4. Final Summary of the Achievements of the Living for Tomorrow project.....	70
4.1 The founding of an independent NGO.....	70
4.2 Publications, resources and records .....	70
4.3 Networking – ideas in wider circulation .....	71
4.3.1 International interactions.....	71
4.3.2 Nordic networking .....	72
4.3.3 Baltic/NW Russian networking.....	73
4.3.4 European connections .....	74
4.3.5 Less formal networking.....	74
5. Youth involvement in HIV prevention .....	76
6. Key elements of Living for Tomorrow: an HIV/AIDS era initiative .....	77
Bibliography.....	78

### **Appendices on the internet**

On the project's web site you can find some 80 pages of documentation and concrete examples from the actual workings and development of Living for Tomorrow. These could be of particular use to readers interested in using some of the project's methods. These documents should be read as appendices to this report! You can find them on the following address:

<http://www.nikk.uio.no/forskningsproje kt/livingfortomorrow/>

If you are unable to use internet, print-outs of these Appendices can be requested from NIKK. Please feel free to use anything that is relevant to your work.

## Reflections from inside the LIVING FOR TOMORROW project

When the Living for Tomorrow Project began its initiative in Estonia, we did not realise fully how timely it was going to be. Within two years of it beginning, the HIV epidemic in Estonia escalated frighteningly. The NIKK project arrived at a very hard time for AIDS prevention. We had a desperate lack of resources even for urgent needs of very vulnerable groups such as injecting drug users, commercial sex workers etc. So AIDS prevention education for “ordinary kids”, so important in any national strategy for stemming the spread of HIV, always had to be put on “hold”. Then Living for Tomorrow arrived out of the blue, with its target being exactly this “ordinary kid”.

When I started getting involved in supporting the planning and implementation of Living for Tomorrow, I was amazed, how much all the work cost, how much it was seen necessary to spend, how richly resourced it was from its Nordic Council of Ministers funding. I know if you read about this project from the West, that maybe it looks like just a “little” project. But from the perspective we were working from in Estonia, it felt like Cinderella, poor, with dirty clothes with holes everywhere suddenly being offered a beautiful brooch with diamonds. What does Cinderella do, but welcome the gift with open arms. It is very startling, from within the economies of post-Soviet, newly transitional societies to see the sudden injection of what for us are excessively well resourced windfalls coming from the richer Nordic countries. But as Living for Tomorrow progressed, I came to understand how much the quality of the work you do depends crucially on the investment you are able to put into it. I understood the best investment we can make is in our youth, and how the resources that the NIKK project made available were able to produce such outstanding results for us, not only in AIDS prevention, but in Russian/Estonian collaboration and integration as well.

This was a project focused on gender issues and HIV prevention. But it wanted to work with our youth in the real situations of daily life in Tallinn. It wanted to do what for me seemed at first an impossible task, given our history of separation: to work with Estonian and Russian teenagers together. Living for Tomorrow was one of the first youth projects to

attempt this in independent Estonia. During the project I understood more than ever how difficult and heavy a process it is to involve people in integration. Very often in Estonia we have many illusions about integration being something very simple. People think it is enough to print some posters about friendship between Estonians and Russians, to hand out some leaflets or to make some TV programmes encouraging integration. Living for Tomorrow showed us it is work that needs the greatest care – every single day. You have to break stigmas and myths, but this is possible only if you understand, why they exist, what problems other people are facing on the other side of the problem. One very important and very unexpected thing I learned as a bilingual adult was that young people in Estonia do not speak with each other across the language divide the Soviet era left us with! It was the hardest thing you could imagine for them to communicate with each other. The project’s commitment to encouraging this lived collaboration was quite extraordinary.

When we chose English as the working language for Living for Tomorrow, our reason was to create equal conditions for the Estonians and Russians teenagers joining the project. It was very ambitious to decide to work in English with 15 year olds – people told us it was impossible. But we had to persevere if we wanted all of them to have equal possibilities of communicating – English was the most available common language for young Russians and Estonians of their age. Their schoolteachers told me how much better they noticed the teenagers’ English was after the project. If only we could have had the same effect on both Estonian and Russian language communication as well! But that is another project.

A central concern Living for Tomorrow was to focus on gender issues that are often neglected in HIV prevention work – even in the Nordic countries that pride themselves on gender equality policies. In both Estonian and Russian languages the word gender does not exist. The concept has not been in discussion in our society. So all the ideas about gender issues in the project were utterly new for all participants, not only for the young people, but for all the adults too. From our Soviet past we have digested many stigmas and primitive understandings about the roles of men and women, from the Soviet notions of “gender equality” imposed on our society. There are many unquestioned and wrong assumptions about gender inequality in the minds of people here today. As with the

integration problems, people have all kinds of stigmas and myths about gender differences, and do not question enough what expectations, pressures and experiences men and women face in society, or what history has shaped them that way. How you are expected to be a man or a woman affects your sense of power and ability to act responsibly. There is so much that is not yet challenged about our gender system, and such a lack of communication about sex and risk among adult men and women, or among boys or girls and also between them.

As far as our AIDS prevention work is concerned, one very fruitful result of Living for Tomorrow's is that its very high quality of education of the young people has given birth to real, engaged peer groups actively involved in HIV awareness work. Every single young person who was involved in Living for Tomorrow became a really significant person in their school, someone who not only knew a lot about very sensitive topics, but understood a lot, and was motivated not only to behave safely themselves but also motivated to help others to do same. They are able to undertake peer education now with a really impressive level of skill, knowledge and critical thinking. Our AIDS Prevention Centre often uses them as HIV prevention educators for young people.

Living for Tomorrow used important new methods of education with our young people. Traditionally from Soviet autocratic society we have inherited very hierarchical relations between the educator and "the taught object". For example, doctors usually have no discussion with patients about problems, just tell them authoritatively what to do. The teacher is the "clever" person who knows everything and delivers information into the heads of "not yet clever" pupils. Politicians "know" what people need etc., etc. I remember how unusual our Centre's work with target groups (HIV positives, sex-workers, drug users etc.) was in the eyes of our decision makers, because our first step was to ask the targets themselves what were their needs and problems. Living for Tomorrow has been a very good and inspirational example of motivational method in a society where hierarchical, informative methods are usually used.

We have a great need to spread the effective experience of this project to other regions of the country, but as usual the lack of finances is our main obstacle to sustainability. Fortunately

Living for Tomorrow has been acknowledged within UNAIDS as a Best Practice Project and we have real hopes of gaining further support from the AIDS Task Force, from the Nordic Council of Ministers and UN agencies to replicate and expand Living for Tomorrow work. The NGO Living for Tomorrow that created itself from the NIKK project is more than ready to carry more work forward, and has demonstrated this in a range of initiatives they have already completed. We already have one good example of interest in the project from the local government of the town of Viljandi, where the NGO has already mounted training to help people found a new branch.

Living for Tomorrow is like a small piece of the future that came into our ordinary lives. I am sure it is a significant step to really helping change the approach to HIV prevention education for young people. And the name of the project exactly mirrors the subject of the project. It is an investment in the future, for those people whose life will continue after ours.

**Nelli Kalikova**, Director of the Estonian AIDS Prevention Centre, Tallinn

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Thank you *all* for input or support that helped Living for Tomorrow come into existence and carry its work forward to make its particular contributions to HIV prevention work.

## Introduction

This report presents an overview of the work undertaken by the NIKK Living for Tomorrow project. The project was based at NIKK in Oslo and ran for three years from 1998–2000 with central collaboration with participants in Estonia.

In response to the urgent need to enable young people to become more actively and effectively involved in stemming the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Living for Tomorrow aimed to combine gender theory and research with action implementation to approach youth, sexual safety and HIV prevention with a challenging focus on gender. Critical explorations of how the gender system works and needs to be questioned and changed in order to enable safer sexual behaviours were at the heart of this project. Processes that deepen understanding of social forms of gender inequality and cultural beliefs about gender differences (in contrast to common notions of fixed, natural truths) were taken as the key focus around which sexual health and safety issues could be made more relevant and engaging for the young people. Participatory learning processes created a climate of engagement and openness that enabled the participants to think more critically about gender while learning about sexual health concerns and risk behaviours in sexual relationships.

The project initiated interactive, capacity building workshops where young men and women, collaboratively learned to question the gender norms and expectations of their culture that lead to risky heterosexual behaviour. A “core group” of these volunteered to design and run workshops with a group of teenager volunteers – who in turn went on to implement initiatives based on their involvement. The project designed a questionnaire that explored young people’s perceptions of how gender “works” in their society, and their attitudes and beliefs about what is “normal” and expected in sexual relationships between men and women. These gender beliefs are central to the HIV risk behaviours young people engage in, yet they are rarely discussed in HIV prevention education.

Given Estonia’s recent independence from the Soviet Union (1991), the project had to work creatively with the intense ethnic/national tensions left over from the Soviet era. Its methods - drawing on local resources, gender researchers, dif-

ferent drama techniques, active learning methods, and initiating projects to be taken over by the young people, – were crucial to enable active involvement with gender issues, to generate cross-ethnic collaboration and create conditions for the project continuing longer term. Issues of respect, listening, democratic processes in organising, actively embodying ideas – were throughout connected to the gender discussions and contestations, locating HIV and sexual safety in wider contexts of significance.

A major concrete outcome from the Capacity Building was the founding of an independent Living for Tomorrow NGO that has continued to actively mount initiatives in many parts of Estonia. A significant outcome from the work with young people was a booklet “How to Bridge the Gap between Us? Gender and Sexual Safety”, made in 3 languages and illustrated by the Russian and Estonian teenagers. Both the NGO and the young people from the project who have continued to volunteer in HIV prevention initiatives work supportively with the Estonian AIDS Prevention Centre. A report, “Challenging Gender Issues”, analysing Estonian and Russian young people’s beliefs about and attitudes to gender, men, women and sex in Tallinn (with many international implications) is available from NIKK. The questionnaire used in gathering this data was revised with collaboration from sex educators and gender researchers in 8 countries, to make it usable as an international HIV education and research tool. An extensive bibliography of books, articles and materials focusing on different aspects of gender issues, sexual safety and HIV/AIDS prevention is available on the project web site, where this report and main documents of the project can also be found.

The report presents and discusses

- *The contexts within which the Living for Tomorrow work was undertaken:* the different challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, dilemmas inhibiting effective HIV prevention education, the lack of radical gender politics within sexual safety education, challenges in mobilising gender debates in different cultural contexts, the collaborative challenges in the encounter of Western initiatives with people in vulnerable and transitional societies, and ethnic/national identity tensions.
- *What the project undertook:* an overview of the different levels of work it needed to combine and the processes involved in its

organisation and core activities: building the infrastructure of the project, the capacity building, youth workshops, youth initiatives, different dimensions of research, networking the ideas

- *Outcomes and Learning processes*: achievements, along with reflections on the difficulties, challenges and experience gained

Young people's unsafe sexual behaviours are gendered behaviours. Safer sexual behaviours, for both men and women, therefore need to go hand in hand with active, informed and politically engaged interrogations of the gender system that normalises risk heterosexual sexual behaviours. It is not a simple movement from the decision to centre gender to implementation of a gender-focused education process. The aim of this report is to record what issues Living for Tomorrow needed to address as it worked to approach gender issues, what it undertook in order to facilitate people engaging with these issues and what its action and research achieved. It discusses what the project faced as it progressed and documents some of the mechanisms and strategies it developed to foster gender-focused HIV prevention. Hopefully the experiences from Living for Tomorrow can be useful to others who are keen to develop more critically focused ways of working with the crucial gender dimensions of sexual safety and HIV prevention.

Jill Lewis

Living for Tomorrow

Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research

*"Youth involves not so much an ideological search for identity as an affective search for the appropriate maps of daily life, for appropriate sites of involvement, investment, absorption."*

E. Erikson, Identity, Youth and Crisis (1968), Quoted in Hein Marais, To the Edge. AIDS Review 2000 (Centre for the Study of AIDS, University of Pretoria)

## Part I: Background contexts and concerns of the Living for Tomorrow Project

The Living for Tomorrow project bridged two areas of work that do not frequently come into dialogue: gender research and sexual health/safety and HIV prevention. This first section covers issues that these different constituencies are unfamiliar with. It is important to detail some of the HIV/AIDS concerns, that sexual health educators are familiar with but that people working with gender/sexuality concerns do not encounter so frequently. It is also important to discuss issues that frame working with “gender”, that are familiar territory to gender researchers, but that sexual health/HIV educators may not have had time to explore.

This section also discusses some of the wider concerns that framed the work Living for Tomorrow attempted to undertake. These issues are present, in some form, in all HIV prevention attempts, though they always surface with local and specific distinctions, so are useful to consider beyond this project’s experience, though illustrated here in relation to Living for Tomorrow’s specific experiences.

HIV and gender awareness education never happens in a vacuum. As it progressed, the project needed to address what its work was up against in the real context of ways people often approach HIV prevention. It needed to consider the ways people think (or do not think) about “the gender question”, and explore the social and cultural realities that framed responses to HIV and to gender questions in the specific situation at hand. Some of the key larger concerns that framed and inspired the project are juxtaposed here with the specific issues, such as “ethnic” tensions, the project found it had to navigate in order to proceed.

So this section draws attention to some of the questions that HIV prevention work has to navigate, giving some examples of how these issues came into focus within Living for Tomorrow. This larger picture sets the scene for an account of what the project did and reflections on its processes and outcomes that follow in the next two sections.

## I. Contextual imperatives: HIV/AIDS

### I.1 Of gender and HIV/AIDS

The Living for Tomorrow project aimed to develop conceptual and strategic frameworks for more effective involvement of young people in HIV prevention education. Its key focus was on questions of *gender* in sexual safety awareness processes. It was funded as a project at the Nordic Institute for Women’s Studies and Gender Research (NIKK), in Oslo, by the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM). The support for the project marked the NCM’s concern for issues of gender equality, youth, health and HIV - and the commitment to develop collaborations with neighbours in the newly independent Baltic countries.

The project was conceived as a three-year action/research project that would establish a new terrain of collaborations with people willing to explore gender. In particular it wanted to facilitate thinking about how ideas about the social and cultural constructions of differences between men and women are significantly interwoven into heterosexual sexual risk and safety. The project involved new, contextual research, and the design and implementation of a gender focused initiative with groups of young adults and teenagers - virtually all of whom had never considered gender issues before, and only a few of whom had any prior involvement in HIV prevention or sexual safety education.

The project had to bridge a series of gaps throughout its work:

- the gap between research and action
- the gap between Women’s/Gender Studies and concern about the HIV epidemic
- the gap between sex education processes and trainers and the field of gender research.
- gaps between affluent, “stable” Nordic and Western frame works, and the perspectives and (im)possibilities of daily life in the post-Soviet context of a newly independent country
- the gaps and tensions within local “ethnic” differences, where historical developments and the social experiences of power, money, rights and political systems of inclusion or marginalisation have left powerful marks of cultural polarisation and non-communication on young people’s lives.

The issues it faced exist on different landscapes, with different internal complexities, in many societies at the start of the 21st century. This project, encouraged by the NCM support for new cross-regional collaborations, “piloted” its ideas, education strategies and research in collaboration with people in Estonia. It is important to note, however, that as a Nordic/Baltic/North West Russian initiative, the piloting action could have taken place in any of the *Nordic* countries - or any place where a dynamic debate about the problematic mechanisms of traditional gender differences in sexual behaviours is not part of the sexual health education processes that young people encounter. Issues the project sought to explore are largely absent from HIV prevention initiatives internationally. In other words, the neglect of “gender issues” embedded in the sexual politics of contemporary life are not problems particular to post-Soviet Eastern European or to developing countries. They haunt sexual safety work in more affluent countries too. One of the background factors that galvanised the idea for the project was my experience within the England-wide *Health Education Authority’s Secondary School Sex and HIV/AIDS Education Project*. In this project’s 22 regional trainings, it became clear that in-depth gender issues were persistently absent from the concerns of the key people responsible for developing sexual safety education for young people. Discussions generated while piloting and disseminating Living for Tomorrow’s work and ideas in Nordic, Baltic and other international contexts have revealed the interest of sexual health educators in more informed work on gender. There is a need to fertilise sexual safety education with more active links to analyses of how to understand gender systems and how gender differences are socially constructed and reproduced.

The project wanted to raise questions about the role of gender analyses and debates in context of sexual safety education. To this end its practices needed to be informed by gender research, embodied by gender-conscious and gender-critical educators – in a process where the gendering of sexual behaviour is understood on a wider map of interrogations of the gender system. So Living for Tomorrow took gender-focused imperatives as its starting point, gender theory and feminist interrogations of gender and sexuality as its fertilising framework, and the urgency of working to involve young people in the education action processes that mobilise these issues as its central motivation.

Fed by the debates and analyses that have surfaced in women’s movements, and from gender research and feminist theory in the last 30 years of the 20th century, the 1990s saw the beginnings of some key feminist and gender research contributions that suggested the need for more dynamic linkage of an understanding of the sexual politics of gender to sexual safety work. (Berer and Ray, 1993; Patton, 1994; Lather and Smithies, 1997; Wilton, 1997; France, 1998; Holland, Ramazanoglu et al., 1998; Nowicka, 1998; Weiss and Gupta, 1998; Foreman, 1999; Whelan, 1999; Barker, 2000). During the course of the Living for Tomorrow project, the discussion of gender in context of the HIV pandemic has increased in UN circles (Reid, 1996; Rivers and Aggleton, 1998; UNAIDS, 1998; Rivers and Aggleton, 1999; Whelan, 1999; Gupta, 2000; Matlin and Spence, 2000; UNAIDS, 2000; UNAIDS, 2000). By November 2000 papers from the UN Division of the Advancement of Women, UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation *Expert Group Meeting on “The HIV/AIDS Pandemic and its Gender Implications”* was arguing that “it is vital to include the concept of gender at all levels of response”, that gender is “central to all aspects of analysis of causative and contributory factors... and to planning and execution of responses to the epidemic”, and that “this calls for skills in gender-based understanding, analysis and planning” (Matlin and Spence, 2000)

This report presents an overview of:

- the issues and problems the project faced as it worked to centre gender in relation to HIV awareness
- what Living for Tomorrow actually undertook in its different stages of work to activate greater critical literacy about gender issues what it was able to achieve some insights, mistakes and breakthroughs in gender awareness that emerged en route.
- Though illustrated by the specifics of the work in Estonia, the aim here is to give account of what was undertaken in ways that can be informative to projects working in other contexts, other cultures - both in sexual safety/HIV prevention education as well as in Gender Research milieus where the translation of academic ideas into social and political processes is considered important.

## 1.2 Issues haunting the HIV/AIDS pandemic

*“The AIDS epidemic ravaging Africa and spreading fast in Eastern Europe and the Caribbean is a bigger potential threat to the peace and prosperity of the world than global terrorism... The number of people living with AIDS is projected to rise to 100 million by 2005. If that happens, it is probably enough to crumble fledgling democracies. It probably will be enough to spread violence among young people who fear that they only have a year or so to live and therefore can't understand why they shouldn't be involved in whatever conflict handy.”* Former US president Clinton, in Diana Princess of Wales memorial lecture for the National AIDS Trust, London. The Guardian, December 14, 2001

The specifics of Living for Tomorrow need to be approached via some initial reflections on the wider context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Nearly 20 years after first awareness of HIV, and of the consequential life threatening and destroying illnesses that cluster under the name of AIDS, the HIV/AIDS epidemics are advancing relentlessly. The scale of this pandemic is hard to digest. In December 2001, UNAIDS reported that some 20 million were believed to have already died from AIDS and 40 million currently living with HIV/AIDS. One third of the global total of those living with HIV/AIDS were aged 15 – 24. During 2000, the final year of Living for Tomorrow, globally 3 million people actually died of AIDS and 5.3 million people were newly infected with HIV. Of those newly infected, nearly half were women, and over half were aged between 15 and 24 (UNAIDS, 2000; UNAIDS, 2001)

In 2000 the World Health Organisation announced that AIDS now caused more deaths than any other infectious disease (outstripping even TB which is increasing dramatically) and had become the fourth biggest “killer” health condition in the world. The long, relatively symptom-free latency period after infection (6, 8, even 10 years), the way statistics have to be estimated from unsystematic or inadequate testing, and the lack of sound testing capacity in many countries or areas have led AIDS “experts” to believe that for every person diagnosed with HIV, there are nine others unaware that they are infected. At the end of 1999, out of 33.6 million living with HIV/AIDS, one in six were new infections acquired in that year alone. (UNAIDS HIV/AIDS epidemic update reports 1998, 1999, 2000).

The continued spread of HIV globally is high and persistent - though varying from place to place according to how and when the epidemic surfaced, local economic circumstances and health contexts and predominant modes of infection transmis-

sion. Though international discussions invoke “successes” in infection reduction (e.g. in San Francisco gay communities, or currently Uganda) data seems to show that these dips risk being temporary and elusive to “rational” control, and depend on individual or NGO initiatives that have limited resources. When successes in lowering infection rates provisionally surface in statistics, they often risk generating complacency or a reduction in national resource funding rather than sustained or expanded investment in prevention.

Rates of new HIV infection levels remain stable or slowly continue to increase in Western countries. UNAIDS is warning of the continued threat of resurgent epidemics in high-income countries (UNAIDS, 2001) and research indicates very limited sexual behaviour changes away from risky sexual acts. Sexual transmission between men and women has slowly overtaken the man-to-man circuit of sexual transmission first flagged in the West. Drug injection with shared needles co-exists with heterosexual unsafe sexual behaviours in youth populations. Young people engaging in sex with same- or opposite- sex partners – and certainly those connecting with older male partners – continue to navigate the discriminations and vulnerabilities of gender inequality and homophobia. At the end of the 20th century, indicators of safer sexual behaviours among youth are not promising. The UK, for example, has seen a 58% increase in teenage chlamydia in 2 years, and in 2000 recorded the highest annual number of new HIV infections so far. And in Norway recent surveys indicate very low condom use among sexually active teenagers, and a huge uptake on pharmacy available emergency contraception.

Globally some 90% of infections are believed to occur through sexual transmission, with men virtually always actively participant in the process of sexual transmission, and the virus passing in the overwhelming majority of cases via *unprotected penetrative sex between men and women*. The mechanisms of sexual transmission of the virus are known and preventable - if sexual behaviour changes can be communicated, understood in ways that make sense to peoples' lives - and embodied in actual sexual encounters. The disjunctures between “information” about sexual safety, subjective appraisals of risk factors, and normative heterosexual conventions of power and control, – all undermine the effectiveness of education campaigns that prioritise “knowledge transmission”.

How a culture's gender system organises sexual encounters pivotally informs possibilities of safety and risk. The familiar gender map that individuals draw on to chart their own behaviours, and interpret their partner's behaviours invites them to behave "as a man" or "as a woman" – as their culture and society suggest. An inability to question the performances of power and dependency in accepted gendered sexual behaviours inevitably favours violations of caring, respect, human rights, sexual safety and health - and the passing on of the HIV virus.

The challenges of Living for Tomorrow were:

- to develop an HIV/AIDS prevention initiative that would insistently centre critical interrogation of ways the taken-for-granted gender system facilitates sexual risk behaviours, and
- to see if this centring of 'critical literacy' about gender would prove fertile ground for mobilising young peoples' energies for involvement in HIV prevention work.

The project needed to find ways to bring the gender debates centre stage, to help participants identify and reflect on their own perceptions and enactments of gender conventions, and harness these insights and concerns to mobilisation of sexual safety and HIV prevention action.

### 1.3 Difficulties mobilising concern about HIV and AIDS

World attention has in recent years directed its gaze towards the unprecedented scale of HIV and AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. The decimation of African national populations has gained front-page attention and become prioritised in UN Security Council, World Bank and Western national responses in the last 2 years of the 20th century.

The many years building up to the HIV devastation in sub-Saharan African countries, however, were full of political neglect and de-prioritising of active resourcing of response to the AIDS epidemics. Presently, prevention work faces an overwhelming situation of high infections and ingrained discrimination and myths, alongside absence of effective, nationally motivated sex education strategies (see introduction to

Swaziland report on Education impact of HIV: (Ministry of Education, 1999)). There has been – and continues to be - lack of political understanding and prioritising of the implications of the advance of the epidemic, especially in conditions of poverty, with its economic and social duress, insecurity and instability. This leads to a sidelining of HIV prevention initiatives (Ainsworth and Teokul, 2000). Sex has been hugely wedded to free market, commercial agendas in the globalising world of the 20th century. Inadequate questioning of the *politics of sexuality* in mainstream, "gender politics" circles in Western countries has resulted in a lack of debate and few strategies focusing on the gendered behaviours that were firing the spread of HIV.

There have been complex blockages in the minds of predominantly male politicians and leaders to address sexual behaviour issues linked to questions of masculinity, or mobilise men's influence in fighting HIV. Gender inequality has mostly been articulated as a woman's problem, emphasising the dilemmas of injustice and exploitation faced by the female victim. The sexual behaviours of men and women, particularly in Western cultures, have come to be generally considered as private arrangements, licensed by notions of individual freedoms and desires, and framed loosely within local or national traditions that organise the expected behaviours. In the West the media is a particularly vast sounding board for norms and narratives of sex. Yet gender inequality is frequently wedded to conventions where women's sexuality is policed, judged and owned, while dominant codes of masculinity implicitly condone double standards and encourage boys and men to circulate sexually and take risks, as "real men" should. The publicly condoned conventions of love, marriage and "the family" harbour a huge range of diverse sexual behaviours. In particular, men's sexual behaviours are veiled in many cultures by informal complicity with "nudge nudge, wink wink" attitudes to double standards. Boys and men learn to ride, in various ways, between domestic family obligations and forms of erotic licence profiled by the media, made available through sex industries and explored by both "unattached", male-bonding men or men in relationships when away from the constraints of the home. The escalation of globalised sex industries illustrates vividly the normalised demand for sexual entertainment and services in which primarily women cater for men.

Poverty promotes conditions ripe for the spread of HIV. It diminishes the chance of effective health or education support. It fosters profitable commercialisation of sex, increasing women's economic dependency on men for survival. It intensifies men's impoverished emasculation with unemployment bringing depression, frustration and reactive involvement in crime, sexual exploitation of women or violence. Poverty creates a lack of envisaged possibilities among young people, under-resourced health and education, and indifference fed by impossibility and despair. Surviving and coping with poverty reinforces the need to comply with and exploit gendered sexual conventions where notions of a "valid male sexual agenda" imply an uneasy partnership between male dominance or control and female compliance and dependency. Economic vulnerability and social insecurity lock young men and young women into twilight zones of coping, surviving, defensiveness and desperation that corner them in sexual strategies that go against the well-being of communities and of themselves personally.

#### 1.4 Emerging Post-Soviet HIV/AIDS epidemics

The extent and consequences of sub-Saharan African HIV situations came dramatically into media and politicians' focus at the end of the 1990s. As a result, international HIV resources were prioritised with a focus on Africa, where several countries face some 700 deaths a day, and have regions with 1 in 4 infected with HIV. In contrast, countries across the vast expanse of the former Soviet Union currently face lack or de-prioritising of HIV-related resources for a range of internal economic and political reasons compounded by inertia and defensive denials.

However, across all the former Soviet countries, a later HIV epidemic has developed in what are often erroneously seen as less needy, "Second World" social conditions (Aasland and Cesnuiyte, 1997; UNICEF, 1997; Carter, 2000; Kutsar, Gross-Lootman et al., 2000). The number of HIV infected people in Eastern Europe *doubled* in the year 2000, an alarming rate of increase in countries where the conditions for HIV spread are ripe - poverty, collapsed social infra-structures, fragile state economies, thriving black economies and soaring drug use (UNAIDS, 2000). In 2001, the fastest increase in HIV infections in the world was embodied in the 250,000 new cases of HIV found to have occurred in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. At the same time, the flood of western media

exports, with their commercialisation of the sex and "good life" package, flows though the daily and evening realities of disempowered youth and affects their changing assumptions about sexual behaviours.

The escalation of sex and drug trafficking, and a dramatic increase in prostitution has surfaced in the post-Soviet contexts as anxious political concerns of governments and international bodies. These are ironically linked not only to the flourishing of endemic mafias and crime as modes of survival and profit, but also to the free market circulation of richer Western men. New financial circuits, speedily consolidated e-mail connections, the commerce of new leisure possibilities in "cheaper" countries, and even security and democracy-building, with their accompanying import of Western military or "expert" aid, all bring new and diverse possibilities of *intercourse* laced with inequalities into post-Cold War, economically vulnerable conditions of daily life. Prostitution, sex industries and marriage markets entice or coerce women into the industrialised world with its market for sex infused with Western gender inequality "norms" and highly commercialised, sexualised cultures.

Meanwhile, the double standards and belief in private sexual prerogatives of financially securer men consolidate sexual inequalities as they circulate within the newly independent, transitional countries. The normative culture of heterosexual sexuality, as seen profiled in Western culture daily, encourages Western men (and women claiming the "agency" prerogatives of male-defined sexual culture), often with relationships and families at home, to deploy their Western economic privileges as they move around.

Assumptions about men's basic licence to pursue sex (as a "natural" man's prerogative), facilitate the freedom to behave differently while travelling "away" from a familiar cultural terrain. This exports gender-blindness about the contributory corrosive effect of financially framed sexual connections. Direct prostitution, "gifts" given as sexual bribes or rewards, the seductive fostering of dreams of escape from impossibilities of poverty, the seduction or violation of younger women - all can leave behind them disabling dependencies or damage in the lives of women, while the men with money can move on. UNFPA registered in 2000, that globally, 2 million girls between the ages of 5 and 15 are forced into the commercial sex trade annually. Trafficking for sexual purposes is the most rapidly expanding sector of

organised crime and flourishes in the conditions rife in Eastern and Central Europe and former Soviet Union countries and regions (2000). These statistics signal that a vast number of men are seeking to purchase this sexual availability, and are licensed to do so by the gender culture in which they have grown up.

The huge profits of drug trafficking are injecting availability of fast cash and temporary “pleasures” into a bleak daily landscape for many young people. Addictions heighten invisible risk factors across the social and sexual interconnections of communities. This multi-faceted sexual commerce, social vulnerability and the desire to access wealth and material well being, seen as a potentially accessible Western prerogative, cultivate easy openings for HIV to permeate diverse social networks.

In the midst of this, HIV is spreading fast. In the former Soviet Union, by the end of 1999 420,000 people were known to be infected with HIV; but by December 2000 the conservative estimate had grown to 700,000. The quarter of a million new HIV infections are mostly identified in men, many of whom inject drugs - but no doubt many of them will also have sexual connection with others in their past, present and future. Eighty two of the Russian Federation’s 89 regions now register the presence of HIV: 29000 HIV infections were recorded here between 1997 and 1999, and in 2000 alone over 50,000 new infections are anticipated to have occurred - 3634 already registered this year in Kaliningrad and 3084 in St. Petersburg. Belarus, neighbouring the Baltic countries already has over 14,000 people known to have HIV. Both Latvia and Lithuania also show clearly increasing infection levels. (Smolskaya and Chaika, 1995; Specter, 1997; Specter, 1997; Mugrditchian, 1999; Whiteside, 1999; Aavitsland, 2000; UNAIDS, 2000; USAID, 2000)

It is curious how governments (and people generally) in Western countries register HIV by national statistics which they often relativise to conditions in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet at the end of the 1990’s UNAIDS reported that there had been some 1.5 million HIV infections in the USA – a country in which over 10 million new sexually transmitted infections occur every year. Even Norwegian data, with its relatively lower numbers, show continued HIV increase and a proportional shift to heterosexual transmission, as well as significant levels of unsafe sex among teenagers. But young people in Western countries do not consider HIV a problem that concerns *them* – and they

often carry this attitude and its concomitant unsafe behaviours when they travel “elsewhere”. From globalised media narratives and inadequate circulation of information nationally, young people, like the adults in their countries, come to associate AIDS with a perpetually sliding “elsewhere”: “Africa” for example, as teenagers I talked to in Norway and Estonia said during this project; or “the US and France” as 72 year old Russian Zoya told me in Tallinn; or “Kenya and South Africa” as teenagers assured me in Sierra Leone. Concern for HIV is displaced onto distant “developing countries” and disconnected from immediate regional and national concerns about failed sex education.

HIV was not seen as a significant concern in Estonia in the 1990’s – and Living for Tomorrow sometimes encountered surprise that the project was working in a country with such low recorded statistics of infection. The argument we made was that all the conditions for a rapid spread of the epidemic were there. At the start of Living for Tomorrow there had been 74 HIV infections registered in Estonia. But STD infection rates were worryingly high, prostitution rising, sex education infrastructures virtually absent or just beginning, and the struggles with post-Soviet conditions difficult. By the end of 1999, a total of 92 HIV infections (a slow, small increase) had been registered, while syphilis, gonorrhoea and unsafe intravenous drug use remained ominously high. By December 2000, however, the total of HIV infections had risen to 309, and between January – November 2001 a further 1326 cases were recorded. Of the total 1852 HIV cases in Estonia by November 2001, 25% had been women, and over 77% were aged between 15 and 24. Suddenly, in a very short period of time, massively more infections were diagnosed than in the previous 10 years. An import of cheap heroin into Finland, St. Petersburg and Estonia enabled easy new use by young people particularly, and left in its wake multiple new trails of HIV infection through Estonian social networks. By World AIDS Day, December 2000, Estonia was being singled out, alongside Ukraine, as a striking example of exploding HIV spread (Kalikova, 1999; UNAIDS, 2000; Kalikova, 2001; UNAIDS, 2001)

We see here the possibility of the epidemic suddenly taking dramatic hold and entering new circuits in communities. This is an instance of a recurring phenomenon in diverse contexts “favouring” the spread of HIV, in many parts of the world where sexual safety between men and women has not been actively created.

This profile of an exploding epidemic had been clearly anticipated by Estonian AIDS Prevention Centre reports since 1988 – but pitifully small resources had been allocated to HIV prevention from national sources, and inadequate resources raised from international sources.

## 2. Challenging dilemmas

With its focus on developing more effective preventive education, Living for Tomorrow wanted to engage with two particular aspects of HIV prevention that were considered to be crucially inter-related:

the dilemma of ineffective sexual health education where young people hear “facts” but remain disengaged from a sense of their relevance in their own lives and

the absence of a critical examination of ways in which the gender system shapes behaviour in heterosexual sexual relationships. These concerns made it important to examine some of the problematic characteristics and implications of sexual health education strategies.

### 2.1 Top-down delivery: educational methods and strategy

A central dilemma in sexual health education for young people is that it frequently does not inspire them adequately to embody safer sexual behaviours. Sexual infection and pregnancy rates among young people in countries like the US or UK are known to be dramatically high. Absence of regular and continued condom use by young people – not to mention adults – in most Western countries signal that safer sex education methods have still not been adequately developed or implemented. The countries that are supporting and resourcing development of HIV prevention processes in other parts of the world have still not been able to develop, implement and sustain effective practices at home.

One reason for this is the educational methodology in sex education. The main approaches to sexual safety and HIV prevention education for young people in industrialised countries have used a didactic, information-delivery based model. The educator profiles negative consequences of sexual risk behaviours, the modes and symptoms of sexual transmission of infections, an

explanation of the ailments that result, and some form of strategy for prevention – abstinence, condoms, monogamy, less partners. The didactic narrative of risk and “knowledge” is usually assumed to have a rational translation into personal behaviour decisions. The tendency is thus to stress individual responsibility for this and warn about the high risk of less proper behaviours. This approach is based on “the wrong assumption that fear or anxiety automatically triggers rational reactions that can be refined and channelled into particular behaviour (safer sex), and that once awareness and concern is established, a “logical”, predictable train of reactions can be set in motion” (Marais, 2000). However people do sift new information through other kinds of knowledge, and other narratives of understanding, such as the unquestioned attitudes and embodiments of the gender system.

Limited time in the school curriculum, other priorities, mixed “moral” messages and reluctant or untrained teachers all complicate and erode the effectiveness of processes of school sexual health education. The top-down approach of authoritative facts and warning rarely includes clear, detailed education about possible variables in safe behaviours. Details of practices (even of correct condom use) are often left vague and abstract behind general category advice. The fact that *it is what you do – not just what you don't do* – that can make sex safe, is hard for adults to discuss within the conventional limits of appropriate educational discourse. The social mores and gender norms, which sabotage access to advised behaviours are minimally discussed, if at all. Teachers are not trained within gender research or feminist-informed modes of enquiry to understand and facilitate these critical interrogations. Young people usually do not have the chance to engage in discussions that help them become literate and critical about traditions that reinforce inequality in the culture around them. And they rarely have the time or encouragement to visualise clearly and vividly the practices they need to embody in their sexual relations and activities in order to stay safe.

Most of us in Western societies have experienced education, even if formally liberalised, through the top-down approach of a controlled pre-planned curriculum. Experts (the teachers) deliver knowledge that we must learn, and educators acquire the sense of mission of their work imbued with notions and methods of knowledgeable delivery to the uninformed. School is a place of discipline and organised delivery of knowledge. The training of teachers, the obligatory curriculum frame and the

timetable for classes set norms for learning practices that are essentially not conducive to safer sex education.

In Soviet contexts, mechanisms of authoritative control and top-down delivery of correct knowledges were structurally magnified. And the project was alerted to this in the Estonian context, as the following comments illustrate. A Tallinn doctor, involved in HIV prevention research reflected in informal discussions:

*There is a huge resistance to asking children anything here. People believe children don't tell the truth.... there is no willingness among teachers to take on sexual health... It is a very authoritarian structured education system that teaches low self-esteem, and silence. Children are perceived as a group - not as personalities. A "Don't talk about self" attitude is common.*

This was echoed by informative comments by the Director of Estonian AIDS Prevention Centre:

*We grew up in the Soviet era with the attitude: "if I am chief, I am cleverer, and those under me will do what I say" - with authoritarian assumptions in every walk of life - the workplace, the family. In the family, adults knew everything. There is an old Estonian saying: "Children can talk when chickens pee" (chickens never pee)... Everything is much stricter in the family here: "Whoever's bread you eat, you sing their song"... There has been a strong emphasis on proper behaviour, correct upbringing, rules.... These authoritarian ways permeate the schools... The lecturer is like god. You just don't ask questions.*

An Estonian Family Planning officer was highly sceptical of participatory learning methods – warning they would not work, as they were incompatible with Estonian educational culture and national reserve.

However, Living for Tomorrow wanted to explore ways of engaging young people actively, despite cultural reservations or constraints, in discussions of the wider patterns of beliefs, assumptions and expectations that they experience as shaping sexual behaviours between men and women. Its starting premise was that by *centring discussions of gender and by facilitating innovative and provocative ways of becoming involved with gender issues* - young people could see more vividly how their attitudes and behaviours implicated them in risk taking, and would be more motivated to engage in more active critical thinking about sexual behaviours, risk, gender and power. The idea was that the education would not be just for them to acquire knowledge or listen to ready-made analysis, but would rally their interest and energies into a larger involvement in participation in safer sex awareness processes by letting them *explore how they themselves were implicated* in debatable social expectations of gender.

No sex education process can guarantee that individuals will consistently practice safer sex within the unknown specifics of ensuing sexual encounters. But by taking the debates about gender as its core framework, the project wanted to see if it could generate young people's more active interest to embody collaborative engagement in discussing and developing sexual safety awareness. This would involve finding ways to generate new critical literacy about social constructions of gender, combined with clear and accurate understandings of the body, sexuality, safety and health.

## 2.2 Top-down delivery: strategic priorities and resourcing

HIV prevention is riddled with other problems of top-down approaches that have consequences for attempts to initiate sexual safety education with young people. Living for Tomorrow was being developed in a country, Estonia, where actual HIV/AIDS statistics suggested it was not a main priority – though all the indicators, as discussed earlier, showed how the conditions for the spread of HIV were dangerously present. It was framed on one side, by Nordic countries where HIV/AIDS is mostly seen as a developing country issue, and by Russia and Baltic countries on the other, where in 1998 statistics had not documented the scale of the problem in ways that politicians had grasped as significant.

The dependence on epidemiology is one dilemma HIV prevention faces. Not only does this affect political vision and allocation of resources; it also affects prevention strategy.

Epidemiology is by nature an assembling of retrospective, after-the-fact data, calculated on selective sample findings and speculative estimations. It produces data that hovers above multiple unknown factors of the present and future, yet it is used by governments and health ministries to validate strategy and funding. Budgets for prevention are legitimised by quantitative facts – so how information is organised and presented carries huge consequences for conceptualising strategy and allocating funding. Resourcing of effective prevention strategies can come too late – sometimes only if the registered, visible numbers of HIV infections and AIDS cases have crossed critically tolerable levels, even though the conditions for the virus itself to circulate along many invisible paths have been identifiable for years.

Epidemiology of HIV is rarely used to support across the board, systematic resourcing of engaged, HIV prevention awareness education for all young people in a country. It is usually drawn on to legitimise targeted, risk-group group education funding. In most countries HIV awareness work with young people happens erratically and lacks the resources needed to develop more widespread and sustained effective educational interventions.

People with HIV are listed in “categories” of infection mode that have been used to establish the “risk group” strategies which come to be key lenses for interpreting the epidemic. There has been a problem, for example, that the categories of epidemiology have erased the active circulation of “heterosexual” men across categories (so as lovers of other men, or impregnators of mothers). Homosexual men are cross-listed with bisexual men – but bisexuality is not cross-referenced with heterosexuality – erasing the same-sex activities of not insignificant numbers of “heterosexual” men.

Bisexuality, and often implicitly male homosexuality, demarcates non-monogamous practices, while the heterosexual category does not, despite heterosexual non-monogamy or “infidelity” being a major factor in HIV transmission. Mother-to-child transmission as a category erases the father/male partner-to-mother transmission. The intravenous drug-using category overrides the interwoven, invisible sexual transmission categories. “Prostitution”, as a term, erases the multiple forms of exchanges of sex for money, support, security or under coercion, that women undertake in different circumstances without identification with that category. The prostitution image often erases political strategies to make the socially diverse and vast numbers of male clients aware of risk behaviours and able to implement safer sex.

Safer sex and HIV prevention strategies influenced by the ways Western industrialised countries have medically conceptualised the epidemic, still prioritise the channelling of funding to high risk target groups: gay men, drug users, prostitutes, and street children. However these target priority constituencies are difficult to access systematically, given their marginalisation and need for secrecy to avoid stigma and ostracisation. The “high risk” group prioritising usually occurs in context of the absence of committed wider strategies for educating “ordinary young people” across the board about sexual safety and HIV. This problem was encountered directly in a meeting, supported by

UNAIDS/WHO, in the meeting organised by the US and Finnish Governments to address responses to the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Baltic region, which two Living for Tomorrow representatives attended in Helsinki in 1999. The notion of the “risk group marginals” versus a safer, mainstream “general public” haunts response to the HIV epidemic in tragic ways – permeating wide response of personal indifference or denial – and nourishing subtexts of blame and prejudice. It comes to reinforce, in the public’s and policy makers’ minds, misconceptions about sexual risk realities in real life that, for the spread of HIV, have tragic consequences.

Same-sex sexual connection, drug use, exchange of sex for money or privileges, disaffection from the main rules of society and navigation of sub-cultures exist in different forms within the “not named as risk group” youth population. Strategies giving high priority and resources for sexual safety education for *all* young people before life siphons some of them into explicitly more marginal and higher risk existences, are few and far between. This is influenced by certain kinds of top-down, expert advice (e.g. target group funding priorities) that inhibit the medical and governmental capacity from supporting development of more effective, systemic and “on the ground” initiatives. Only when young people have *already* engaged in “risk behaviours” do they qualify for the target group identity. The education and awareness in mainstream networks of young people needs to be understood as crucial to help prevent and limit unsafe behaviours among those whose lives possibly lead them later to specific acts, or situations, that put them particularly at risk.

Living for Tomorrow worked with a wonderful and inspiring network of “ordinary” young people – teenagers aged 15 – 17, and a network of young adult supporters and participants aged mostly between 18 and 32 recruited through ordinary education networks – the worlds of school pupils, teachers, students and sexual health educators. While planning and working with the positive energies of many individuals involved in different ways with the project, I was involved in many conversations about daily life as the project and issues it raised were discussed in preparatory explorations, workshops, evening work sessions, and morning coffee meetings.

Through these conversations with “ordinary” people, who would not have been located by “high risk group” targeting, stories were told of life experiences full of risk:

- teenage boys being taken to prostitutes by their fathers
- 15 year old girls as sex partners of foreign men in their forties (including relationships condoned by or secret from parents)
- plans to run away from home, with promises of visits to SE Asia financed by foreign older men
- friends incarcerated for drug dealing
- the lure of teenage modelling abroad
- teenage girls longing for older or richer men to change their lives and open possibilities unimaginable in the course of real life hopes
- oppressive domestic relations at home
- the excessive use of alcohol
- husbands or fathers having affairs
- the nervousness and secrecy of bisexuality and same sex relationships
- night work in casinos financing education studies
- easy access to drugs
- sexual harassment of younger participants (male and female) by older men responsible for AIDS prevention work
- an international e-mail relationship leading to meetings with (and paid for by) a virtual stranger in foreign countries
- partners with HIV and unsafe sex practices
- sexual abuse by men
- lives linked in various ways to prostitution
- health problems being navigated through a sparse health system
- poorly resourced schools with minimal sex education of any kind.

The renovated centre of Old Town Tallinn, inviting for tourism and bigger capitalist and western links, is where the night clubs and sex services flourish and where globalised images of style and the “good life” proliferate. Early 1998 saw Tallinn’s cheap sex services profiled in a men’s magazine, available on street news stalls in Finland. Autumn 2001 saw the same type of article in a leading men’s magazine lead on news stalls across Britain.

The lures and coercions of risk behaviours are invisibly present in the mainstream realities of many people’s lives. The exploration of the ways heterosexual norms function within the gender system render these more visible. Problems of sexual risk behaviour are acutely present *within the norms of heterosexual behaviours in our societies*, the very heterosexual diversities intersecting with what are *imagined* as exceptional or marginal worlds. In post-Soviet situations these crises surrounding the relationships between men and women are heightened by all the insecurities of the transitions to democracy and a free market economy, occurring under difficult and uncertain conditions.

Contradictions between official profiling versus day-to-day experiences of difficult conditions harbour another problem. Estonia currently bridges tensions between real signs of progress in the transition from Soviet times and new complicated conditions, averse to implementing democratic change. Living conditions are described as improving, relative to other Baltic countries and other countries of the former Soviet Union, while actual daily realities are still riddled with hardship, sparseness of possibilities and a sense of despair for many. While efforts are made, with European Union encouragement, to democratise ethnic privileges, the actual ethnic/linguistic divide actively echoes the map of poverty, crime, drug use and prostitution. A social infrastructure whose surfaces can be profiled as modernised is coping with collapse and a dearth of resources for renewal. A newly evolving class structure where private sector wealth for a small minority is soaring ahead of wider public welfare, producing polarisations of wealth/poverty, of privilege/marginalisation.

The prevailing imperative to present issues as “solved” or in process of being solved in order to facilitate fuller inclusion in European Union produces disjunctures between government priorities and actual daily lives. The gaps between how things need to be thought about to partner European approaches, and how things actually are in the daily realities young people confront, echo at another level, the tension between organised data and experienced conditions. (Dietz, 1995; Aasland and Cesnuiyte, 1997; Lazarus and Redman, 1997; UNICEF, 1997; NCR, 1999; Bond, 2000; Carter, 2000). Various international-funding supports have been stopped because of the relative “success” of Estonian progress. Yet little or no internal Estonian funding is available, for both economic and political reasons, for sustaining the development of creative, well resourced sexual health agendas – or for NGOs that can develop or consolidate new methods and mobilisations.

### 3. Problems in taking up “gender” in promoting sexual safety

#### 3.1 Absence of a “gender” focus

Sexual safety education and HIV prevention most frequently deliver facts about the mechanisms of human bodily functions (the HIV virus, cells, body fluids) and interactions (unprotected contact with exchange of body fluids, transmission of infected blood etc) that lead to the negative consequences that need to be avoided. The abstract language often inhibits real understanding of the physicality actually involved. However, from the most morally conservative, risk-focused admonitions to the most morally liberal, pleasure-affirmative information, there is often a pervading absence of actively engaged, politically and research-informed gender awareness. There is minimal facilitation of *critical awareness of how sexual behaviours and experiences - from monogamy to orgasm, from penetrative sex to oral sex, from marriage to prostitution - are engaged in or experienced within relations of a gender system that is permeated with explicit and implicit relations of power.*

Even when themselves critical of gender inequalities, both men and women grow up complicit in the gender systems of their society and culture, enacting behaviours absorbed through gendered values and attitudes that prolong and reproduce the problems. Gender systems have been established within histories of social codes that “normalised” and policed gender difference through various mechanisms that legitimised different levels of inequality (economic, legal, domestic, political, cultural narratives etc). Men and women are positioned with a different, gender specific relationship to these socially constructed gender norms. They are positioned differently in relation to power. Sexual relations and embodied sexual acts between men and women happen between people shaped subjectively and socially encouraged (or policed) by the experience of gender in the world around them (Connell, 1987; Davies, 1989; Butler, 1990; Holland and et al., 1991; Connell and Dowrett, 1992; Reid and Bailey, 1992; Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1993; Richardson, 1996; Richardson, 1996; Holland, Ramazanoglu et al., 1998; Lewis, 1998).

Western, industrialised societies have evolved sex education strategies – particularly in the face of the threat of AIDS – within education processes that very rarely critically interrogate the power relations of gender systems. Gender inequality mostly gets mentioned, if at all, at the most provisional, descriptive, generally moral level (e.g. the history of women and the vote, the women novelist’s perspective, abstract human rights etc) and often only at the discretion of an individual teacher. Women’s movements in the last 30 years have, however, galvanised rich re-examinations of the diverse ways gender operates in how people acquire knowledge. We all learn appropriate behaviours, within the cultural and social mechanisms we encounter in daily life where we create ourselves as men and women within the invisible rules of how men and women are meant to be and what men or women are meant to do. Research and education initiatives exploring these questions are now more and more institutionalised as Gender, Women’s, Men’s, Feminist or Queer Studies, and identify issues and methodologies that are resonating into all the disciplines as the significant implications of the gender focus are more and more widely grasped.

Most sexual health educators and many development aid workers have not been party to the developments within these gender analyses and debates. This was illustrated vividly for me during my involvement in a 1990’s project involving all regions of England. People influential and active in the development of sex and HIV/AIDS education and related school policy and curriculum priorities in English secondary schools, were invited to identify important concerns in strengthening STD and HIV prevention education within the design of their own regional support training. Gender issues were invisible in the concerns they listed. Discussions I have facilitated with school pupils and students in Norway, and with sexual health educators from Sweden and Denmark during Living for Tomorrow, have echoed this invisibility – the absence of conceptual frameworks for thinking the problematic of the power relations of gender within sexual safety/health initiatives. It is striking too, in the scanning of research and educational initiatives, how absent critical interrogations of gender mechanisms are within the mainstream literature on sexual health promotion.

### 3.2 Problematic forms of gender focus

As gender has emerged as a topical theme within sexual health/HIV prevention work in the late nineties, it has risked still being relegated to its own thematic sub-section, insulated from other strategies or concerns. “Gender” is sometimes included as a politically correct but superficial category of reference. A European experts’ meeting on *Youth in HIV Prevention* I attended in Spain in 1998 included little reference to gender. When I commented on the absence of gender-focused discussion within the programme and workshops, I was told that gender had been covered in another, earlier experts’ meeting. Only one youth workshop promised to include the topic of gender. It profiled it in fact by a flip chart with the word GENDER written in bold letters, under which, without any related discussion and shortly before the end, a young woman silently printed the word: “*unresolved*”. Gender is often seen as a self-contained category that needs to be included in the politically correct list of related topics but never actually explored in depth. Or it is addressed as a self-contained theme, looked at only by the “special interest” group (usually women). It needs, however, to inform a critical focus for developing and interrogating *all* levels of approach, for men and for women working with all aspects of the HIV/AIDS issue. This is because gender issues permeate both the problem and the solutions.

Another dilemma encountered when trying to work with the politics of gender is that the category “gender” has emerged in development aid discourse since the 1980s as a synonym for “women”. This has gone hand in hand with human rights discourses that name injustices and inequalities, and rally concepts of rights and equalities in defence of the disempowered and weak. So women have emerged as “the gender problem”, described most often as the victims and exploited – whose position needs to be rectified through commitment to human rights and projects focused on empowering women. The problem here is that the discourses that name the terms of women’s victimisation, invoke *women’s* situation as the problem to be solved, and chart *women* as the objects of exploitative or abusive male behaviours needing protection and special support. This kind of “gender strategy” provides crucially needed local responses to the real situations of women affected by discrimination, male violence and control.

But the ensuing emphasis has often been to deal with the damage in the victims’ lives, emphasising the importance of legal protection or survival support for women, at the detriment of engaging with the conditions that facilitate and reproduce the causes of damage - the gender system that fosters the specific gender problems.

The gender system in the society that normalises the polarised differences in women’s and men’s positions often remains absent from the victimisation and local solution approaches. While discussing or funding “women’s projects”, there is often a curious pussy-footing around the naming of men as participatory agents in the problem, and the related ramifications of the *gender system* of the culture that has enabled men to enact expected “masculine” behaviours. This reflects an underlying lack of theorising gender – as if the only available (and risky) model is to incite men as oppressors and protect women as victims – echoing a dysfunctional kind of radical (minority) feminist polemic most men and women are reluctant to uphold. A discussion of gender could prove more useful if it explored *gender as a socio-cultural system that implicates men and women in its reproduction*. This kind of discussion could invite men and women to *rethink* the terms of masculinity and femininity in which they have become unconsciously invested in the course of growing up.

This point was illustrated in one of the many spin-off connections from Living for Tomorrow. I had a planning conversation with an organiser of a new, democracy-building network in Balkan countries, on how to take up gender issues in their new dialogue centres. Gender was in their list of main focal themes. Her clear assumption was that “gender” work would be about and with women. The idea of involving *men* in exploring the implications of gender issues initially seemed to her surprising, indigestible, even ridiculous – and then rather risky, since it might provoke their hostility and contempt, stir a subtext of tensions and power relations usually left dormant. Ensuing discussions with men and women together from the Balkan region proved, however, that if gender issues are formulated as a gender system problem – rather than an oppressor/oppressed formulation, rich forms of discussion and interest and potential involvement can emerge. The use of the Living for Tomorrow questionnaire and approaches to gender discussion also met with enthusiastic interest and engagement from both men and women in Sierra

Leone during seminars I ran for teacher trainers and youth in Freetown, 2001, for the Norwegian Refugee Council. The cross-cultural viability, as well as necessity, of this approach to gender concerns is particularly important when taking gender issues into contexts where “gender” has not been a conceptual frame for discussion. It means that gender discussions need to range wider than the specific theme (here sexual safety and HIV prevention) at hand, in order to make sense to those participating in them.

Linked to this “woman problem” approach has been a minimal engagement with men. There is very often a lack of strong political challenges, *involving men themselves*, to problematic codes of masculine behaviours. A particularly fascinating feature of much discussion of violence against women has been the frequent absence of the noun “men”. The UNIFEM statement on violence against women circulated in December 2001 illustrated this point vividly. What is more, politically responsible men with public profiles rarely take up such issues as ones within which the gender system implicates them, (e.g. violence, even if they personally are not violent).

*The kind of statement Pascoal Mocumbi, Prime Minister of Mozambique and its former Minister of Health made in July 2001 is a rare intervention by a male politician:*

*...there is likely to be too little said about what is the primary means by which AIDS is spread in sub-Saharan Africa: risky heterosexual sex... As a father, I fear for the lives of my own children and their teenage friends. Though they have secure families, education, and the information and support they need to avoid risky sex, too few of their peers do. As Prime Minister, I am horrified that we stand to lose most of a generation, maybe two. The United Nations estimates that 37 percent of the 16-year-olds in my country will die of AIDS before they are 30. As a man, I know men's behaviour must change, that we must raise boys differently, to have any hope of eradicating HIV and preventing the emergence of another such scourge. ... Above all, we must summon the courage to talk frankly and constructively about sexuality. We must recognise the pressures on our children to have sex that is neither safe nor loving. We must provide them with information, communications skills and, yes, condoms. To change fundamentally how girls and boys learn to relate to each other and how men treat girls and women is slow, painstaking work. But surely our children's lives are worth the effort.*

Urban crime and youth disturbances, activities involving men in risk-taking behaviours, are frequently discussed without reference to gender. (Ramazanoglu, 1992; Gilmore, 1993; Connell, 1995; Jahli, 2001). The dynamics of unsafe male sexual behaviour (outside of gay men's safer sex campaigns) is alluded to most frequently by reference to condom use. The “condom” solution somehow comes to displace the need for

men to think more deeply, and in more public political discussions, about the gender attitudes and beliefs held within their culture about sexually performing masculinity. The moment of condom use is one moment within a cumulative set of gender relations between men and women that are riddled with investments in certain kinds of femininity and masculinity, and anticipate certain kinds of behaviours. These gendered behaviours that are perceived as “normal” are in fact riddled with assumptions about oneself and one's partner that bolster certain kinds of images of differences between men and women that encourage them to enact unsafe sexual risks. The other Living for Tomorrow report, *Challenging Gender Issues*, analysing feedback from teenagers about their perceptions of men, women and sex brings this vividly into focus.

Men, and heterosexual men in particular, are a complex constituency to mobilise in efforts to address negative outcomes in sexual relations with women, not least sexual safety initiatives. A fascinating feature of HIV prevention work has been men's reticence to question male sexual behaviours and acts that place sperm in direct contact with zones of their partners' bodies that are maximally receptive to infection with HIV or other STDs.

The turn of the century has however seen an important emerging new focus on theorising the problems constituted through masculinity (Connell, 1995; Dammert, 1995; Hearn, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Barker and Loewenstein, 1997; Davies, 1997; Bourdieu, 1998; Wight, 1999). 1999 saw the Nordic Council of Ministers create a Nordic Men's Studies co-ordinator. UNAIDS declared its year 2000 theme to be on new partnerships with men and promising studies of ways men are implicated in the HIV epidemic have been emerging (Carovano, 1995; Berer, 1996; Rivers and Aggleton, 1998; Foreman, 1999; UNAIDS, 2000). Interesting debates on the problematic gender polarisation underpinnings of the institution of heterosexuality are being opened up by gender research (Chodorow, 1992; Holland, Ramazanoglu et al., 1994; Richardson, 1996; Dunne, 1997; Holland, Ramazanoglu et al., 1998; Jackson, 1999). Work involving men is very new and difficult – but the reconceptualising of gender-focused approaches that centre men along with women as an intrinsic part of the gender problems and solutions is very important to HIV prevention work where men's sexual activities are key components of the spread of HIV.

Being aware of dilemmas such as these in working with “gender” was an important framework for developing Living for Tomorrow. In the design and approach of the project I saw it was crucial to explore ways to bring into sexual safety work with young people a critical literacy about how gender relations between men and women are *socially* constituted. This required facilitation of open discussions, linked to participants’ own experiences, about how gender is culturally scripted, how beliefs about gender circulate in common-sense assumptions about “natural” differences, and how gender is behaviourally embodied at a personal level with women and men enacting gender differences. It was important to encourage a realisation that gender is a social system that is articulated differently in different social frameworks and cultural traditions.

Understanding that gender is a changing system of relations that people embody and “perform” in different ways, in different places and times was to be crucial to the necessary realisation that gender relations do change, can change, and, in the face of sexual health dangers, urgently need to be changed. Sexual relations between men and women and sexual practices are shaped by gender conventions. If sexual relations and behaviours are grounded in unequal gender relations, they will actively undermine or sabotage the sexual safety practices that are urgently required to stem the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

### 3.3 Working with a gender focus in a post-Soviet context

Living for Tomorrow sought to develop a project that could anchor discussion of gender in ways connected to the experience and context of the project participants. This involved reflecting on ways that gender differences, structures and concerns are perceived in the cultures where the project was to be developed. Connecting the work of the project to findings and debates of gender researchers working with the countries and wider region involved was crucial to profiling the immediate significance of gender questions in the participants’ lives. For Living for Tomorrow, therefore, wider post-Soviet residues needed to be considered along with current attitudes, beliefs and current changes or conditions in Estonia. (Baalsrud, 1992; Einhorn, 1993; Funk and Mueller, 1993; Lie, 1995; Einhorn, 1997; Lauristin and Vihalemm, 1997; Scott, Kaplan et al., 1997; Purvaneckiene, 1998; UNDP, 1999; UNICEF, 1999)

In 1998, the Central European University in Budapest held a seminar where Gender and Women’s Studies scholars from universities and institutes from a range of post-Soviet, Baltic, Central and Eastern European countries discussed the particularities of how gender issues surfaced and needed to be addressed in their contexts. To help inform the project, I was invited to audit the seminar presentations and discussions where participants debated the relevance of Western-based gender research and feminist critical perspectives and theory for their work and the social changes their countries and regions were facing. The discussions helped highlight some of the important questions Living for Tomorrow needed to be aware of.

The seminar participants’ thinking was stimulated both by engagement with and also critical distance from Western gender theory and feminist priorities. Discussions resonated with a need to resist the application (and perceived invasion or patronising import) of so-called “advanced” theoretical and strategic perspectives on gender that have evolved in Western, industrialised societies. These often appear, from other cultural perspectives, to rather arrogantly claim blind authority in analysing and theorising gender.

Listening to these discussions brought the following key issues onto the map of Living for Tomorrow:

- the use of words and concepts in cross-cultural collaborations
- the lack of familiarity with the concept of gender
- dilemmas in references to feminism
- different perceptions of men’s position in society

The significance of these four concerns for approaching discussions of gender and of sexuality on different cultural, social and historical terrains has wider implications. Here I want to discuss them with reference to the wider post-Soviet situation profiled by researchers attending the seminar, illustrating them by quotes from my exploratory discussions with doctors, teachers, researchers and young people in Tallinn and Tartu at the beginning of the project. These comments gave insight into the perceptions of gender issues in Estonia that I was able to draw on in discussions within the project as it progressed.

### 3.3.1 Words and concepts in cross-cultural collaborations

The conceptualising of gender problems that has evolved in Western or European influenced frameworks, raises questions about the different connotations and associations in cross-cultural dialogues. Colleagues located in non-western cultures and experiences, often access (as in *Living for Tomorrow*) gender debates through Western filters, and need space for critical re-assessment of the significance or non-significance of these filters and different formulations for differently experienced problems (Kupryashkina, 1996; Eliot, Hood et al., 1997; Koroleva, 1997)

Discussions of sex, the body, the family, the public/private debate, notions of individualism – even “women” or “men” – refer to experiences framed by specific history and traditions. (Eliot, Hood et al., 1997) This is a crucial feature of cross-cultural sexual safety collaborations. There needed therefore to be care in the use of language – and time and space for listening to how people perceived the issues themselves. The risk of importing ready-made categories, of setting up the comparison from a starting point of Western gender analyses is a permanent point of tension and endless revisions in the cross-cultural collaborative process.

Post-Soviet contexts, for example, carry ghosts of all “emancipatory concepts” (as, for example, *gender equality*) provoking cynicism, following their misuse in the Soviet period. The rhetoric of official ideologies and censorship had been experienced as powerfully manipulative and silencing. Public discussion of actual personal experiences was unfamiliar, if not repressed, in the Soviet Union.

*Coming out from the forced “equalisation” of the Soviet period – there is now a new important polarisation into men and women: people are re-identifying themselves again through polarised gender scripts: with a new clarification of borders between male and female, a reassertion of clear traditionalism. Under Soviet Totalitarianism men and women were “equal”. New traditionalism invokes imagining of time before “forced equalisation”. And then the Western Media has brought an importation of a new cultural landscape associated with images of individual “freedom”. Researcher at Tartu University, Estonia*

*“In Soviet times women were in positions, society “full of equality”... but women worked very hard, the double load. Women were strong. But hidden sexual inequality was a huge problem”.*

*“For decades all sexual problems were underground: only recently have they*

*exploded outside. But the Soviet mentality lingers - all sex issues are underground, hard to talk about”.*

Comments by doctors in AIDS prevention initiatives, Tallinn.

*“The liberation of women was in fact a functional state mobilisation of women as a resource”.* Gender researcher, Lithuanian University.

“Gender equality” was associated for many, in their twenties and older, with a resented imposition by a totalitarian regime that “denaturalised” the “natural” relations between real men and real women. Soviet-style “emancipation of women” mobilised women’s labour power but excluded women from decisive power and authority, and disallowed the adornments of “real” femininity - masculinising women. Soviet era strategy for freeing women from pregnancy adopted a “contraceptive” abusive to women’s bodies – repeated abortion, usually performed without anaesthetic. The hostility to Soviet imposition leaves in its wake a contradictory sense that “equality between men and women is not our problem - but a Western capitalist one”, simultaneous to a belief that with the ending of the Soviet regime, equal men and women can now invent their lives as “real” (authentic Estonian) men and women - not the coerced distortions of Soviet impositions.

Recent Estonian research shows that democratisation processes during transition have in fact displaced women from places of influence and independence that they were actually able to occupy under Soviet “forced emancipation” (Lauristin, 1996; Narusk, 1996; Narusk and Hansson, 1999). In the context of collapsed state structures of childcare, health, stable living conditions, the worlds of new finance, computer technology, and mafia commerce in trafficking have all been premised on assumptions of male power, authority, skill and mobility.

In discussion with people in Estonia many contradictory views about gender were in circulation. Romantic nationalist nostalgia was often expressed - that now Estonian women were free to return to being real women – as they were imagined to have been in the period of national independence before Soviet occupation. There is an imaginative turning from tractors and mines to lace and high heels. An AIDS educator told me earnestly how now, with independence, the outstanding, even superior beauty of Estonian women was allowed to become visible for international renown.

*“Under Soviet style equality women dreamed to be real women - to be loved, cared, taken care of.” “A key issue is the residue of “over-emancipation” of Soviet*

*times was this “forced emancipation”. People are looking now for traditions of courtesy to let you feel feminine or masculine.” “There is a new approach now, thought to be freer: an image of a new kind of couple is more desirable: man should be stronger, the leader. Women like this.”*

From a round table discussion with researchers and students, Tartu University

There is a desire to mirror the gender codes of femininity and masculinity associated with Western freedoms that *are* made vivid through commercial advertising, Western TV and films. Yet at the same time, especially some younger people frequently express another view. Estonia has embedded in it, from its recent history, they told me, all the terms and experience of gender equality necessary – that men and women are equal in Estonia, and that to raise discussion of gender inequality is to import a Western problem and projection.

*“people have a certain way of talking... a conservatism, a refusal to be interested, they just assert that gender equality is not an issue”* Estonian UNDP employee.

*“No, men and women are absolutely equal here. It’s really not a problem.”*  
Teenager on joining the project.

The specific configurations of how people themselves envisage gender issues needed to become part of the discussion and engaged with in various ways in the project’s Capacity Building and youth workshops. We needed to find ways to open up possibilities of discussion of contradictions or myths, or simply the underlying terms that were in circulation, that people had heard or taken for granted – but that importantly informed certain attitudes and beliefs about gender.

### 3.3.2 “Gender”? What’s that?

*“Estonia is the hardest place to take up gender, it’s a discussion that’s not really begun yet.”*

Wife of Estonian politician

*“There is a real attitude here - in the press; a story comparing women to dogs is not questioned.”*

A Tallinn NGO representative

While notions of equality between men and women provoke ambiguous reverberations for people, the very concept “gender” as an analytical and political category is new and unfamiliar for many people. This means that the education process needs to draw out of participants their familiar script-

ings of gender, the frameworks that they invoke without thinking concerning men and women, and the social situations men and women navigate. It was found important to locate the debates about gender assumptions and perceptions within the terms familiar to the participants, before juxtaposing them with findings and debates from new gender research within their country - and other issues raised in international engagement with gender issues.

In post-Soviet contexts, debates about the social and cultural construction of differences between men and women have not been very frequent in academic, political or popular circles. Discussions that elsewhere have surfaced from the 1960s onwards, stirred by different currents of Women’s Movements, have had little public circulation, and are stimulated by a few gender-focused researchers or activists, and Western democracy building partners since independence in the early 1990s. Gender and Women’s Studies have barely any funding or mainstream academic support in the post-Soviet higher education systems (Lewis and Anders, 1998). It is so far mostly supported by funding from the West, and exists precariously facing opposition, indifference and hostility. The discussion of gender only exists because of the interest of a few committed individuals and some nascent, small and struggling centres, or spurred on by controversial dialogues with women from the West.

Widespread assumptions that gender is an “essential” quality, determined by biological sex, co-exist with the utter newness of sparse discussions of gender as a social construct that can be debated, analysed, rethought, negotiated and changed. Participants in *Living for Tomorrow* reflected often on the newness and difficulty of the concept “gender” for them and a very new experience of the questions and perceptions it opened up for them. Realising the significance of working to facilitate the questioning of gender, while incorporating Estonian/Baltic frameworks for concretising the discussion, and generating cross-cultural debates, we made a short video during the Capacity Building, where we recorded some of the participants’ initial responses to the newness of the gender concept and focus.

The people who adopted positions that they “knew” all about gender concerns proved to be the less able to engage challengingly with the questions raised by the gender focus. It was

harder for more men to engage in gender discussions open-mindedly, to dislodge the more authoritative stance they were invested in - and participants at the end of the project reflected on the need for better, stronger strategies for engaging men.

### 3.3.3 Images of “feminism”

*“He was saying in the bar how feminists make him sick, how he would want nothing to do with any of that, how they are just women with problems. So I told him – well, I think of myself as a feminist, all these gender issues are what feminism is about. But he wouldn’t see the link. He just took another drink and laughed.”*

Dialogue between two Living for Tomorrow participants, reported by a female Russian gender researcher, at beginning of Capacity Building

*“When women don’t shave under their arms it’s seen as ugly. People call them feminist armpit.”*

Male Russian gender researcher

*“At home my husband and his friends mock me when I talk about these things. I am seen as a not-proper wife, a crazy woman when I question these behaviours - and get involved in a project like this!”*

*“I just got fed up being policed into cooking for him. He’d say – yes do things that you want – then get angry with me when I had responsibilities and wasn’t there to tend to his needs.”*

Comments from project young adult participants

For those working with political impetus in gender studies “feminism” is a key referent concept – designating analytical and political engagement with issues of gender and power, with gender inequalities. When working outside the givens of women’s movement mobilisations - outside an understanding of the diversities and inner contestations of feminisms, away from the theoretical debates it has generated and any historical grasp of the political nature, political content and real political contexts of feminist struggles – the word itself is a problem.

The term “feminism”, across the whole Soviet region, resonates with Soviet era connotations of lesbianism (seen not with homophobic rejection, judgement or repulsion but rather as an illness, a psychological condition needing treatment, to be pitied), man hating (ridiculous, hysterical, abnormal, risky since wilfully aggravating male negative response) and western capitalist decadence (abnormally self indulgent, lacking moral fibre of social cohesion, being dissatisfied with having it so good - the privileges of the housewife denied women in Soviet times).

Feminism is stereotyped in similar ways in many countries – including Western industrialised countries, and already carries new ambivalences for the “post-second wave feminism” generations in the West. There is something about the word that invokes for some people an “in-your-face”, aggressive claiming of the urgency to challenge men and open the “can of worms” of gender and sexual inequalities that makes people balk. This is especially so for young people, nervously making their way into “attraction to the opposite sex” and the sexual codings of what are seen as affirming of the different positions of the sexes. The feminism banner invites a destabilisation of consent to the gender norms - and is too risky a slogan for many to embrace.

Living for Tomorrow, though informed and stimulated by a diversity of feminist debates, feminist political agendas and gender-focused discussions, chose from the start not to use that word unless it emerged later as relevant for participants who engaged with readings. The word risked activating too many distracting obstacles – for both men and women in the project. It was felt better to let people in the project in Estonia lay claim to that word as and if they encountered it in meaningful ways – rather than to wave it clumsily with western gestures in post-Soviet oxygen. The interrogation of “gender” became less polemical, more “inclusive”, using less polarising terminology to let questions of gender and power surface with integrity and allow men and women to engage with them.

### 3.3.4 How men are positioned and perceived

The positioning of men and the understanding of, or investment in, certain forms of masculinity is permeated with specific traditions and conditions.

It was important (and the project did not always do this well) to locate the beliefs about masculinity within not only cultural traditions, but specific current conditions of both possibilities and impossibilities. It was also important to discuss men and masculinity with awareness of how women are invested in bolstering men’s “masculine” positions and in servicing family frameworks within which the ideology of man as the provider prevails in certain ways. The fragility of acquiring confident masculine currency in any culture, and the defen-

siveness young men navigate in proving and asserting themselves needs to be recognised with care.

Workshops based on approaches from Living for Tomorrow that were held with men and women from different parts of the Balkan region, towards the end of the Estonian project, were able to bring into respectful dialogue a plethora of anxieties, vulnerabilities, intolerable and frightening expectations that young men have to “manage”- in ways that highlighted the fearful borders of insecurity and uncertainty that their immediate familial, social and cultural contexts often reinforce. When gender issues come into focus, the language for discussing them often risks being that of locating men as the perpetrators of the problem, while neglecting how boys grow up written into the terms of the problem, required to invent a masculine self that performs the popular (and peer-monitored) criteria for “being a man” (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Connolly, 1995; Connell, 1996; Barker and Loewenstein, 1997; Davies, 1997; Wight and West, 1999).

The post-Soviet gender researchers’ seminar in Budapest discussed how relations between women and men in their societies had been pivotally shaped by the terminology of the Soviet totalitarian regime, where women’s experience was conceptualised as *common* with men. Against the “enforced emancipation” strictures imposed and controlled by the state, another level of common agendas was invested in by men and women in order to manage the survival and protection needs of the family, and to provide a safe base from which to navigate resistance to the system. The “double burden” of women’s full responsibility for domestic matters was often digested invisibly within relationships, uncontested by women or men, both accepting men’s patriarchal prerogatives not to have responsibility in this area. It is important to realise how recently in Western societies these questions were brought into public debate by Women’s Movements, and how relatively little practices in domestic labour and caring work have changed within accepted ideologies of gender equality.

Post-Soviet situations have destabilised the earner/provider role of many men, while many young people hold what they see as “modern” images of man being the natural higher earner and provider (Lewis and Clift, 2001). Living for Tomorrow informal discussions with young people in Tallinn highlighted current assumptions held that men today *should* be the provider, *should* appropriately earn more, and legitimately could want “real women” (as opposed to “Nordic-style” women) who would stay

home, and care, and be supported by them. This image is at odds with economic realities of earning possibilities and unemployment, at odds with the high level of education among women in Estonia, and silent about the internal power dynamics of the domestically contained wife and mother. The stable “family” image with the “natural” position of the husband/father, and the economically viable male, is also at odds with a strong investment in the image of “real” (and desirable) men as free-wheelers in active sexual circulation, wielding the accoutrements of sexual seduction (fast cars, presents, mobility). Also in the Baltic region, where the difficulties of transitional societies make many young men unable to envisage practical possibilities of assuming typical male roles (to provide, have control or access the material badges of success), a crisis in masculinity is dramatically visible in symptoms such as higher male drop-out rates in education, escalating alcoholism and drug taking and rising suicide and crime rates among men.

Gender politics, if formulated as a synonym for “women wanting change”, can easily be seen as a systematic opposition to men – promoting and aggravating these lived crises in masculinity. The post-Soviet, transitional contexts involve women in bolstering men against emasculation from new and unstable economic pressures, harsh social conditions and the ascendancy of *Western* men in the media sexual imagery of stylised “health”, fashion and economic power. This commitment of women to support men to survive “the system” is a crucial aspect of gender scripting that needed respect and expression.

*“If women are abnormally strong, men drink, or find other ways to be masculine.”*

*“The Soviet Empire was seen as emasculating, feminising. So the move to independence must be masculinising for the nation”*

*“There has been a loss of pride in all the changes. Male power is associated with the power of the nation”*

*“Being a real man is difficult to access now. Unemployment means men are stressed, vulnerable.”*

*“Women, girls really want men to take the lead”*

Comments by gender researchers from Estonia and Budapest during CEU seminar.

*“Nordic funding is being given to women’s projects in rural areas where men also are poor, unemployed, desperate or depressed. Locally it increased tensions between men and women, made men even more depressed and gave “gender equality” a really bad name”.*

Gender researcher in Riga, Latvia

### 3.4 Working with a “gender” focus with young people

Living for Tomorrow wanted to explore implementation processes directly accessible to young people. To this end we needed to sift useful conceptual frameworks from gender research – its theory and research debates – and then translate these into processes that the young people would find interesting and engaging. Discussing larger, contextual post-Soviet and Estonian gender issues was one part of the process. The other key element was listening to what the young people were saying themselves.

During the Capacity Building in late 1998 Stephen Clift and I, who were facilitating the two 3-day week-end trainings, decided to spend evenings with small groups of the participants over informal meals where life, experiences and attitudes could be discussed, and people come into better focus for each other. These meetings with people and the exchanges of ideas and experiences were very enabling for all involved. So near the beginning of the Youth Workshops in 1999 I met informally, in small groups of 5 or 6, with the young people committed to the project. We met each time in a pizza house, and talked for several hours, to get a sense of each other and also to help me get a sense of how the gender map looked from their teenage and Estonian perspectives. Rather than having the young peoples’ ideas remain untapped, parallel to project discussions and continuing latently to inform sexual attitudes and behaviours, it became a significant component of the project to find ways for their perspectives to surface into conscious discussion.

I asked them, as an outsider, about:

- what they liked to read, watch, listen to?
- what sex education they had experienced, if any?
- where they accessed information and images about sex?
- how men and women “are” in Estonia – are there any differences that shape men’s and women’s lives and what is expected of them?

The lenses and reference points via which the young people interpret the world around them needed to be part of the safety dialogue process. In retrospect, it seemed very important that this time was taken to create informal contexts where the relevance of participants’ own experiences, views

and lives was a recognised part of the process being developed.

The teenagers who joined the project had their main experience in a youth culture that has no direct experience of the Soviet era, but were navigating contexts still shaped by it. They were all glad that the Soviet Union had ended, though spoke of difficulties and lack of opportunities in transitional Estonian contexts. They were glad of the freedoms they had access to that their parents hadn’t – and saw their lives – especially their relation to sex – as significantly different from that of their parents. This cross-generational perception of parents as coming from an old-fashioned world with different values, not understanding the pulls and terms of the present, had particular significance. Their youth culture is strongly influenced by Western music, TV and films – especially American. The stories and images that circulate are influential reference points in the imaginary landscapes of gender that young people inhabit, and inform the “performance” of gender in sexual relations in real life. When asked about favourite programmes or films of stars, a Western topography of names emerged, and it was visible that at any one time during the 3 years of the project nearly all the films playing in Tallinn cinemas were American. The young peoples’ clothes style was more concerned to emulate LA and San Francisco than Moscow, their main aspirations for travel lean West. When improvising in workshops later in the project, all the created character names the young people chose were American (Wanda, Lois, Wayne, Mel etc). The impact of this cultural import - where the sexual narratives are de-contextualised, based on usually on American media norms and framings of men and women, and out of synch in particularly dramatic ways with the daily life realities of young people in their own transitional society – needed to be an issue actively raised in the workshops.

Impressions garnered from these initial, informal, small group conversations were corroborated from feedback the project gathered with its questionnaire on Attitudes to Men, Women and Sex, that is analysed in the companion Living for Tomorrow report, *Challenging Gender Issues* (Lewis and Clift, 2001). Creating contexts for young people to see their beliefs in perspective, to discuss the implications of things they said about men and women, was to be an important framework for the sexual health and gender agenda.

A sample of quotes from notes taken in these conversations, can give a sense of the span of attitudes that surfaced often in pizza house discussions with the young people in the project, and the complicated, contradictory gender thinking the project was approaching:

Segment of an exchange: - *Women and men ARE equal. There's no difference in Estonia, (agreement boys and girls). (Then girls added) - Well – there are differences but it's all in attitude - Yeab. Like, men have more control. - Yeab – they can always take the initiative. Yes – it's the men who have the power - and they kind of dominate women...*

*Their (men's and women's) values are different. Women value the family, children, security, and commitment. Men want adventures, being adventurous matters, having an interesting life – aren't concerned about the house, the kids, safety... Boys want different things from life. They don't care about their future.*

*If a man has power, he has the responsibility to make choices, to initiate things... But sometimes men are nasty. I was in Stockholm, & we were wearing short skirts. And these men followed us – and I was really scared*

*Women find it harder to find a job. They're at home more, looking after the children*

*Men think women can't be equal to them... Men want always to be the centre of things, the main person. They want to dominate things. Boys think they have more power. If a boy wants to do something, he will do it... They don't care about girls, about what will happen to girls... In relationships the man is the lion: she is only the cat.*

*Men are stronger than women. Men's bodies are stronger. They are better at abstract thinking, like engineering... The woman can cry, be shy, be delicate. Women are more sensitive, tender, weaker. Sometimes they just feel weak...*

*Men have harder time finding work... men have to work harder... A man is a man – he must not cry...*

*Boys are very stupid. They want only sex... Well, some boys want love and friends*

*Men... just live for today... are interested in the Stock Exchange. They think of women as their property - "She's mine" sort of thing...*

*Estonian women are not as emancipated (said as a negative word) as women in Nordic countries... Lots of men would like to marry Estonian women, because they are not so independent. They are more eager to sit and work at home, more feminine, like more traditional clothes... Women like to be home...*

*Women prefer men to earn more than them.*

*But if in same job, pay should maybe be equal?*

*Estonian women care more about themselves, their home, their children. They love their husband... Nordic women wear more sports clothes, are fat - that is not popular in Estonia - to be fat. It is popular to be on a diet (laughter)... Body image is really important... Estonian men want their women skinny. And Estonian women are known to be among the most beautiful in the world.*

The young people all said they had very, very sparse educa-

tion about sexual matters, and had discussed sex very little. They talked freely about the normal inevitability of “how men are or should be”, “how women are or should be”. They oscillated between:

- affirming the naturalness or even desirability of a sexual division of labour and roles where power, money, freedom and sexual initiative were clearly unequally distributed between men and women
- asserting that men and women are the same, are equal in Estonia, that inequality is not an issue
- arguing about discrimination and a sense of inequality and expressing frustrations at the differences in what was expected of men and women.

#### 4. Relating to and from “The West”

There were advantages to a project fertilised by external input. These included: Western resources, frameworks of ideas and theory that have developed uncensored, and experiences within democratic norms of engaging with political issues, education and organising. The Nordic Council of Ministers’ backing for Living for Tomorrow gave it a legitimate, official status in addressing gender – not a main priority in a period of transition, where it is mostly men setting political agendas and grass-roots movements are new and fragile. An outsider could be bolder (more forgiven or welcomed) in initiating discussion of problems, disturbing the established borders of norms – like ethnic polarisations and gender beliefs. This was the first youth initiative to work with both Russian and Estonian youth in Estonia – and did so against the odds of resistance that haunted it, even as it progressed.

In the post-Soviet, newly independent societies, attitudes to gender issues and to collaborative projects are affected by newly available interactions with richer Western societies. The West is desired as the place of images of hoped-for possibilities, projected promises and a source of money not available at home. It is also resented as the place that imposes foreign agendas, whose “haves” and privileges accentuate the feelings of “not having” at home, who preach and impose their ideas but can be seen not living up to them themselves. Contact with the West can bring resentment of the pressures of globalisation. Encounters with Western complacency and uninformed foreign projections can become embedded in relations between a foreign agenda set from outside, and expected and experienced dependency and compliance of Soviet-style habits of working. The contact is mediated through Western languages (most usually English) that for participants carry the mark of interference and distancing from home experience, and the imposition of expected adaptation to foreign criteria. And it is mediated by Western money with the implicit relations of power. As a Tallinn journalist commented: “*decisions are being taken where the money comes from. They have the money*”. Or as an Estonian teenager commented “*Now there are a lot of foreign men ... older men and fat wallets*”.

So there were issues about bridging differences, discrepancies in power that needed to be addressed. The collaborative terrain had to straddle dilemmas of “importing” and “imposing” ideas

(that people might tolerate but not really engage with) – so the listening and transforming or amending of ideas as things progressed became crucial. The idea of building partnerships within which participants could assume their own agency meant confronting issues of money and power, Western privileges, arrogance or blindness. Issues of control and letting go, of facilitating and assuming new forms of agency were delicate. Post-Soviet inexperience of sharing information or working collaboratively, the habits of hierarchical working and ceding authority to those with power (which, coming from the West, one had) needed to be actively addressed. The project wanted to disturb inequalities (gender, ethnic) but risked embodying new images of East-West inequalities. Even its funding possibilities risked dysfunctional inflation – funding things in ways that would be impossible to sustain within real resources available beyond the end of the project.

With a project coming from, initiated in and funded by institutions in the West, and led by an outsider, there was a persistent set of concerns, and perhaps irresolvable contradictions, running through Living for Tomorrow’s work. Some of the questions that haunted its development for me as the work proceeded were the following:

- how could the project support opening of discussion while not imposing Western frameworks?
- how could it create processes of active participation where people did not just comply with a set agenda – but contest and adapt it?
- how could it engage with and draw on the newly emergent, small gender studies networks that, while hanging precariously on the edges of Estonian academia, were being overloaded with expectations from Western Women’s Studies?
- how could the money in the project’s budget be managed appropriately so that the encounter of different economy levels did not exacerbate the differences, or set in motion unrealistic levels of resources that would undermine possible later sustainability?
- how could the project’s resources best support the work democratically and not generate a small over-paid in-group?
- what were the best ways to navigate an encountered mentality of territorialness – where people, anxious to acquire their own special relationship to Western links which promised individual lines to money, might become more competi-

tive and not share knowledge and information?

- how could it ensure that people who joined the project did so out of the real interest and commitment necessary for the project to develop effectively?

For Capacity Building recruitment, it was clear that “health professionals” were not always the best people to involve. Evident curiosity about this unfamiliar “gender” focus, keenness to work creatively with young people, a good listening capacity and signs of openness to non-didactic, less hierarchical methods of working had to override on-paper credentials. The project needed people who were excited about creating new approaches rather than people who self-identified as “experts” or eyed another chance of Western links and funding. It had to navigate suspicion and forms of territorialness, typical in situations of limited resources that militate against generosity and inclusiveness and foster individual, competitive imperatives to escape from the pessimism and impossibilities of daily social reality.

Specific help by individual people who were curious and enthusiastic to embrace developing the questions and spirit of approach was crucial. The navigating of cross-cultural codes, of differences in circumstances and resources and an anchoring in local networks was helped immeasurably by the integrity of support, the encouragement, advice and good will of a key “anchor” person for the project. This was Nelli Kalikova, a doctor heading the Tallinn AIDS Prevention Centre, with a history of committed work mobilising support in the face of AIDS and fearless in taking up controversial political debates in the media. She welcomed the project to work out of the AIDS Prevention Centre in Tallinn, and helped its staff embrace the presence of the project. Her support for the gender focus, that was new to her, and also her willingness to adopt the Russian-Estonian collaboration (consolidated during her time visiting the NIKK project in Oslo) proved very important in these not being resisted as foreign interference.

The people, who volunteered to continue with the project after the Capacity Building, did this out of their interest in being part of doing the work itself. This open-minded and voluntary interest and commitment were crucial to the spirit the project was able to develop. They were in fact remunerated for their time, energy and shared responsibilities in mounting the youth workshops at appropriate local rates, but this was

confirmed only once the “Core Group” had constituted itself and was meeting regularly.

The processes of running a group were new to everyone. Two young women volunteers in their early twenties, Poliina Jooks and, later, Sirle Blumberg (who would head the new NGO), and a teacher, Tarmo Tank, managed the local co-ordination of the “Core Group” and youth workshops with care, enthusiasm and high levels of integrity and responsibility. Some of this core group, joined by others and with a group of the workshop teenagers as extra volunteers, went on to legally establish their own independent NGO based on the ideas they had engaged with in the project. The commitment, efforts, willingness to give a lot of time and the collaborative integrity established among the group - including Marika Truumure, Irina Piiberg, Karmen Pai, Julia Samarina, Margus Raudsepp, Olesija Roos, Eda Leesalu and Alexandr Samarin - would, in various ways, slowly generate new responsibility initiatives among them in finance management, producing the booklet, helping with research, active education outreach, international networking of the project and NGO and creating new, independently run youth workshops and further NGO initiatives. Their interest in the central issues of the project, their patience with the international co-ordination and expectations, their willingness to explore, discuss, suggest, contest and support the project became invaluable to its progress and success. An attentiveness to the dilemmas faced – establishing a willingness to name problems, to talk openly about the difficulties and see the coping and solutions as an integral part of the development of the project – were all important. Taking time to build interpersonal collaborations and trust was also essential for everyone involved in the project.

The very challenge of how to build effective partnerships was right at the top of the project’s agendas all the time. It was important that international input was framed realistically by the real concerns and issues people faced. It was important that participants in Estonia did not try to please or satisfy the outsider’s agenda, if harbouring ambivalences or tensions. So criticism, argument, disagreement, dialogue and openness, and two-way caring support became crucial within the collaboration. This took time, energy and commitment beyond the frame of any usual academic work and beyond the demands of a working daily life for all involved. Progress needed to be reinforced, ground covered more than once, confidence strength-

ened, energies nourished, and trust built. It was not a simple question of “bringing people on board a NIKK project” – but of creating something new out of the encounter that the project made possible.

## 5. The post-Soviet divides: ethnic polarisations

*The idea of working together, Estonians and Russians, in this project was interesting in some respects. In life Estonian and Russian young people are rarely in contact or communication with one another. My faith in a collaboration between Estonians and Russians is very weak. But this project got the two sides together and helped us have a possibility to know each other better.*

Teenage participant's evaluation comment

Living for Tomorrow took place at a very particular time in Estonia, as the first visualisations of strategies to enable new national coherence and dismantle mechanisms of ethnic discrimination (between its population of Russian versus Estonian origins) were being discussed and initiated.

Working with Estonian and Russian teenagers jointly, as the project did, was a very new experience in post-Soviet Estonia. Since the project occurred on the cusp of these transitions, in the following section I want to record some of the complexities in taking on this internal, cross-cultural collaboration, and give some sense of the challenges of this experience.

### 5.1 Independent Estonia: a residue of separated populations

The project envisaged its work as involving a representative cross-section of young men and women and of young people from the main cultural background groups in Tallinn. For the Capacity Building, with (mostly young) adults, care was taken to include men and women, Estonians and Russians. The young people later invited into the project were recruited from Russian and Estonian schools - and it was explained to them very clearly that the new work of the project was to explore gender (how men and women are positioned and expected to be in Estonian society) and to collaborate across the Russian/Estonian divide. It was presented as part of the initiative to make a new kind of collaboration to intervene in the issues of sexual safety that all young people would face. The need for collaboration to mobilise all young people to attempt to find more effective solutions to sexual risk behaviours was conceived as integral to the ways the project visu-

alised the participation.

In post-Soviet Estonia, a significant percentage (some 37%) of the country's population is of non-Estonian origin. This population has as its first language Russian - the official Soviet Union era language. Families with Russian as first language had no need in the Soviet era to learn Estonian. In Tallinn itself in 1999 the population was comprised of approximately equal numbers of people from Russian as from Estonian backgrounds. Most live linguistically, socially and educationally separate lives. Current educational policy is working towards greater universality of the use of Estonian language. There is frequent discussion of integration of the communities, with particular concern coming from the EU about “ethnic” tensions, inequalities and discriminations that are experienced in the backlash period following the earlier Russian ascendancy and linguistic privilege promoted by the Soviet Union.

The context Living for Tomorrow worked in was one where a strongly segregated system established under the Soviet era was still highly influential.

At the end of the 1990s, the project found Estonian teenagers resistant to, if not disdainful of speaking Russian – even if they studied it at school. They never used Russian if they could help it, and had very rare direct interaction with Russian teenagers – or any Russians. They went to Estonian language schools, took English mostly as their second language, and inhabited a social, educational and recreational world that was exclusively Estonian. They seemed to experience this “language issue” as their identity right linked to independence from the abuses against and marginalisation of Estonians by the Russian population and Soviet control during the Soviet era.

The project was dealing with a context where the vast majority of Russian teenagers in Estonia went to Russian schools, and had parents who spoke very little Estonian. They watched Russian or Western TV, accessed Russian web sites and read Russian in print. In this exclusively Russian context of their daily lives, they felt insecure and resentful about the requirement imposed on them to learn Estonian to reclaim nationality. Discussions with Russian teenagers found that they felt the weight of exclusion that their lack of fluent Estonian language gave (many have alien status - with no

passport because of failing to meet the language requirement), felt their access to good Estonian teaching to be very limited and resented the second class status that the independent Estonia offered them, while feeling anxious and pessimistic about any inclusion in possibilities that the country was going to offer them.

Living for Tomorrow was the first project in independent Estonia to work with Russian and Estonian teenagers together. The investment of an outside vision not implicated in the subjectively lived, accumulated ethnic/national/linguistic tensions helped urge this collaboration forward. I had not realised the full implication of these separated populations as the project began, and it had been envisaged that the work with the young people would be taken forward in later stages by Estonian collaborators in the Estonian language. But Estonian language would have needed participants who shared speaking the Estonian language confidently. Nelli Kalikova, head of Estonian AIDS Prevention, after initial hesitations and reflections, gave full and influential support both for the effort of new Estonian/Russian collaboration and for the use of English necessary for the teenagers to avoid the linguistic polarisations. English equalised their participation, and had them meeting on the common ground of a third language. There was some initial resistance from adults in the Capacity Building to undertaking the work with the young people in English (*Estonian is the national language, if they want to take part the Russians can just speak it-* a Capacity Building participant). But using Estonian, the official language, would have in fact excluded or actively marginalised the Russian teenagers. Their participation was crucial, both for the internal democratic processes of the project, as well as it being clear that the Russian populations in Estonia experience marginalisation and exclusion in these first phases of transition – and social problems such as drug use, prostitution and STDs/HIV are surfacing most swiftly among impoverished Russians. So Russian youth, with experience of collaboration with Estonian youth and motivated to work on HIV prevention have particular importance.

Going against the grain of the separated spheres experienced by the young people, the project assumed and “willed” a collaborative agenda. It was working, however, with complex,

underlying attitudes that inhibited easy flow of cross-ethnic collaborative process. Undercurrents of resistance, hostilities or suspicions recurrently surfaced in small or occasionally explosive ways and were an ongoing and significant challenge to the collaborative processes undertaken.

The project was centrally concerned with sexual safety and gender – so had, *at its heart, questions about how attitudes and behaviours can change, can be embodied in shared processes and negotiation.* Encountering the intensity of the ethnic polarisations in Estonia necessitated engaging with issues of attitude and behaviour change at other levels too. Safer sex is not a lone process, but an interactive one, where projections, assumptions, and beliefs - about the other and about oneself in relation to the other - inform what is possible and what is impossible. To become conscious of how one deploys attitudes, of how behaviours are shaped by acquired beliefs – and start thinking about how and why those beliefs exist, how they are socially and historically and culturally shaped - is a key part of being able to imagine changing them. Seeing possibilities of different ways of relating, having a new starting place from which to visualise change and find ways of embodying that change are at the heart of HIV awareness and sexual safety. The constant sub-text of ethnic differences between the young people was an important and relevant theme of tension, effort and movement that shadowed the gender/sexual behaviour concerns in important ways.

The decision to undertake this Russian/Estonian collaboration was seen as risky, idealistic, and even impossible by various participants - though willingness to persevere with it, despite difficulties, was agreed by all, and the significance of trying to do this felt by many. Though the internal complexities of polarisations were never transcended or resolved, everyone in the project became proud to have been part of the attempt.

## 5.2 Working against Russian/Estonian tensions

The project had to steer all the time between respecting the authenticity of feelings of resistance and reluctance, and insisting on strategic commitment to making the Russian/Estonian collaboration a real, not just nominal, part of the work experience. This was done through structuring

mixed groups a lot, but not all of the time, in workshops and assignments and supporting contexts of interaction. We set up pre-paid refreshments in a café where they could meet each other off the formal map of project work. Some, but not all, took advantage of this. People in the “core group” took great care to keep generating encouragement for their collaborative participation in work over the booklet and vocabulary. Networking opportunities for the young people and the new NGO members to travel to present the project at conferences or meetings and hear about others, created contexts for further collaboration. As the project progressed, two teenagers, one Russian and one Estonian, travelled to Wales together to attend an international youth conference on Drug Abuse and HIV prevention initiatives – and presented Living for Tomorrow. When 4 of the NGO and 5 of the young people travelled to Sweden to exchange ideas and experiences with Swedish teenagers and university students – the Russian/Estonian participation was integral. Public celebrations of the founding of the NGO or launch of the Booklet were planned to include Russian and Estonian, as well as male and female voices.

The implications of undertaking this outreach and ongoing gender work collaboratively was consciously discussed on many occasions in terms of its personal and wider political importance: what it was struggling with, what it could model, what could be learned – and eased – by trying to do it together. The Core Group found it useful to have an outsider (a “foreigner” not enmeshed in the subjective polarisation’s) take these issues up with the young people at times - defusing in some way the internal projections and locating the issues in wider contexts.

The success of this cross-ethnic collaboration is manifest in many ways – not least in the concrete results of collaborative actions and the co-produced booklet. There was a real “We did it!” feeling of achievement. This is expressed well in a letter (quoted here with permission) sent to me in Oslo by Ann Bykova, one of the young Russian women, about the public launch of the Booklet:

*When I first saw the booklet, when I felt it in my hands I couldn't actually believe in it, I couldn't hold my tears, I am so happy now! We made it! Got over all the difficulties and obstacles on our way! Finally, after 10 months of work! All my friends and relatives really liked the booklet and thought not only the cover and the idea were great but also, what is the most important, the texts were*

*interesting. Now I just can't help remembering how hard it was to rewrite and re-  
alter them, how we quarrelled and argued, couldn't come to a common opinion. But I see that as a great experience.*

*The organisation of our presentation of the launch of the Booklet was great. The food, champagne and the great cake which was really delicious, had written on it Living for Tomorrow. Though I didn't really have chance to try all the snacks because I was running around like a crazy with the camera, shot this, shot that and so on. But the material is quite good; my teachers in the video studio were pleased.*

*I'm going to record it for you from the camera to VHS for you. My reporting about it all will be shown on Russian TV on 28th, there will be also a part from seminars because I'm telling not only about the brochure but about the project as well.*

*I'm really enjoying the new youth workshops we are running in Living for Tomorrow, I was present on almost every session. I think that these new young people are great, I'm sure some of them will continue working with us, I already know who that will be. I think also that our presence - me, Ann, Nadya, Maru, Jaanus and Reili and Eva - really helps the new participants. They watch us talking freely in English and behaving good towards everyone, doesn't matter if they are Estonian or Russian and feel themselves free as well. I hope that it's true.*

*Did Sirle tell you about our new project idea? The possibility to release a newspaper once a quarter? I thought it was a great idea – discussing relationships and men and women. So us, “pilot” participants, and new young people from Living for Tomorrow could work together on it.*

Before this project Ann had never participated in a collaborative youth project, never done videoing, never had any interaction with Estonian youth, never had sex education, and never heard of the concept of gender. She is now a committed member of the new NGO.

The final evaluation workshop in June 2000 saw participants as a group, and in individual interviews, affirming the effort towards this collaboration, validating its importance while acknowledging its difficulties. Its achievements are also perhaps more specifically marked by the idea they broached to initiate a newsletter, with texts in both Russian and Estonian, about relationships and sexual health, to go into schools in Estonia. When NIKK Living for Tomorrow participants were returning from their networking visit to Sweden – Estonian young people were overheard talking to their project friends in Russian, and Russians in Estonian. In a new round of Living for Tomorrow -based youth workshops that the NGO ran independently in autumn 2000, the original group of young people voluntarily turned up and participated actively, facilitating group discussions – and modelling collaboration by their willingness to work together and to meet each other

in English language. Apparently the Russian – Estonian interactions of these new workshops were easier, less inhibited and high energy - significantly affected by the visible joint participation of the original young Russians and Estonians.

The significance of all these developments cannot be underestimated. They underscore the importance of persistently facilitating collaborative contexts where the work can take root. Facilitating changes in attitude, the re-thinking of perceptions is affected positively when young people's work is embedded in action and embodied in practical collaborative processes, which need ongoing encouragement and continued critical debate. The work with ethnic identity tensions needs to be understood as a key productive contribution to the complex, demanding work needed to change attitudes to gender.

### 5.3 Textures of 1990s ethnic polarisations among young people

While marking the progress and success of developments within the project, I feel it is important to leave a vivid record of the nature of some of the difficulties the project was navigating as it worked against the latent and explicit residues of ethnic oppositions that the Soviet occupation of Estonian had left rooted in the lives of young people growing up in its wake.

Some examples of the difficulties and challenges this posed can give a sense of the time and sustained energy needed to enable young people's to engage, reassess and modify their attitudes – processes crucial in creating the conditions for changing behaviour. I want here to give some accounts that will illustrate some of the complicated moments we had to navigate in the project.

There were practical processes to navigate. The young people's collaboration had a blockage concerning telephone communication. They were inhibited about calling each other at home – if the home being called was of the other group, the other language. So a lot of the time/place planning has to be mediated by the “core group” adults and supported actively by the project coordinator. This complicated very basic practical processes in the progress of the work. The teenagers were reluctant to meet cross-ethnically independent of the larger umbrella agenda of the project where older people were also there necessitating and supporting them doing so.

Then there were the attitudinal and emotional dynamics, between and among each group. In the Soviet era, until 7 years before this project took place, *Russian* teenagers would have unthinkingly experienced their “ascendant” position in Soviet Estonian society. They would have felt part of mainstream possibilities, linguistic authority and not have had the experience of discrimination, violation and marginalisation from the main political agenda part of their family's daily lives. Independence brought a reversal of roles – with ascendancy and authority on the side of Estonians and Estonian language. The *Estonian* teenagers now carried a sense of vindicated exhilaration at the ousting of a system that violated the rights of Estonians, sent thousands to Siberia, restricted expression of Estonian identity and policed daily life under agendas set in Moscow. The backlash effect of these reversals, the ways political and social realities congeal into “racist” and “ethnic” formulations of difference were visible in comments from these teenagers, who themselves were only 6 or 7 years old when Estonia became independent. The Russian youth participants had very varied family backgrounds – with widely differing geographical links to various parts of the Soviet Union, very different histories of how and when their families came to Estonia. But from the Estonian teenagers' perspective they were seen simply as “the Russians”. We brought this into the open by doing a warm-up game where in a circle everyone told the story of where their parents or grandparents were when they fell in love or got married.

Some cameos of experience from within the project can illustrate some of the workings of difference and attitudes associated with ethnic connotations experienced by young people as independent Estonia worked to establish a new, integrated social fabric. The first images highlight comments from the young people at the start of the project. The following two stories are from my personal notes about experiences within it. The last text presents the words of the young people themselves, recorded in the day-long final evaluation.

#### 5.3.1 A vivid sense of “otherness”

February 1999. At the beginning of the Youth Workshops, during my visits to Tallinn I met informally – for up to 3 hours at a time - over soda and pizza with 5 or 6 at a time of the young people, in small groups, separately within Estonian or Russian groupings. Some of the things said then, recorded in my notes

during the conversations, caught the complexity of feelings shaping their perspectives on life that were undercurrents within the project.

A collage of comments by the Estonian teenagers, profiled to me the prevailing tone of their understanding of “the Russians”. It is interesting to note that they hardly ever referred to the Soviet Union as being part of their problem – the perpetrators of the bad system were simply “the Russians”:

*When Estonia had its first independence – it was a fine, beautiful country. Then the Russians took it over – and pushed THEIR culture and language. Forced themselves on Estonia... Russians were stupid, weak, just wanted to get things – made no effort, were just lucky. They're always angry... If you have a beautiful house – an Estonian neighbour would admire it and think to make their house beautiful too. A Russian neighbour would just want to destroy it... The Russians who came to Estonia wanted to come here because... of the sea access... because Estonia was a better place to live... because Estonia was more civilised and more beautiful... Russians wanted to rule the world... World War II? No, the presence of Russians in Estonia had nothing to do with World War II... No, no Russians died under the system that killed Estonians. They were always the ones doing the violence... The Russians sent all the smart and rich Estonians to Siberia. Then they forced equality on us... It was a Russian government with more Russians than Estonians... They put my grandfather in jail... They are more quiet at the moment because of the changes – but that might change. Yes – I feel threatened by them. Of what they might want and do... Their attitude is a problem. Their arrogance. They haven't even learned Estonian. They resist and refuse to do that... They don't care about the rules.*

Inequality and violence experienced by their grandparents and parents over the years of Soviet occupation and centralised Soviet control of Estonian politics, and their own lives inevitably played out in the accumulated resentment and polarised “them-us” ways of thinking shaped unthinkingly familiar ways of talking among the Estonian teenagers. There was only a vague sense of history in the way they talked (no doubt reflecting how new accounts of history were still inadequately developed and resourced in the schools) – and powerful undercurrents of the residues of “racism” that takes root in the repression of democracy and the exclusion or marginalisation of sectors of the population. Among the Estonian 15 year olds, anger, a sense of past hurt and injustice, and even a sort of triumph in the turning of the tables seemed to justify “unquestioningly” a surface indifference to current tensions. Recent history militated against possibilities of generosity towards their Russian peers at the beginning of the project.

In contrast, here is a collage of typical comments that were made by the Russian teenagers about the ethnic divide, highlighting other forms of anger, anxiety or vulnerability:

*I am Estonian. Estonia is where I live, where I was born. I love Estonia. But I am not Estonian in their minds... I feel myself Estonian. But I belong somewhere else. But I don't know where. Not Russia, anyway... It's very difficult here. I am Russian. We can't get good work. There is no hope – not like in other places... I feel uncomfortable here. Separate... I want to know Estonians. But they don't want to know Russian or to know us. They just don't care about us... It is good the Soviet system ended, there is more freedom now. It was a time of oppression and injustices. But it is harder here right now for a lot of people – the old, children, the hospitals... some people can make it, but there isn't much hope... and I need a visa now to travel to visit my grandparents. It's more complicated for us to travel... I don't even have a passport, some of us have alien status. It's as if we don't have the right to exist... When I go to visit my grandfather, I am proud of my country, Estonia: when I tell about Estonia – he says: ah, I want to go there too. But here in Estonia I am not proud. I feel terrible that I don't like Russia. We live in Estonia but are not Estonians. We are just “the Russians”...*

The immediacy of their experiences of being located as second class citizens (if indeed they even had citizenship, which some did not) in the Estonia of today, the pain of marginalisation and lack of currency for equal participation placed the Russian young people in positions of vulnerability and disempowerment. They were children of parents themselves caught in and positioned by the restrictions and oppressions of the Soviet years – but on the safer side of inclusion and power, and main-language ascendancy. The NIKK project was working with Russian teenagers as they navigated the fall-out of silence, exclusion and “punishment” – the new unfairnesses that the heritages of the Soviet Estonian period bequeathed them as the pendulum of history swung against them.

These “feelings” and experiences, clearly transmitted through everyday thoughts and talk in their daily (and segregated) lives, snagged the young people within attitudes and beliefs about themselves and the “others” in the group that risked sabotaging collaboration at any one moment. The project had to hold the aspirations of exchange and co-operation in focus despite these pulls and disruptions that history had embedded in their views of “ethnicity/nationality” differences that for the young people were often essentialised and de-historicised. As, indeed, was gender.

### 5.3.2 Willed and loaded differentiations

An account of two incidents that I describe here from notes written after the event give further vivid images of the texture of complexity of the ethnic polarisations.

*Autumn 1999:* It is the end of the last day of participatory workshops with the young people, using drama techniques with Chris and Eleanor, 2 wonderfully engaging actors from *Loud Mouth Theatre and Health Education Company*, from England. The aim has been to help them prepare the themes and content ideas they want to develop for the Booklet on gender and sexual safety some of them have agreed to write together. The last workshop had invited in the designer who would help them translate their ideas into a professionally produced document.

There is suddenly huge tension in the room about the juxtaposing and integration in the booklet of the illustrations made by the Russians and illustrations made by the Estonians. English lapses and whisperings or rapid fire of argument in Estonian erupts. Ten minutes earlier the atmosphere had been running easily, relatively relaxed, everyone participating. Now gauntlets seem to be thrown on the floor. Someone bursts out crying – in rage it feels - and is comforted by a friend. Someone leaves the room temporarily, upset. There is resistance everywhere. Willingness to co-operate retreats like a magnetic tide. Anxiety hovers with anger and suspends the threads of patience that were in the room. It is the Estonian teenagers who align themselves to resist the joint venture at this moment. “The aesthetics don’t mix” “What they do isn’t artistic” and worse insults flicker in fragments of sentences. People are suddenly willing to hurt each other. Someone leaves the room. The Russian teenagers group close together watching.

We are three “foreigners” in the room. The argument doesn’t make sense. There are surely many ways of accommodating differences within the design. I can’t field all these emotions.

But this is actually about the whole coercive effort to bring them unnaturally together – which needs to be aired, suddenly, though this conflict. The realisation is in the air that this involves a “going public together”, marking a whole set of compromises. It feels indigestible to “them” to let “the others” participate in the setting of terms. Why should they – when we are better, more aligned with the modern world, don’t want our path contaminated with their interference. It feels a huge endeavour to keep track of all the colours of emotion, the resentment, hope, hostility, resistance, refusals and fear, arteries of possibility seem the blocked.

All this must have permission to emerge *because it is there*. Not covered up or avoided with surface niceness. And then the next huge effort is to help calm impulses of disintegration, let tempers settle, rekindle positive energies, re-adhere hope and visualise together kinder, viable paths forward.

*June 2000:* My personal record of another, later difficult moment during the “making of the booklet”, at its final text-co-ordination and editing meeting.

Twelve of us sit round the table in the Nordic Information Office seminar room – where we are welcomed across several days with space, paper, computer use, biscuits and drinks. It is the final, cross-language editing check of all the written texts of the booklet and the vocabulary. Any final revisions of content must be cross-referenced here, now, into the three languages.

The young people come here straight from school. They are tired – this is a long slow process. Undercurrents of jokes and yawns and groans punctuate the onward plod. The final haul now, after all the earlier work processes. Line by line. The final checks. Does the text now, finally say the same thing in each language? Is what it says what they want, as they overview all sections together? Are things missed, too awkward in any on the languages?

It all moves easily and with good will.

Then suddenly everything has gone askew. There has been a Russian querying of the Estonian version of a sentence, which had been agreed on by all, in English, at an earlier date, about how stereotyping of Russians and Estonians inhibits collaboration towards common goals. An outright Estonian rejection of the validity of the query. The whole atmosphere has changed. How could the Russians know, they don’t speak perfect Estonian? But a Russian NGO member is in fact a linguist, a lecturer – she explains how the Estonian text *does* vary from the Russian and English, both of which catch the same meaning. The Estonian teenagers close rank. Talk is no longer in English. Estonian language reigns and I watch it move like sharp knives across the table. Body language rears ugly and uncomfortable with tones of taunts. Something ugly is being summoned into the communication.

This collaboration feels exhausting, too uphill, against too

many currents.

It seems very important that the Russians are held to be wrong, that their interpretation be disallowed. My attempts to query the Estonian text by asking the Estonian teenagers for their literal translation of it into English are palmed off. I am to be reassured. This is not my issue, the outsider. No, no, Jill - the Estonian text is fine. It is beyond doubt that it is right as we have done it. There feels the possibility of different tones of weeping breaking into the room any minute. An inappropriate over-empowerment and an inappropriate disempowerment. An unwillingness to listen, to build agreement. Something that is humiliating, an impulse of revenge coming from somewhere outside this room prevails. No one is happy. An angry, inert patience or resignation and withheld reactions are necessary from the Russians. They see what is happening. But they have somehow no right to enter 100% into a decent human exchange. This is something they must expect, endure, holding the resentment at the injustice somewhere off the actual map. An anachronistic deluge invisibly floods the air. They have to pay for something because of where history places them. While the Estonian teenagers are snagged on uncomfortable stubbornness.

I take my copy of these texts. I tear the pages so they stand separate from each other in each language. I say I am going to get outside help. We need help. We need something that can re-anchor the reasonableness of this small task within our accumulated terms of tolerance and compromise and good will and kindness and support. We need to reclaim some kind of generosity to get over these old stale blasts of air from another era.

Outside the room, two Estonian women from the Nordic Office, nearer my age, not briefed about the dilemma, are willing to help. They translate together first the Estonian text, then the Russian one, into English. The Russian one catches the spirit of the booklet's equivalent English version. The Estonian text does not, it waters down the double implication of Estonians and Russians in the sentences. I ask them to translate the English version for the booklet into Estonian, then to compare their translation with the one the teenagers have made. They corroborate the Russian reservations.

I return to the room and explain what I have done and the

outcome. With back peddling murmurs what felt like an irresistible tornado of will subsides. The new translation is accepted. "Estonians and Russians have all kinds of stereotypes about each other. These stop us finding common ground to work together on important issues concerning us all" is the text that will be found in the Booklet they have chosen to call: "How to Bridge the Gap between Us? Gender and Sexual Safety", on the page they have chosen to focus on dilemmas of stereotypes in how people, men and women, see each other. The work goes on.

In a pizza café after, the young people sit ethnically divided, talking among themselves. When all the others have gone, I stay for two hours with four of the Estonians, talking, listening, arguing, questioning, processing what happened, where the nerves touched come from, where they might go.

It is all exhausting and feels full of impossibilities.

No, it feels full of possibilities, because they are simultaneously so fine, each in their own way. Set against themselves in the things they feel, polarisations and hostilities accumulated invisibly from growing up in Estonia then, now, its histories resifted through parents and grandparents memories, losses, resentments, sufferings, paralyses. And their own integrity that is full of their own self-aware desires, reflections. These feelings run against the grain of some other, finer set of instincts and positions that they grasp after in themselves. It is very vulnerable, delicate within its insistences.

"X" insistently speaks out her feelings of hostility, otherness, Then she says to me: "I feel awful. Now you will not like me for saying, thinking these things. I lose your respect". Anything I say could go wrong any minute. What can I say? It all feels heavy, out of depth.

I say: "You have courage to say what you feel. I like you for your effort to be honest, not to hide. I am moved that you trust enough to say these things. But I don't like what you say or what you feel. It hurts other people, it does them wrong. It hurts you too. It closes things down, when there is so much to be done to open things up in new ways. Things change as we grasp how and why they are the way they are, how did they get like that. If there are things we feel wrong and hurtful about the way things have become, we can decide to try and do something about them. Then there is a possibility to

build things differently, in ways we like. We are all involved in this process, one way or another. Nothing changes overnight.”

All we are trying to do is to complete one part of a Nordic-Baltic action/research project. There is so much interwoven with the gender issues that calls for change even as it invokes habits and assumptions.

Each of these steps, these encounters, these airings, these eruptions are part of the slow move forward. At any moment things can go wrong, regress, explode, rigidify. Or not. The issues surface and bubble – and become embodied in the processes of effort, in the envisaging of joint tasks, the consolidating of very small, minute moments of change.

Later I will hear “X” affirm, in the evaluation time, how the effort to work with differences, to bridge the divide was, she thought, one of the most important things in the project’s work.

### 5.3.3 What they wanted to go on record

Twenty-four of the adult and teenage participants came together for a day of retrospective evaluation towards the end of the project. The last task is to discuss in small groups what they want to put on record, what would they like, do they think important for people outside to know about the project. The following texts are transcribed from flip chart records of the small group feedback, accepted and commented on by the whole group:

*The importance of working with Differences: We learned to work together with different people. It was important to learn to put differences aside. People with different backgrounds came together. The project gave people different ways in... Everyone was necessary and useful. Everyone can feel good working together – if there is no “have to” pressure...*

*Choosing a third language was important as a strategy to bridge differences. In creating of trust, it is important to respect where people are coming from, the different perspectives they bring. Then people don’t close off from each other. ... We were all different, but grew to be friends. From being strangers we made OK links with each other. It made us more open-minded.*

*You need to be really careful and thoughtful about what you do. Take care not to give the wrong impressions or messages... It is really important to plan carefully and think through the impact on others of what you say... Our work in the project helped us be more realistic about actual life situations – and this is what helps you make right decisions. The knowledge, the questions, the processes of dis-*

*ussion – all helped us not feel so scared. We gained a better grasp on influences on real life and feel less scared. The issues that the project focused on really touched everyone... If you know about what is shaping that real situation, it helps you not make mistakes. You feel you can make the world better: that you can really make a difference. We learned: expect that things can be done, and they will be done. It was good not to feel alone.*

*Others around us see how we’ve been changed by it. We are different now. In discussions at school, we realise how much we’ve changed – in ways we think and speak and argue.*

It has mattered to describe in some detail these efforts and processes of engagement with attitudes to highlight how gender and sexuality issues are always entwined with other aspects of social relations – never in a self-contained space. Gender work needs to be flexible to respond to the differences young people are navigating in their own lives that affect their relationships to each other. Here it was post-Soviet ethnic/national identity issues. Elsewhere questions of class, marginalisation, discrimination, race or religion, for example, could be challenging but productive grounds for embodying collaboration necessitating struggle and change around common interests of wider gender issues and immediate urgencies of sexual safety.

Secondly, the ethnic attitudes issue highlights an important element of work on gender issues. It is well known that the relationship between changing attitudes and behaviour is a dynamic interaction. By bringing the young people into an “unnatural” collaboration here (i.e. going against habits of separatism), by developing work where they were motivated to undertake together tasks focused on gender questions, the project involved them in *actions that allowed them to embody possibilities of change of attitude and practice*. This suggests that as well as the conceptual content of work on gender and sexual safety with young people, the mode of facilitating their collaborative work on gender and HIV is of itself very important *if behaviour change is the key goal of the education process*.

This first section of the report has discussed the range of concerns that had to be taken into consideration as Living for Tomorrow worked to elaborate its gender focused work on HIV prevention. These issues were framing, stimulating and challenging the goals and methods of the project’s work. They are important to have in mind when looking at the actual actions and strategies that the project implemented. These will now be described in the second section of the report.

## Part II: Overview of what Living for Tomorrow undertook.

The work of Living for Tomorrow depended on a combination of different levels of activity. This section gives an overview of key aspects of the development and implementation of the project. It discusses its anchoring networks and institutional connections; its conceptualisation and design; organisational strategies; implementation of action elements such as the Capacity Building, Youth Workshops, the production of a youth booklet, and the research implementation. Appendices to this section give concrete examples of the *details* involved in certain of the project's processes. A profiling of some of the key people who mobilised to support and enact its implementation is also important to detail, since the *professional* links and *personal* input of the individuals who were active in its implementation were crucial to its success.

This section briefly records, then, significant aspects of the work undertaken. It traces developments specific to NIKK's Living for Tomorrow – however, elements of the different levels of its planning and implementation will hopefully prove useful to others wanting to generate new gender-focused, HIV prevention projects.

### I. Framing the project

#### I.1 The importance of links and networks:

##### Institutional and individual dimensions of the project's web of collaborations

The location of Living for Tomorrow at the Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research (NIKK) anchored the project's work in important ways. Support from the Nordic Council of Ministers and its location at a Nordic institute gave the gender-focus of the work "weight" – in contexts where gender issues were often little discussed, rarely funded and usually perceived as marginal or insignificant. It also significantly located the work crucially within networks of gender studies and research and feminist debates, where HIV/AIDS issues are, in fact, not frequently discussed.

As Living for Tomorrow project co-ordinator I had participated, on NIKK's behalf, in three Nordic/Baltic *Men and Women in Dialogue* conferences (1997 – 98). I had helped co-ordinate a NIKK Nordic/Baltic/NW Russian postgraduate seminar on *Researching Sexual Issues* (Valmiera, Latvia, 1998), had co-ordinated meetings and a 1998 NIKK report on Women's Studies and Gender Research in the Baltic countries and NW Russia (Lewis and Anders, 1998), and helped establish a NIKK Baltic/NW Russian Database of women's organisations and gender researchers (1999) (Lewis and Anders, 1998). Living for Tomorrow began, therefore, with the institutional advantage of having a significant, evolving web of active NIKK links in the region and in Estonia.

The project involved a large number of people, all of whom, I hope, are acknowledged with thanks earlier in this report. However, it is important to highlight the angles of contributions of some specific collaborators in particular, in order to illustrate the nature of the collaborative anchoring that was crucial for its development. The experience, research connections and the nature of the gender-focused interest and commitment of key people in the project were crucial to its progress. I want to highlight the kind of participation that was mobilised in the infrastructure of the project to emphasise the importance of the research links that it involved. Working with gender issues needs to be fertilised by gender research – since interrogating and changing aspects of gender systems is a complex challenge faced internationally. A lot of new, critical thinking and understanding is necessary to set the desired processes of change in motion. Otherwise, there is a risk of simplifying the gender issues under what looks like an evident aspect of human rights or justice, without deepening the understanding of "how gender works" within a society and within people. The multiple links of the project with gender researchers as well as with educators also concerned with gender issues or sexual health education issues, was pivotal to its development, and networked its concerns into wider circles in the region and beyond.

Based at NIKK, in Oslo, as the project co-ordinator and main researcher with central responsibility for the design and implementation of the project, I was the only person working full time on it. My first concern in the project process was to construct a web of collaborating colleagues and build the networks that would frame and stimulate the project's work. My

background is in literature, cultural studies and gender studies, combined, since 1986, with a range of experience designing, organising and facilitating youth HIV/AIDS prevention-related projects. The HIV/AIDS interest had emerged for me from an active involvement in women's movement politics, feminist issues and gender theory since 1972. In order to develop and run the project I went on leave from my academic position at Hampshire College (Amherst, USA), an innovative liberal arts undergraduate college with an educational philosophy and practice emphasising facilitation of student motivation and initiative.

Stephen Clift, Professor of Health Education at the Centre for Health Education and Research at Christ Church University College, Canterbury in England – who had wide experience in youth, HIV and sexual safety research and trainings, joined the project as consultant. He worked with enthusiastic interest and a generosity of time way beyond the 6 collaborative weeks per year he contracted to undertake. His background is in Psychology and included a focus on travel and health, and on men's sexuality. He proved an invaluable colleague for thinking through and developing the concepts, strategies, design, evaluation and implementation of all parts of the project. He helped facilitate the Capacity Building with me and we collaborated on processing and analysing the questionnaire data. Having a man work with such dedication, support, commitment and kind collaboration with the project was invaluable in establishing the gender issues as concerning men and women – and allowing an imaging of men's and women's collaboration to be present at the heart of the project.

Diana Anders and Elisabeth Lorenzen, international consultants at NIKK, consecutively giving administrative assistance, energetic support and upbeat enthusiasm at various stages of the work, were both younger women with backgrounds in gender studies and a keen interest in gender politics.

The early interest and encouragement of Nelli Kalikova, head of the Estonian AIDS Prevention Centre in Tallinn, was seminal and invaluable. The project was able to anchor its work, with her supportive practical advice and connections from the centre, linking it to central Estonian HIV/AIDS work. But more than this, the enthusiasm and interest of someone with firm roots locally, with (as became clear as the project

advanced) an influential profile nationally on the HIV issue in Estonia, and with a background rooted both in former national AIDS support at a volunteer level, and in HIV medical and preventive initiatives, proved supportive beyond what was initially understood. Her connection to the project was consolidated by time she spent visiting NIKK – reading, discussing, listening and arguing about the ideas framing the project. And her “work persona” interwove with enormous personal kindness and willingness – and a passion for developing more effective work with young people in the face of Estonia's looming epidemic and limited resources. Her conversion (after initial scepticism and reticence) and ensuing determined commitment to the idea of working *together* with Russians and Estonians in the project (a virtually unexplored phenomenon in post-Soviet Estonia) proved seminal to the project being able to sustain this work against the difficulties it faced in this respect.

During the project, other important collaborators visited NIKK for periods of time. During short stays supported by the Norwegian Research Council, Dagmar Kutsar, researcher and lecturer in the Department of Family Studies and Social Work at Tartu University, and Marija Caplinskiene, head of research and education programmes at AIDS Prevention Lithuania, also discussed readings and ideas on gender and sexual health and collaborated in development of different aspects of the project. Dagmar connected the project's ideas to research with her students at Tartu University, and with related Estonian researchers (e.g. Anu Laas, Krista Papp) – and spent a lot of time discussing the Estonian context of the work and the gender concepts it was deploying, and helped pilot and develop the Living for Tomorrow questionnaire. Marija helped establish contexts of discussion of the project within Lithuanian gender research, governmental, family planning and NGO networks, and helped circulate information about it as it progressed.

These visits gave us better time to discuss ideas away from the pressures of every day work. They strengthened the collegial friendships that became importantly embedded in the project, consolidating co-operation, and also gave the visitors possibilities to meet with other colleagues in Oslo of interest to their own work.

The project wanted to develop links for Nordic and Baltic

regional collaboration possibilities as it went along – so that its strategies and ideas, if found relevant and interesting, could start building channels of information and exchange. The notion of this networking growing as integral to, rather than appended to the project was crucial. Often “projects” evaporate after the funded time frame. The urgency of HIV prevention work with young people requires energy to sustain collaborative efforts, but also needs time to exchange and debate ideas and methods for developing the work effectively.

NIKK’s already established links with gender researchers in the Baltic/NW Russian region was able to fertilise the work of the project in various ways. I visited Vilnius several times to present Living for Tomorrow to networks of interested people (e.g. from Health and Education ministries, NGOs, UNDP, FPA, universities, sex educators, Red Cross Youth). These visits, arranged by the AIDS Prevention Lithuania programmes’ Director, were supported by the Women Studies Centre at Vilnius University and gender researchers at UNDP. A visit I made to St. Petersburg also brought the project into dialogue with NW Russian HIV/AIDS prevention centres, the activist Gender Issues Centre and Russian gender researchers. Meetings and e-mail communication with sex educators and researchers on gender study issues or sexual health/HIV issues from Sweden, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Russia, Croatia, Hungary, England, Scotland, Wales – and from US, Australia, Brazil – fertilised ideas as the project proceeded. A seminar on gender from post-Soviet perspectives at the Central European University, Budapest, with participants from many countries from the former Soviet Union, and a European Experts meeting on *Youth Involvement in HIV Prevention* both helped me frame and keep reassessing the Living for Tomorrow initiative (see previous section of this report).

Early on in the project, an informal Nordic, Baltic and NW Russian advisory network was established, with some 30 sexual health or gender researchers and educators interested in staying in touch with the project, being updated about its progress and advising or participating in aspects of its development - as and when possible. Other researchers, outside this region, whose work linked usefully to gender, education, sexual safety and related feminist issues and were either contacted by the project or made contact with it, contributed comments and ideas as the work evolved.

AnnaStina Henriksson, a researcher and project organiser in the Swedish Ministry of Education, engaged very actively in discussion of different stages of implementation, networking and research – helping develop and pilot the questionnaire in Sweden, and linking the project with visits involving teachers, students and a Swedish youth project. Anne-Charlotte Ek, researching at Umeå University on AIDS and media issues in Sweden, helped discuss the project ideas and draft its leaflet while a visiting researcher at NIKK. Marjut Jyrkinen (STAKES, Finland) was active and encouraging in the advisory network, helping link discussion about the work with Finnish research. Bente Træen, from the Institute of Public Health in Oslo, added her experience as researcher on youth sexual behaviours to refine the questionnaire. Researchers at NIKK and the Centre for Women’s Studies and Gender Research at University of Oslo, students from the Norwegian Medical Student Sex Education Action group, Marguerite Howick, a Health Promotion Officer on the Isle of Wight, England, and Bengt Sundbaum from the Institute of Public Health in Stockholm were also among those who helped informal piloting.

Elena Zdravomyslova, gender researcher in the Institute for Independent Social Research in St. Petersburg and lecturer in Gender Studies gave invaluable practical advice and guidance, engaged in very useful discussion about its ideas as the project progressed, and resourced it with Russian research on sexual biographies. She helped recruit just the right gender studies graduates, Andrei Khanzin and Katja Guerassimova, to actively participate in supporting the Russian anchoring of the work, and also contribute to the research process. They agreed, with keen interest and commitment, to help energise the Russian input into the Capacity Building, youth workshops and the development of the questionnaire – since all the gender researchers I found in Estonia were of Estonian not Russian backgrounds, and input was needed by people from both for all participants to feel identified with the concerns.

Elvyra Giedraitiene, head of the Faculty of Education and in Health Studies at Klaipeda University, joined as an active participant in the Capacity Building and connected the project’s approach to a new course she developed for training teachers on *Gender and the Education of Children* and became active in piloting and developing the questionnaire. Gita Grange, head

of the Latvian AIDS Prevention Centre followed the project with active interest and linked it to their centre's youth initiative in Riga. Discussions with Latvian researcher Ilse Trapienciere linked the project usefully with bodies of Latvian gender studies research, and the project was the basis on which Stephen Clift and I were asked to help develop a national Latvian campaign, with FPA and UNDP, to try to involve men more actively in reproductive health. Colleagues from CESI, Zagreb, Croatia drew the project's ideas into their work, helped pilot and develop the questionnaire and implemented a new Croatian research project based on it that was funded by the World Health Organisation.

Discussions with Bronwyn Davies, Professor of Education at James Cook University, Australia, with Rachel Thomson of South Bank University, London and the *Women/Men Risk AIDS Project*, with gender researchers Shirley Prendergast from Anglia University, Cambridge and Gill Dunne from London School of Economics set their research in very fertile debate with the conceptual concerns of the project. Lively exchanges with Danny Wight, a Scottish Medical Research Council researcher, about the problem of "imposing" gender debates on other cultures were usefully provocative in keeping the questioning of the project internally alive.

Finally, information useful to and about the project was also exchanged within 3 e-mail posting lists: the WHO/UNAIDS GENDER-AIDS list; the AEGIS AIDS information list; and the Women East-West list. These also were outlets for circulating information about the project – and opening channels for exchange of ideas.

## 1.2 Building resources for the future

Throughout the 3 years, the NIKK office base was the outreach point for gathering information about resources on sexual safety, HIV prevention and gender issues that could fertilise the work of the project and at times resource participants. Related resources and research were assembled in a final bibliography that is now available on the NIKK web site. It may be useful to others as a starting point from which they can begin to explore gender and sexual health issues further.

This bibliography includes writings on:

- post-Soviet situations, challenges of transitions to democracy, issues youth are facing in the transition, the social positionings of men and women in the Soviet era and new independence
- gender theory – the debates in conceptualising the understanding of gender and gender systems, masculinity/femininity
- gender issues in post-Soviet situations and perspectives
- gender and sexuality research; the *politics* of sexuality, and of heterosexuality in particular
- sex education and HIV education: dilemmas, approaches, strategies, methodologies and initiatives
- the HIV/AIDS epidemic – and responses to it

It can be accessed at:

<http://www.nikk.uio.no/forskningsprojekt/livingfortomorrow/>

## 1.3 Specific Estonian contexts: input and anchors

The project needed to situate itself within the context of initiatives and knowledge that were already being generated within Estonia. In the first stage of the project I talked with many people to gain a sense of what had been done and what was currently taking place in HIV awareness education with young people (research and action) in Estonia. This laid ground for the project potentially to connect usefully to work already being developed, and made it possible to see ways that Estonian issues, research and initiatives could be linked into it. Meetings with about 40 people in Estonia, in Tallinn, Tartu and Sillimäe, allowed preparatory information to surface and be cross-referenced. These included people working in research, institutions, NGOs or projects focused on current youth issues (e.g. street children, drugs), sexual health, other education concerns.

The project needed to explore what aspects of gender research and gender debates in Estonia specifically – but also in other Baltic and regional contexts where post-Soviet situations were facing similar concerns – could fertilise its gender discussions. Gender research and sexual health education practices do not

often come into contact (not only in Estonia). A key part of the project was to generate a cross-fertilisation of gender analyses and discussion with practical strategic initiatives focused on young people, HIV prevention and sexual safety. As the work on sexual safety/HIV prevention was being developed linked to discussion of gender, HIV issues were able to be profiled to gender researchers and centres, inviting reflection on connections, and facilitating the different networks to come into focus for each other. Links and support between The Women's Studies and Information Resource Centre (ENUT) at Tallinn Pedagogical University and the Estonian AIDS Prevention Centre, or between Women's Studies Centre at the University and Lithuanian AIDS Prevention in Vilnius were examples of productive dialogues that evolved.

Informal meetings and conversations with teenagers and students who expressed interest in the project also took place and through them I learned about how they thought about men and women, how they saw gender working in Estonia today, and where their sexual knowledges came from. These discussions were very important in helping identify the "flavours" and angles of gender debates the project would encounter. Informal time spent discussing experiences and ideas with the core group of adults who moved the project forward were also a great resource for brainstorming, debating and energising the collaboration for everyone involved.

## 2. Implementation processes

### 2.1 Clarity in strategy: philosophy and aims, evaluation and monitoring

It was important to draft documents about the philosophy and aims of the work to be undertaken. These internal documents were a crucial exercise in clarification of goals and the vision and principles being developed in the project. It helped shape the work, but also provided documents to discuss with participants as the work advanced – to establish common ground.

Evaluation and monitoring of response procedures were also set in motion early on; to evolve as structurally integral and informative to the work as it progressed. Our idea was to gather, at different stages throughout the project, some basic information from people, as they became involved, about their ideas about men and women in Estonia, and about their responses to their experience of working with the project ideas. Participants' responses were gathered by questionnaires before, during and after capacity building, youth workshops and booklet production. Group discussions in informal settings, where I took notes, as well as formally structured interviews were very informative to the process at many different stages of the work – and included evaluative feedback from participant researchers and key support people. This was used to keep the project informed about how things were going at each stage, what new things might be needed, and what changes or problems could be identified and responded to, as the work itself moved on.

Towards the end of the project 24 adult and teenage participants spent a full “Memory Day” in participatory workshops focusing on different aspects of retrospective evaluation of all experiences of the project and work undertaken. Participants were also interviewed on video after each key stage of the “trainings” and after the final retrospective evaluation day.

### 2.2 Building local collaboration for implementation

The project idea was discussed with a wide range of people in Estonia, accessed through the networks of sexual

health education and gender studies, NGOs and gender research links, and through the grapevine of people the initial networking had helped build. Information, with informal “application” forms with questions about background and interest, was circulated asking people if they, or people they knew, might be interested in taking part in a 6 day (over 2 long weekends) Capacity Building that would focus on HIV/AIDS awareness, sexual safety, and, in particular, gender issues. Those applying to participate were asked do so with a view to considering continuing involvement in the Living for Tomorrow project, if what they encountered in the Capacity Building was of particular interest to them. The gender focus was stressed in particular as the exploratory “centre” of the project's aims. Rather than on the basis of their professional “expertise” in sexual safety/health issues, people were invited to participate in the Capacity Building in terms of their evident interest and curiosity about this focus. The project also needed people who were keen to work with young people – and be flexible to non-didactic, less hierarchical methods of working.

### 2.3 Capacity Building: the initial “training” workshops to establish a “core group”

The Capacity Building – a six day programme of discussions and workshops taking up the issue of gender alongside sexual safety and HIV concerns - was the key context from which the project hoped to consolidate its links and identify core collaborators to move forward with its pilot actions. It took place in Tallinn in November 1998. It was the ground from which the project hoped to find five or six people who would commit themselves to go on to take the project ideas forward with young people in the next stage. It proved an important strategy to circulate information into wider networks so more people were able to express interest than the project needed for implementation. This allowed really interested people to come forward, and less interested people to fall away, stabilising a critical mass of “the right kind” of people needed to carry the Living for Tomorrow pilot work forward, without risking the central momentum of the work, and while sustaining the best possible energy at its heart.

Following discussion with them, and review of the information they submitted about their interest in the project, partic-

Participants were selected with attention to including diversity in the group. Particular attention was paid to the kind of curiosity and interest they had shown in response to the gender focus and its different approach to HIV prevention. Twenty-nine people then committed themselves to undertake the Capacity Building. They included students (undergraduates, graduates), school teachers, sexual health educators, university teachers, gender researchers, AIDS Centre workers and volunteers, youth organisation workers, doctors, a nurse and people whose lives were linked to HIV in some personal way. It included 9 men and 20 women. Ten were from Russian backgrounds; some were parents; some had connections to gay/lesbian issues; some has personal links to HIV and AIDS concerns. The majority were recruited from Tallinn, in Estonia. Five came from Pärnu, Sillimäe and Tartu in Estonia. Two were from St. Petersburg, Russia, and four from Vilnius and Klaipeda in Lithuania. The youngest participants were aged 18, the oldest around 50. The majority, however, were in their 20's or early 30's – the participation of younger people being seen as important in work that connects with teenagers.

Participants were asked to fill our short questionnaires at the beginning of the process – about their backgrounds, interests – and perceptions of men and women in Estonia. These last comments were drawn on to design one of the interactive sessions that helped open the discussions of gender. A folder with the programme and evaluation sheets, and a range of background resource materials, including the full initial Living for Tomorrow project description, and participant contact lists was prepared for each participant.

## 2.4 Design of the Capacity Building: programme and methods

The six-day programme was designed to build the relevant conceptual basis for possible ongoing work. Its central concern was to facilitate empowering experiences of personal agency and mobilisation, based on *increased understanding and challenging, in depth discussions of how gender systems work and on energising personal and group experience of, and reflection on, interactive, participatory learning methods.*

### Themes of the Capacity Building

- perceptions of contemporary gender issues in Estonia (economic, life style, media representations)
- Estonian and international research on gender and sexuality (theatre based on sexual biographies project archive: youth problem pages in Tallinn) and on sexual behaviour, beliefs and knowledge of young people
- information about the HIV/AIDS epidemic regionally and internationally, and HIV/AIDS and STDs concerns from Estonian perspectives – with discussion of how the gender affects the epidemic
- the experience of living with HIV or AIDS
- youth culture, the media and gender
- ways gender is *embodied* (using drama)
- dilemmas in sex education methods with young people
- the theory and practice of participatory educational methods
- educational strategies for activating questions about gender in sexual safety education
- brainstorming for future initiatives
- opportunity to volunteer to continue working with Living for Tomorrow and constructing an action agenda to take the project forward
- discussions of what had been gained, learned, provoked, questioned during the 6 days

Each session was planned in great detail, with a *clear structure of its aims and objectives* that the facilitators has discussed as they designed it, a *breakdown of the exact timing* of each part of it, and *points of responsibility held by individual facilitators and presenters*. The participants were to be involved in a huge language effort – talking in English, a language they did not usually “use” as frequently, and here for days lasting sometimes 11 hours. We often continued with videos and discussions late into the night after dinner, and the programme content itself was quite demanding. We therefore thought it crucial to have the sessions carefully planned in detail so that the necessary ground would be covered well, while time for participatory activities was not underestimated. At the same time, keeping open flexibility for response to developments and interventions from the group needed to be a crucial element of the facilitation practice.

The work was undertaken in English because that is the international linguistic exchange in the region, and international collaborators did not speak Russian or Estonian. It would stay working in English out of necessity – to bridge the entrenched language gaps between the Russian-speaking and Estonian-speaking Estonians, thus equalising their relationship. The use of English was also able to help strengthen participants’ access to international data and debates.

Sessions were planned so as to include input into the programme from three Estonian gender/women's studies researchers; the Director of Tallinn's AIDS Prevention Centre; an Estonian theatre director currently producing a play based on sexual biographies; student research on youth sexual problem pages; a Swedish youth sexual health researcher and educator; a British researcher and educator in sexual health and youth sexual safety education; a British cultural studies teacher and HIV educator; Danish and US videos on youth, sexual safety and HIV, gender and the media; people living with HIV or AIDS; and two American feminist actors who write, perform and teach internationally about gender issues and the embodiment of gendered behaviours. International and Estonian research on gender and sexual behaviour was also presented in workshops designed to engage participants in these issues.

The emphasis on *active participation* was seen as important both to engage people in the ideas and vision of the project, as well as to model the experience of being involved in interactive learning processes.

One main way of working was to create contexts where participants undertook small group activities discussing and debating with each other their own perceptions or ideas about, for example, different aspects of gender differences and sexual behaviours in Estonia. These workshops, however, were juxtaposed with input of information and research findings. Though there were a few more traditional presentations of research or knowledge, when done by the facilitators (not invited visitors to the project), research was adapted into participatory learning processes, to avoid "cold" delivery of facts and allow people the chance to develop an active relationship to the issues.

We used Krista Papp's important research on young people's sexual behaviours and attitudes in Estonia to generate reflection and debate in the group. Instead of simply presenting her data, participants individually filled out their own responses to what they would expect the research to find, and compared these perceptions with each other. They then discussed issues raised by their perceptions, and what influenced them, in comparison to the actual findings, before the whole group reflected on implications of the findings in the research.

The challenging insights on ways young people's sexual behaviour is gendered, as researched and discussed by the *Women/Men Risk AIDS* research project (W/MRAP) in the UK, was first turned into small group work exercises. These involved heated discussion about what statements from the research findings the groups agreed or disagreed with, – before the research implications were presented for wider reflection. Awareness about correct condom use (and reflections on details men and women might be unaware of) was processed through an activity where the group as a whole had to assemble clear directives for absolutely correct use. The aim here was to "educate the facilitators", who improvised total ignorance and posed basic questions – often neglected by simple directives given to young people. The group finally listed 21 points as crucial information for correct condom use – many more than found on any condom packet.

Using drama methods was considered crucial to helping participants shift their thinking about gender from an abstract, rational level – into a more embodied understanding of the complexities of how gender systems work to constitute each of us in "unthinking" performances of our own and others' gender expectations. Here the project was supported by input from the Split Britches theatre company – a women's and feminist theatre company that has performed its own work and facilitated women's involvement in theatre and the cultural politics of gender since late 1970s. Split Britches actors Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw led workshops that got people improvising, making, playing – and aware of their own ways of *embodying* gender differences and complicitly reproducing "being a woman or man" in certain personal and social behaviours, and, especially, the power relations communicated through these gender embodiments.

At the end of each of the 6 days, participants filled out evaluations of each session, commenting on their responses to the work undertaken. These evaluations were used as part of strengthening the work as it progressed. Every evening the facilitators themselves also spent some hours evaluating, in talk and writing, what had happened in each session – relative to the aims and goals they had established for each session. They discussed their own feelings about how the sessions had gone, what issues had surfaced in interesting ways, perceptions of the dynamic within the group, break-throughs,

difficulties and challenges that had emerged in each session that related to its content and method.

Participants were informed about the significance of the evaluation processes, and the facilitators' uses of it were explained. In fact, throughout the sessions, care was taken to encourage participants both to experience and learn from the workshops, but also to reflect on how they had been planned and facilitated – to link reflections of method into the personal learning experiences – so that *educational approaches, techniques and analysis* were combined with the actual participatory *experiences* encountered. We videoed parts of the workshop sessions and undertook interviews with the participants about why they had become involved, what had been most interesting for them in the Capacity Building workshops, what they had made of the “gender” issues addressed, how they felt about the methods used in the workshops, the usefulness of what they felt they had learned, if they had any hopes of using ideas in the future, and the impact the Capacity Building had made on them personally. Representative quotes from their replies, along with extracts from an evaluative discussion between the two facilitators just as the process ended, were made into a short video about the project “in process”, catching mid-stream responses of people involved to the linking of gender issues (new to most) to sexual safety and HIV awareness and prevention education concerns. NIKK and the NGO have limited copies of this record. Everyone in the project watched this video and able to profile through NIKK some of the participatory implementation processes the project was building.

## 2.5 The Core Group

At the end of the Capacity Building, eleven people volunteered to become part of what we called the “Core Group”, who would work to take the project forward to its work with young people. There were 4 men and 7 women, of whom 4 were from Russian and 7 from Estonian backgrounds. Three other Russians (including 2 men) would later become involved in the process, after the youth workshops – while 4 of this original Core group would have dropped out, for personal reasons, by Autumn 1999.

Immediately the Capacity Building ended, with striking

alacrity the Core Group began to meet regularly, every week in Tallinn. Their agenda was to prepare 8 days of Youth Workshops, on gender and sexual safety, for a group of teenage volunteers from local schools in Tallinn. As well as the newness of the gender focus and, for some, of the sexual safety issues, none of the Core Group had experience of this kind of collaborative working and responsibility. They were now engaged in shared decision making, collaboration over practical planning (where, when, who, food, how) as well as thinking through how to plan in detail each day of workshops, how to delegate responsibility, manage budgets and support each other.

Contact with me at NIKK was active and regular, but was now mostly only by e-mail and fax, and occasionally by phone. Details were argued and discussed, suggestions aired and accepted or rejected, new developments surfaced. Moments of anxiety were processed, and encouragement and humour flowed in a two-way process. The Core Group worked together in a combination of their own languages. Since the work with the teenagers from separate linguistic backgrounds necessitated working in English, and some members of the Core Group had somewhat different levels of ease with this, the project helped organise evening support sessions in English language, to help build the confidence as a team.

The Core Group had all volunteered to undertake this work. It was key that people joined the project out of their own integral interest in the ideas and possibilities the project opened up through the Capacity Building experience. Once they were already meeting, the existence of modest financial remuneration, calculated appropriately by Estonian standards, was confirmed. As well as venue costs for the workshops, administrative costs for communication, workshop materials, lunches and refreshments for workshop participants, budget support also covered the language support sessions (organised through British Council contacts), and, very importantly, refreshments for their planning meetings and funds for post-meeting meals. They met early evenings, with people coming straight from work. It felt extremely important that the project supported sustenance for the energies people were deploying for the work, and also encouraged contexts of time when they relaxed together, got to know each other better outside the meeting format and built personal terms of commitment

and collaboration. The collaborative energy they created together would have a key effect on the energy they communicated to the young people.

People in the Core Group were paid honoraria at a local rate equivalent of Estonian school teachers' salaries for the work they planned to undertake. Two people accepted to be the "co-ordinators" of the Core Group – which communicated by an e-mail/telephone/postal tree system to circulate information efficiently within the group and with me and the project office in Oslo. One of the co-ordinators kept meticulous accounts, with receipts, of all expenditures of money. It was very important that people felt supported in gaining and deploying the responsibilities the project required, and that it was understood that the whole process was a learning experience where what evolved would depend on what was experienced and created from each stage.

This Core Group stage of the project marked already the beginning of the "hand-over" of the project's action work, with responsibility and "take-up" of the gender ideas and educational methods becoming an autonomous initiative, but still in collaborative and supportive dialogue with the project's home base at NIKK. Disagreements with me back in the NIKK office or face to face, and, after discussion, acceptance of appropriate decisions to the will of the group, were very important in this phase.

The Core Group met at least once a week for over 2 months (long, evening meetings), and planned 8 days of workshops, session by session – working out who would take responsibility for which, and inviting in external resources to fertilise the work and helping with recruitment of the young participants. They took responsibility for its administration (locations, food, budget, local communication, and delegation of responsibilities). In discussion with the group, I kept abreast of these developments and the wider framework of the budget, and helped prepare formalised documents for the workshops: drafting outreach letters, the contract for the young people, preparing the participant files, the evaluation sheets – and eventually the certificate all the young people received. I kept the Core Group fully informed, briefed from e-mails at the start of each meeting, about all these aspects of this work – and they helped amend documents and translate when necessary (as for the schools and parents). A strong, nearly daily, e-

mail dialogue was kept active between the NIKK base and the Tallinn processes. E-mail had the great advantage of being fast, including all involved in awareness of *all* the levels of work being undertaken, allowing many angles of communication (worries, mistakes, amendments, new ideas, encouragement, humour etc) and real collaboration to occur – and yet kept the Western co-ordinator (the only person working full time on the overall project) out from under the feet of the Core Group.

## 2.6 The Youth Workshops and youth initiatives

From mid-February to early April 1999 eight days of Youth Workshops were held once a week, on weekend days, in rooms at Tallinn National Library. The Core Group felt strongly that it was important to have a high quality venue for the environment for this work for the young people. This gave a message about the calibre of the work expected and the seriousness of what they were participating in. The Core Group took full responsibility for the design and implementation of the workshop programme – sometimes re-running sessions they had experienced in the Capacity Building, sometimes adapting them and sometimes creating new sessions (e.g. on youth and drugs, on prostitution issues) and inviting some new presenters to participate. My proposal to bring in experienced theatre in health education actors/educators to again mobilise what drama can uniquely enable was accepted with enthusiasm, resulting in a visit from Loudmouth Theatre in Health Education Company from Birmingham, UK, whose young adult actors had extensive experience working with teenagers and teachers.

Twenty four young people were recruited from 2 schools (one Russian, one Estonian) with which the AIDS Centre director and a member of the Core Group had active contact in Tallinn. The project had to work in English language to bridge the separation of cultures and language that young people in post-Soviet Estonia face. Estonian now, not Russian any more, is the official language. Many young Estonians are loathe to speak (or learn) Russian, or simply do not speak it. Many Russians do not speak Estonian well, most never use it actively and many young Russians have poor access to good Estonian language teaching (see earlier section E: The *post-*

*Soviet divides: ethnic polarisations*). To have worked in Estonian would have dramatically marginalised the Russians in the group. English equalised them in language effort.

The young people were informed about the project verbally, in various small group meetings and were given handouts to read about what the project was hoping to do. Their willingness to work in English and their awareness of the cross-ethnic collaboration was clearly emphasised – and their appetites whetted for the gender explorations. The seriousness of their commitment to the workshops was underscored by their signing a formal “contract” agreeing to attend regularly and participate actively. Letters were sent to the Principals of their school, and to their parents, informing them about the project their son or daughter had volunteered to participate in and welcoming their inquiries for further information. The young participants were promised a formal certificate confirming their participation at the end of the Workshops, and told of the possibility of taking part in follow-up activities if they so wished.

Framing and supporting the work experience of the young people was important in many ways. Discussions were resourced by some weekly assignments (discussions with people at home, mini-interviews on issues with friends, scanning the media), meetings in town cafes with refreshments to encourage them to process things, and get to know each other around the project. It was planned for the whole group to go out to dinner and to a disco to celebrate at the end of the workshops. Each of the 8 days produced simple evaluative feedback from the participants, with them responding, before they left, to these questions:

- Did you talk during the week to anyone (friends or people in your family) about what you did in the workshop last weekend? To whom? What about?
- How did today go for you generally?
- What did you particularly enjoy about it?
- Did the day raise any new or surprising issues for you? If yes – can you list some here? Which were the most interesting sessions for you today? Why?
- Were any of the sessions difficult for you – or less interesting or enjoyable? If so, why do you think this was so?

A final certificate with official logos was presented to the young people, on completion of all 8 workshops, and was

signed by the Director of AIDS Prevention Estonia, the Core Group co-ordinators, me as the NIKK project co-ordinator, and the NIKK Director. It witnessed that the named person had attended 40 hours of presentations, discussions and interactive learning activities at the National Library, which had brought them into greater awareness of issues related to sexuality. It testified that they explored how gender beliefs affect sexual risk behaviours, engaged with basic facts and information about the body and sexual safety; and discussed the practice of condom use and safer sex; and problems of drug use, prostitution and violence.

The young people were then invited to volunteer to work on:

- a video initiative where they would, in small groups, film 30 minutes video on issues related to sexual health, attitudes and beliefs (interviews, or drama)
- a new booklet for young people on gender and sexual safety.
- an English/ Estonian/ Russian vocabulary-list of words on sex and gender

Seventeen of them worked on the video initiative over the summer, after which they held an evening inviting everyone linked to the project, and friends, to view them. They included interviews - with a women MP, a headmaster, relatives or friends, a graffiti artist, and on-the-street and disco/club interviews - and a dramatised “scene” between two girls in a bedroom about coolness and risk.

Eleven of these 17 committed themselves to work over the following months on the texts, artwork and design of the *booklet* and *vocabulary*. The project facilitated the work process at its inception with two days of interactive workshops that were kindly funded by the British Embassy in Tallinn *Know How Fund*. *The British Loudmouth Theatre in Health Education Company* returned to Tallinn to enable this process, having first come to perform and run interactive sessions during the Youth Workshops. The project took advantage of this visit to also mount with them two extra days training and practice for the Core Group – to help strengthen and move forward their ideas, strategies and actual “education delivery” practices, using interactive and participatory methods.

Two members of the by then established NGO, Sirle Blumberg its Director (a student of education at Tallinn

Pedagogical University, and youth activist) and Julia Samarina, (a literature and gender studies researcher and teacher of English at Tallinn Pedagogical University) took central responsibility for supporting the young people, in preparing the booklet. They helped co-ordinate the different stages of collaboration and negotiated with them nuances in the text. Lee Murrand, a businesswoman heading the first woman-led advertising/publicity agency in Tallinn worked with the young people on the design in preparation for publication. She was willing to include the young people in the processes of building the design on advanced computer technology – and was important in having patience with delays and moments of indecision, while keeping professional pressure on their awareness of the demands of production processes. The Ministry of Education in Tallinn supported their schools giving the young people a few days off, at various times, to undertake some intensive stages of the work.

The young people's texts were read over by NGO members, by myself, by Stephen Clift, Nelli Kalikova and colleagues at NIKK. I gave minor suggestions into its textual development, occasionally proposing additions. One example of this is the following. The young people first had no reference to marriage in the booklet. It was suggested to them that, since for many young people marriage and the family were a significant frame of reference for sexual relations, they should consider including this. The idea was first fiercely resisted, then, with hours of debate involving the NGO members Sirle and Julia, they decided they *would* include it, and wrote a wonderfully unusual and to the point text under the heading: Marriage and Family.

The young people and members of the NGO were centrally involved at every stage of the making of the Booklet. Just before going into print, Sirle, Julia, Irina and Olesija from the NGO and I worked with the young people on the final editing co-ordination and proof reading of the texts in the 3 languages. Sirle, Julia and I also worked on checking the final layout of the designer's computerised version of texts and illustrations. The renowned Estonian painter Navitrolla, whose work is hugely popular with young people in Estonia, generously agreed to let some of his images be used as illustrations the booklet. Young participants undertook negotiation with him with special interest in art.

*How to Bridge the Gap between Us. Gender and Sexual Health* emerged some 9 months later, as a 68 page, pocketsize booklet,

matching its 3 language texts in 3 different colours. It incorporated the vocabulary. With extra support from NIKK, and due to a miracle of printer's error - the project was able to locate extra funds to print 10,000 copies. A further 10,000 are shortly to be made available for distribution to schools throughout Estonia. The newly formed NGO, with the young people themselves, organised a public celebratory launch of the booklet in Tallinn, with press releases and circulation of its announcement to ministries, city infrastructures and NGOs. Their families and friends were welcomed to the launch. From the NIKK office, information about the booklet was circulated widely in Nordic and international circuits. Requests for sample copies came in from as far as Ukraine, Yakutia, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Brazil, Pakistan, Australia, Canada and South Africa. The main supply of booklets is held and managed by the NGO in Tallinn.

## 2.7 Consolidating skills and sustainability

An unplanned outcome of the project was the establishment of an independent NGO in Tallinn, by members of the Core Group who after their Capacity Building experience had gone on to design, organise and run the Youth Workshops. In August 1999 they established themselves legally as an NGO named after the NIKK project.

This was a welcome development celebrated within the NIKK project - and set in place new terms of continued work and suggesting the success of the project's focus and explorations. The NGO gained funding from UNFPA to run a second series of youth workshops, involving 30 young people, and supported by teenage volunteers from the first workshops/booklet making. They moved swiftly on this, and undertook it, independently, during the last year of the NIKK project. As the report is being written, further youth workshops are being planned, and the NGO has already, in winter 2001, mounted its own Capacity Building for a new Living for Tomorrow "core group" to be based at Viljandi – setting up another centre for the NGO, from which further youth workshops will be run by a new group of NGO members.

The NIKK project had incorporated into its work certain processes, which had resourced the possibility of the work continuing. It worked to deliver knowledge and practice awareness simultaneously, and the participatory, active learning methods

were central to this. It resourced educational technique and practice skills, facilitated skill building in grant application, and maintained close e-mail discussion of organisational tactics, strategies, and priorities. It encouraged open communication about the challenges of collective work and open discussion of problems and possible solutions. Important learning also came out of coping with a hostile media response (young people working on sex is a potentially scandalous media sell) and instances of sexual harassment (three men who work themselves with HIV prevention behaved inappropriately with younger participants in the project). Through all these experiences a strong infrastructure of networking was established within the project.

The priority given in the NIKK project to networking participants to wider regional initiatives also supported the building of confidence, exchange of ideas and acquiring of communication skills. It brought home to the project participants that their experience working with a focus on gender had much to teach youth initiatives even in the Nordic countries – and was of interest to people working in HIV prevention in many parts of the world. They experienced the effects of their own agency in undertaking and seeing through the work – and this itself has nourished new energy within the NGO. I worked to let go of my central role as the project ideas were taken up and developed. It was, for example, a strategic decision *not* to be present at the launch of the booklet – so that a full sense of responsibility and ownership of the work they had undertaken would be consolidated for the NGO and the volunteer young people at that point.

The innovative work that continues to be undertaken by the NGO, suggests that grounds for sustainability of the Living for Tomorrow project did emerge from within the concepts developed by the NIKK initiative – beyond, in fact, what the Living for Tomorrow project could have deliberately orchestrated or hoped for.

## 2.8 Wider networking: locating the project's work within international efforts

Participants in the project were encouraged to see their work not only as personally and nationally important but also as part of wider initiatives working to address these issues.

Two core group members presented the project at an international conference in Tromps, Norway; two members of the NGO came to Oslo to work with help from a grant-writer specialist to prepare an ambitious EU application; young people from the project presented their work and listened to work being undertaken by other youth projects in Wales (UK), Norway and Sweden. The NGO networked its work with meetings in Latvia, Sweden and Finland. Two young women from NIKK and the NGO represented the project at a Baltic region strategic planning meeting with Nordic, UN and US AIDS prevention “experts” in Helsinki.

The location of the work in a wider field of work attempting to develop more effective sexual health initiatives was considered a valuable contribution of the project to international initiatives. Efforts were made to locate the project's work within wider contexts and debates. Some examples of this follow - to illustrate the outreach efforts to connect the project's gender focus to ongoing initiatives concerning youth and sexual health.

Information about the project was circulated via the Gender-AIDS, Women-East-West, the AEGIS AIDS listing and Kvinneforum e-mail lists, and through NIKK publications and the Baltic Sea AIDS Action network. I kept key people in UNAIDS and WHO/UNICEF and Tallinn UNDP actively briefed about developments within the project.

The idea and vision of the project went into a variety of discussions and initiatives. UNICEF and UNFPA asked the NIKK project to work with them on a vision of an upscaled version of the project - which they submitted in an internal UN application procedure for specially released HIV funds (only 6 out of 108 applications were funded - and all in Africa). The questionnaire generated the draft of a collaborative proposal to WHO involving researchers and educators in 11 countries (involving very intense networking and co-ordination of discussion and people) – before the preference on single country proposals was tightened up.

The Council of Europe's *Division on Equality between Women and Men* asked to profile the project and the booklet at a Central and Eastern European conference on Youth and Reproductive health in Bratislava. Information about the project circulated in various contexts in former Soviet Union networks - where the Russian language in the booklet made it

of particular interest. Russian Women's Studies Centres circulated information about the project and cross-referenced the web site. NIKK received requests for more information from projects in a wide range of different countries, and descriptions and articles were sent. A project proposal was drafted from a minority women's organisation in Vancouver, Canada, based on Living for Tomorrow's ideas. A Croatian initiative (based on the Living for Tomorrow questionnaire strategy, emerging from exploration of a wider, cross-cultural initiative involving educators and researchers from 11 countries) gained funding support from WHO and is currently being implemented.

Family Planning colleagues in Latvia and Lithuania have been working on new projects, still seeking funding, drawing on the project's experiences and wanting links with NIKK. Presentations about the project were invited at an EU initiative on best practice gender projects, and a seminar on *Youth and Health in Transition* run by London School of Economics with Cambridge University, UK. Its work was seen relevant to new initiatives being developed from other research institutes in Norway and Sweden, and used in Southern England. The project's ideas were presented in a seminar at The Five College Women's Studies Research Centre (linked to Smith, Amherst, Mt. Holyoke, Hampshire Colleges and University of Massachusetts) in South Hadley Massachusetts, USA. In 2002 it will be presented at New York University's Centre for European Studies at their *Gender in Transition* seminar and in a NIKK co-ordinated Nordic seminar on gender research issues in Copenhagen.

Its capacity building ideas, articles and booklet has already informed work undertaken for teacher training for Rapid Relief Education for refugee children in Sierra Leone. Pending funding, the Norwegian Refugee Council also hopes to take the capacity building work into Burundi, Uganda, Congo and Angola in 2002. Living for Tomorrow ideas and publications are resourcing participants from the Balkan countries in democracy building, Norway supported *Balkan Dialogue* project in 2001. Input from the Living for Tomorrow experience was helpful in the preparation *HIV/AIDS and Gender - an awareness raising folder* by the gender-AIDS group generated by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry AIDS strategy.

The active outreach from and interested linkages to the project have been multiple, diverse and at many levels of connection – from action to concepts.

### 3. Research processes

As an interwoven research and action project, Living for Tomorrow involved different dimensions of research processes.

First, the whole process of developing the project and assessing the implications of working with gender within HIV prevention with young people was a research process in itself. This report traces the elements found to be significant in exploring and orchestrating such an undertaking in ways that would root commitment among young people to sexual safety and active involvement in HIV prevention – not an academic but urgent, real-life need in the face of the continuing HIV epidemics.

Next – the project involved a wider combing and drawing together of research relevant to the development and resourcing of the work. This research framework – now referenced in the project's bibliography on the web as a resource for others at:

<http://www.nikk.uio.no/forskningsprojekt/livingfortomorrow/>

Brought together disparate areas of concern that Living for Tomorrow wanted to interweave, identifying sources that could help inform and inspire different aspects of the project approaches, design, methods and implementation. The project then networked elements of this research to the education processes – forging dialogues, that were few and far between, between sexual health education, gender research the politics of gender issues.

And finally, parallel to the Capacity Building and Youth Workshops, the project designed and piloted a *Questionnaire on Attitudes to Men Women and Sex* and gathered data with it from teenagers in Tallinn. The process of developing the questionnaire findings is described in full in the second Living for Tomorrow NIKK report *Challenging Gender Issues* available on the NIKK Living for Tomorrow web site or from NIKK on request (Lewis and Clift, 2001). The findings of this questionnaire dramatise the urgent significance of enabling young people to think about the conventions of heterosexual behaviours in context of gender inequalities and attitudes and beliefs about men and women in their society. It argues, from the symptomatic implications of its findings,

that the understanding of how risk behaviours are scripted into the norms of the heterosexual encounter in the wider, taken-for-granted gender system, are a crucial part of enabling young people to disturb traditions of unsafe behaviours and envisage safer sexual relations.

The piloting of this questionnaire demonstrated keen cross-cultural interest in exploring gender issues more deeply within sexual health/HIV prevention initiatives. Extra funding support from NorFA enabled Living for Tomorrow to bring together sexual health educators and gender researchers from Estonia, NW Russia, Lithuania, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, England and Croatia to work collaboratively on the questionnaire - and lay the ground for strategies for using it as both a research and educational tool in different cultural contexts. This strategic collaboration of researchers and sexual health promoters was seen as key to both the development and implementation possibilities of the questionnaire, as well as to ensuring that throughout the very conceptualising process findings from the study could be linked into action with young people. We drew on preliminary findings from piloting already undertaken with young people in England, Estonia, Sweden and in Norway to stimulate discussion, and then “reworked” the questionnaire in detail, question by question, with cross-cultural debate and input. In three days of workshops modelled on methods used in the Capacity Building, we experienced together the participatory, interactive ways of working that could be implemented using the questionnaire in safer sex education contexts. The similarities and differences in the various national responses raised interesting questions about gender traditions in different and changing societies, as well as about the “globalising” of sexual risk behaviours though common media references that all were interested to discuss. Following this meeting, the questionnaire was adapted incorporating agreed detailed revisions, and guidelines were drafted for agreed strategies for its use. This collaboratively revised version of the questionnaire went into new rounds of exploratory re-piloting, with focus group discussions, with people working sex education in Sweden, Norway, Russia, Croatia, Estonia and England in order to explore a little further young people's responses to these questions and issues that the questionnaire addresses.

The initial aim of the Living for Tomorrow questionnaire was as part of the action research undertaken simultaneous to

other dimensions of the NIKK project. Its immediate goal was to gather new, local information that related to the gender concerns of the project, and could inform the work that Living for Tomorrow might generate. Comments and feedback from the questionnaire were anticipated as useful to stimulate discussion and ideas for direct work with Estonian colleagues and teenagers. Its data indeed came to provide useful input to the booklet *How to Bridge the Gap between Us? Gender and Sexual Safety* that the teenage participants made, and its findings are available for new work undertaken by the independently established Estonian Living for Tomorrow NGO.

As the project advanced, however, the wider significance of such a tool came into greater focus. The interest and response from colleagues in a range of different countries and cultures suggested its usefulness as a strategic tool for activating local debates with researchers, educators and the young people themselves in many different contexts. The later, cross-culturally revised version of the questionnaire is not a “final” version of a definitive tool - but a “core version” of a *potentially adaptable tool* that can be revised for specific take-up in different countries and different cultural and educational contexts. It has been already used as a resource for initiatives in schools in England (the Isle of Wight and Canterbury); with young adults from the newly established, cross-ethnic *Balkan Dialogue Centres*; with high school students in Oslo in workshops on a international AIDS-focus day; with sex educators in Sweden; and in a WHO funded initiative in Croatia. The approach and strategy of the questionnaire has been discussed for adaptation and use by two Norwegian research institutes in their development of new HIV intervention projects - one working in Estonia, targeting young adults 20 - 25 (students, first time employees and unemployed) and the other working with HIV prevention and youth education in Sub-Saharan African countries. It provided useful insights in HIV Capacity Building with refugee teacher trainers in Sierra Leone later in 2001.

These links are significant to mention in the wider set of *gender political concerns* that Living for Tomorrow has been committed to activating in sexual safety and HIV prevention work. Culturally diverse interest and enthusiasm has met (or sought) links with the project. This suggests that a gender

focus strategy, linking research on wider cultural beliefs about gender differences to new critical literacy among young people *about how society locates man and women differently with problematic sexual health outcomes* is seen as both relevant and urgent for concrete sexual safety and HIV prevention educational interventions with young people in diverse cultural and national contexts.

The questionnaire can be down-loaded from the Living for Tomorrow web site and adapted to local concerns for use not only by researchers but also by health educators, NGOs or school teachers doing HIV prevention work with young people (or adults). It has already proved stimulating and useful in Sweden, England, Norway, Lithuania, Croatia, cross-Balkan networks, the USA, and Sierra Leone.

Throughout the project it was research that resourced the strategy, ideas and methods. As it advanced, in turn, the specific findings and research that Living for Tomorrow generated opened new possibilities for debates both within the project - and in wider circles of interested people. What is more, the issues that surfaced in the action processes described in this section in turn themselves lent urgency to the need for further research.

After outlining the main processes undertaken to develop the Living for Tomorrow project, the final section of this report now traces some reflections on the learning processes that emerged as the work was undertaken.

## Part III: Challenges and achievements

This section summarises some of what came into focus in the project during the development and implementation of Living for Tomorrow. As the project proceeded, there were certain things that became more visible in working with gender, and in strategizing the education processes, in thinking about what the project was encountering as it progressed.

### I. Gender Issues

#### I.1 The urgency for more engaged gender focus in HIV prevention

Though recently the focus on gender has emerged as an important element in discussions of HIV prevention, the Living for Tomorrow project found very few examples of gender questions being explored as a central and integral concern throughout safer sex and HIV prevention education with young people. The work of the project was continually bridging disparate zones of work: HIV prevention on the one hand and gender research/politics on the other. Despite wide outreach (including via UN networks and HIV prevention/gender research e-mail listings), few initiatives that incorporated a sustained concern with challenging the gendering of sexual behaviours came into focus for exchange of ideas and practice with the NIKK project. Resources for new work in this area are however starting to surface - but are still marginal in the majority of HIV prevention issues (HIV/AIDS and Gender 2001; Resource Packet on Gender and AIDS 2001)

Work in the Living for Tomorrow project highlighted the following:

- discussion of gender politics is still often limited, marginalised or avoided
- awareness of gender issues is often superficial or based on personal “intuition” rather than research or critical debate
- notions that “taking up gender” is often seen as a simple, obvious thing to do (that can be just added in, if you believe in equality)
- discussion of sexual behaviours or HIV prevention informed by critical gender research and feminist research is relatively scarce

- gender concerns remain often absent from safer sex and HIV prevention education with young people
- Discussions circulating from the UN General Assembly on HIV and AIDS in New York in June 2001 often quoted the idea that we “know” how prevention work is done, so just need locate more resources to get more of it into action. (UNAIDS, 2001)

The relative absence of engaged gender work in HIV prevention suggests that the actual strategies and practices of HIV/AIDS prevention work *still need crucial further development*. If gender issues are at the heart of the continued spread of HIV, at the heart of its sexual transmission between men and women affecting millions of people every year, then gender education and gender-related educational practices need to be prioritised, resourced and upscaled in all HIV prevention work.

#### I.2 The challenges of working with gender: no quick fix

Activating gender issues within HIV prevention education is not a quick affair. It needs time and commitment. Gender awareness is not easily deliverable and the ideas cannot be communicated simply by rational information alone. Work on gender issues involves a careful, continuing and, often challenging, process that needs to be approached from many different angles for the critical concerns and important strategies to take root in young people’s minds and hearts. It needs time, creative communication and learning, and humour.

Enabling critical literacy about problems in the gender system that feed the spread of HIV involves creating conditions within which men and women can both understand themselves as embedded in the gender problems the world enmeshes them in. Men and women then also need to feel they can become part of the solution to these problems. There is not a technical fix, nor easy “adoption” of political correctness, nor a simple message of morality, nor an easily envisaged patching of negative consequences of damaging gendered relations between men and women. Gender and sexual safety education needs to invite and encourage engagement with the problems of the gender system. It needs to facilitate participation in processes of change that do not

come easily to people, in any culture, who are enmeshed in gender beliefs that are resistant to active questioning and change. Young people need an education process that encourages them to gain a critical focus on gender issues, so that new ideas and questions can make sense for them and involve them in action for change. They need a process that enables them to face their ideas of difference and debate them, to listen to others and learn to work with generosity and political commitment.

### 1.3 The importance of cultural framings of gender: contexts of real lives

Living for Tomorrow brought into focus the care that has to be taken with introducing the concept of gender. Gender issues are always located within both local or national concerns and information, within recent events, as well as within wider international or political issues. Young people need to have ways of visualising the wider range of problems that emerge from histories, social systems and traditions that reproduce inequalities. One key dimension of these is the inequalities between men and women. It is specific heterosexual conventions and sexual behaviours that are shaped by these inequalities that foster the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Gender issues thus need to be contextualised within other experiences of difference or identity that also make up the sense of self, the positioning of self within a culture and the performing of a self affected by the expectations of that culture. Gender issues echo and intermingle with other experiences of power and agency in rich and informative ways. In Living for Tomorrow the post-Soviet heritage of ethnic/national distinctions became a central part of the gender-focused project. Navigating these issues resonated across the explorations of gendered sexual concerns.

Gender inequality and its conventions of heterosexual sexual behaviours facilitate and pressure boys into adopting risk behaviours and give them licence and means to disempower women sexually. Gender inequality and its conventions of heterosexual sexual behaviours encourage and coerce girls to adopt behaviours where they concede power and control to men, and survive through compliance to and dependency on men and terms set by men. This means that heterosexual sex

is a zone for risk behaviours.

The Living for Tomorrow participants had a variety of threads linking their lives to what the HIV epidemic highlights as risk behaviours. “Risk group” targeting in HIV prevention needs to be conceptualised to embrace not just so-called “marginal groups”, but the very mainstream normative interactions between men and women - into which young people are invited by the prevailing gender system. Unsafe sex and gendered risk behaviours involve us and the men and women we know – in our families, among our friends, our workmates - not out there, among strangers or far away.

Gender issues and gendered sexuality needs to be specifically visualised within the cultural contexts young people navigate in their own realities.

### 1.4 The need for a “theory” of gender

As Living for Tomorrow progressed, it was clear that *how gender is understood* is central to any ability to change the way gender is assumed to be and the way gender is performed or embodied. The project developed a very basic briefing sheet for discussion of gender (see Appendix 19). This brought together ideas debated in workshops and sessions that explored how gender is a social, cultural and historical phenomenon. The key idea here is that *the gender system is a socially constructed system* - so how men and women are perceived to be and behave is not some natural, biological phenomenon, but an effect of where, how and when they live. By understanding that gender is organised differently in different countries, societies, cultures and at different times in history, it is possible to see *the gender system as something that varies and changes - and is therefore changeable. If sexual behaviour is shaped by gender beliefs and traditions, it then also varies and changes* between cultures, societies and across time - therefore it is also changeable (not determined by biological drives or some essentially “natural” sexual drive).

*Having a framework to understand that gendered sexual behaviour can be changed is of crucial importance to HIV prevention.*

## 1.5 Working against very real currents of resistance

It was very important not to underestimate the depth of investment people have in beliefs about gender differences. Gender is at the core of how we see ourselves and others, and it can be disturbing to question what seems a known, fixed set of contrasts between what men and women “are”. It was important therefore to bring in and/or generate local research to open debates about familiar, taken-for-granted ways of thinking about gender.

When dealing with people’s unwillingness to disturb invested gender notions, it was important to keep asking questions about what it is that confirms inflexibility in thinking about gender and what creates movement in ideas. This was especially important in opening up new questions about gender, since this involves going upstream, against currents of media, common knowledge and essentialist, often invisible beliefs. Masculinity, men’s sense of gender identity, is particularly defensive and resistant to interrogation - and this needed more research input and more attentively welcoming strategies than we perhaps mobilised in the project. The fear of losing power - that to many boys seems elusive and fragile in any case with the harsh peer and cultural performance pressures they encounter - produces complex mechanisms that distance boys and men from gender politics in any form, and gender in sexual issues in particular. Our problem of sustaining male involvement as much as was hoped was taken up in the final evaluation by Living for Tomorrow participants. Good news has reached NIKK in December 2001 that the NGO’s new work is producing more sustained and engaged participation from more boys than the NIKK project achieved.

The intensity of beliefs about “natural” gender characteristics – men’s superiority, natural abilities, emotional limits, leadership propensities, rational capacity etc, and women’s caring, emotional and communicative “nature” - needs to be explored to encourage more open discussion. The Living for Tomorrow questionnaire found 40% of the 16-year-old teenager respondents asserting that it is impossible for men and women ever to be equal because of “natural” differences between them. This implies that any discussion about equal responsibility in setting safe sexual agendas is invisibly sabotaged by these larger “core” gender difference beliefs for a significant number of young people.

ple.

The large majority of the respondents had not had a sexual partner, yet were articulate about what men and women “are” in their society and what kinds of different sexual behaviours can be expected from men and from women. Their responses illustrated also the complexity and depth of beliefs that gender is fixed and natural. They showed a glimpse of the texture of resistances to changing gendered sexual behaviour which educators need to understand as crucial obstacles to young people envisaging the possibilities of safer sex between men and women. The ideas about gender the young people harboured illustrated how they see heterosexual sex through the conventions of gender difference that society offers them – and these conventions in fact “naturalise” risk behaviours. Details of their responses and the gender analysis of their perceptions can be read in full in the other Living for Tomorrow report, *Challenging Gender Issues* (Lewis and Clift, 2001).

## 1.6 The importance of educational strategies and framework in addressing gender

To frame HIV prevention with gender awareness Living for Tomorrow needed to develop consciously orchestrated strategies.

Its education processes aimed to:

- build an understanding that gender systems implicate both men and women, are social and cultural, change and are therefore changeable
- implement an educational practice that engaged participants in explorations of how gender is socially constructed and embodied
- facilitate awareness of the many different ways gender issues affect the HIV/AIDS epidemic
- enable critical reflection on participants’ own assumptions about how sexual behaviours are gendered; possible problematic sexual consequences of “gender norms” for young women and men.
- link these gender issues to an understanding of the urgency for young peoples’ efforts to stem the spread of HIV among young people.
- understand the importance of *their* efforts in helping to stem the spread of HIV among young people.

The strategy needed to draw on findings and questions generated by research that enabled new knowledge, clarification of “facts” and also, importantly, culturally specific as well as cross-cultural debates.

Ideas and questions needed to be posed in relation also to participants’ own experiences of “being gendered”, being actively positioned within a gender system. Participatory work involving drama, improvisation, physical movement and creative imagination was crucial in allowing the participants to experience more consciously and critically their own, daily-life assumptions about masculinity and femininity. In this way gender understanding became relevant to their own situations, while the research input gave access to data about gender issues both in Estonia and in international sexual health discussions.

### 1.7 Gender issues on the move

Taking up gender issues in the critical way Living for Tomorrow explored did prove to be an approach that made HIV prevention come into active focus for the participants.

Emphasising the importance of developing new “critical literacy” about gender issues and how they relate to HIV prevention work was perceived as significant by the participants as they reflected back on what they felt was important. The project did achieve dynamic engagement from young people that is still going strong a year after the NIKK project ended in Estonia.

When asked to profile for others the most important things that could be learned from Living for Tomorrow, the participants emphasised *the significance of questioning gender* in their final group-feedback evaluation:

*It was important to create QUESTIONS at the heart of what we were doing.*

*It was difficult to start talking about gender: we even didn't know it could be talked about. But it really made us start asking questions. It changed the way of looking at relationships between people.*

*If GENDER is centred along with sexual safety, if gender is explored more deeply and critically – this gives to theme of sexual safety a whole new angle. Gets us thinking about men and women in relationship, the WHYS and the stereotypes in what happens. What IS happening at the moment of not using condoms? Questioning gender opens up sexual safety in a really other way.*

*If it had only been about condoms and facts and diseases – it would have been boring. The wider context made it different, exciting, interesting.*

*The project made people think. It opened up problems not noticed before, and got us thinking. It generated discussions.*

*We gained a better grasp on influences on real life and feel less scared.*

*Our work in the project helped us be more realistic about actual life situations – and this is what helps you make right decisions. If you know about what is shaping that real situation, it helps you not make mistakes.*

*The knowledge, the questions, the processes of discussion – all helped us not feel so scared.*

*It was important having a context where theory could link to practice... The project gave us the chance to put theory into practice*

*At school we learn how to think and act in abstract. Here we learned how to think critically AND put things into practice. We learned things, then we created things ourselves – we were able to do practical things taking the ideas out into our lives.*

## 2. Research + action

### 2.1 The importance of a research framework

A key element in Living for Tomorrow was working to find ways of linking research to actual processes of HIV/AIDS education. I think in academic circles it is easy to forget how ideas do not circulate easily to educators, who are facing the time and energy demands of working with large numbers of young people and without active relationship to academic and research discussions and debates. Yet it is the fruits of research that can galvanise interest, push understanding deeper, show the complexity or richness of issues that shape the “gendering” of the HIV epidemic - and encourage the rethinking that makes safer sexual behaviours better understood, more motivated. The project kept questioning what elements of research could help activate and resource more dynamic thought-provoking discussions of gender in HIV prevention; how should it be introduced to people, and what could be learned by participants’ response to it.

An interesting example of this is the research of the *Women Risk AIDS Project (WRAP)* in Britain, which builds on specifically British data about young women’s actual accounts of sexual interactions with men and strongly informed by Western feminist analysis. Yet the issues raised by this research fired extraordinary discussions with people involved in Living for Tomorrow, and helped bring home aspects of the embodiment of gendered sexual acts and behaviours of young women and men that were curiously familiar (and urgent, yet very rarely discussed) in very different cultural settings (Holland, Ramazanoglu et al., 1998) (See also J. Holland, et al in Living for Tomorrow Bibliography on the NIKK web site for a range of publications from the WRAP project research).

HIV education risks getting worn down to repetitive bare bones of information delivery spiced up with some interactive activities. To be able to fertilise the key concerns of HIV prevention and the practical risk/safety information with challenging analyses and questions that research generates lends a richness and “electric charge” of engaged interest - for everyone involved. It was important to see that participants in their final evaluation comments themselves highlighted this -

talking about a sense of having worked with theory as well as practice and their interconnections, of having had the chance to access a whole range of new ideas and debates:

*“It was important to create QUESTIONS at the heart of what we were doing.”*

*“At school we learn how to think and act in abstract. Here we learned how to think critically AND put things into practice.”*

It is the research links that brought in the questions, and profiled the importance of keeping alive a sense of exploration and rethinking that let the actual HIV prevention issues take root in richer soil. The research connections stimulated new debate for both the educators and those being educated alike.

The significance of the project emerging from a research institute comes into focus here, and could signal the importance of building and resourcing more collaborations between researchers and educators. As project co-ordinator with academic research links, I was not only able to direct research into the workshops participants were undertaking, I could also link the issues into wider debates occurring on academic, research grounds. I could listen to papers and debates by gender researchers from different corners of the former Soviet Union, or international seminars on adolescent sexual health, or attend discussions of the *Changing Gender* seminar at the Centre for Women’s Studies and Gender Research at University of Oslo. I could end up in what were, for the project, incredibly fruitful, idea-injecting seminars and discussions where researchers (to mention some from different academic frameworks in different countries) such as Bronwyn Davies, Danny Wight, Rachel Thomson, Elena Zdravomyslova, Ilse Trapenciene, AnnaStina Henriksson, Negussie Taffa, Gill Dunne, Marjut Jyrkinen, Anu Laas, Barbi Pilvre, Gary Barker, Bente Træen, Nadine France, Gill Gordon, Gaspar Fajth, Stephen Clift, Bob Connell talked about their work on some combination of gender, young people, sexual health, HIV and sexual education issues.

I was then able to bring the fruits of this research, and at times researchers themselves, into dialogues with the project participants. This also enhanced the sense of the work being part of something larger, part of wider conversations and investigations, part of a concern that surfaced from different angles in different places. And the feeling of being part of something beyond one’s own small daily reality is a key ele-

ment for mobilisation and involvement of young people in social issues that have immense personal consequences.

The experience of this channelling of connection to research suggests that having people in HIV prevention education projects who can provide an active two-way flow of links between gender research and the education processes might be more important than usually considered.

## 2.2 Education processes

As well as its persistent concern to implement interactive, participatory forms of learning, there are several aspects to the actual learning processes that warrant special mention

### 2.2.1 Asking questions, not delivering pre-given analysis

First, for the gender issues to come alive for people it is crucial to approach gender through *questions* that activate initial reflections among participants about their own experiences and perceptions. A very simple example of this is a session that worked very effectively with groups of young adults and young people in Estonia, but also in other cultural contexts. The question presented was: here in your country what do you think are some of the main problems boys and young men face today? After discussing this in pairs for a while, preparing to feed back their thoughts to the larger group, they then were asked to consider what they think are some of the main problems girls and young women face today. When these are mapped onto parallel flip charts the overlap and contrasts, the zones of risk, vulnerability, pressure, expectations, difficulties come richly into focus all at once - laying a ground from within the group itself for opening up new discussions of how the gender system works and what issues it is actually very important to explore more critically.

The project's education process kept firing debate by facilitating *questions* to surface from research and from the groups themselves, that could open discussion of taken for granted notions about men, women and the workings of the gender system. Questions such as:

*Is male sexuality different from women's? Do men and women have different "natural" sexual needs? Why do you think that - on what basis? What assumptions are in*

*circulation here about what is to be sexual as women or as a man? How do issues of power and money affect sexual encounters or relationships for men and women? Where do young people get their "sexual scripts" from - and what differentiates women from men within those texts and images? Do attitudes about femininity and masculinity see initiative and agency differently for men and women? What are the consequences of these beliefs and attitudes? Why is it so difficult to normalise safer sex behaviour strategies that limit sexual damage between men and women? How can sexual behaviours be rescripted more "safely" by activating these kinds of questions? Can we afford not to ask these kinds of questions in the face of the AIDS epidemics?*

Questions such of these could be activated in relation to examples from research, interacting with participatory learning activities drawing on personal opinions.

### 2.2.2 Practising what you preach

Since the idea was not only to educate the group involved, but also to generate interest in them continuing the work, it was crucial to keep trying to model the processes of education that the project was teaching about. The education needed to be delivered to participants, its implications had to be embodied in the teaching practice, and conditions had to be created for participants to not only *experience* the learning process, but *reflect consciously on its processes* and the actual way it is delivered.

(There is something very symbolic in this regard where HIV prevention is concerned. Many adults who never think to use condoms themselves - are on the pill, are "married" so don't need to, don't like them, don't dare to ask partners etc. - eloquently exhort young people to use them. If the educating practice of the educator contradicts the ideas the education is aiming at, young people pick that up more perceptively than one often realises)

It was important to resource the content (planned ideas, strategies, information, questions) while opening up embodied practices of method (the ways of setting these in motion with people).

It was important also to have time to return to issues or to go over things more than once. Running a day of workshops on facilitation of participatory methods months after the initial Capacity Building and Youth Workshops gave the core group an added surge of confidence that no doubt contributed to their initiative to found their own NGO. Though we talked about funding ideas for sustainability, the fact that the project was able to work intensively with two of the core group members, har-

nessing support from a skilled grant writer, and undertake a maybe over-ambitious but concrete application process, no doubt allowed strategic skills to come into focus which could later bear fruit.

This concern not to consider the delivery of education “done”, but to keep open ways of helping participants consolidate skills and strengthen confidence is perhaps crucial in laying grounds for sustainability. It proved important to have within our budget allocation the flexible possibilities to add in-process support for participants’ sense of agency – and respond to needs that became clear as we went along, and to amend things - or process mistakes transforming them into learning processes.

### 2.2.3 Practical ways of working

For people willing to commit themselves to ongoing HIV education, but with little experience in “running things” (as for many young people), the discussion of very basic practical things needed not to be underestimated. There are, to start with, basic techniques like ground rules and warm-up/ice-breaker strategies. But also, if you have never had responsibility before for running a day of group sessions, there are things you have maybe never consciously thought about, such as: how distracting it can be to participants if you talk in the back of the room during sessions others are running; how important the preparation of the space and seating really is for group dynamics; how each session can benefit hugely from very careful and detailed preparation, (even if you want to “go with the flow” of the group at points - it does not run on its own juice after a 10 minute introduction); how important is to give shape to the day with good introductions, clear explanations of what is happening, what goals are, what is going to happen, why what has happened was important; how speaking to a group needs conscious efforts to project your voice; how your delivery will affect energy in the room, how the attitude you convey can enable or disable involvement.

### 2.2.4 Allowing for differences

For people to really feel involved in taking up gender issues and HIV prevention, the education experience has to create different possibilities for different people to approach these

quite challenging concerns in their own ways, that make sense to them. The young people in the group needed leeway to find their own ways of connecting the questions and information to where they were coming from. So care needed to be taken so that individuals did not feel pressured to conform to any political correctness. It was important that they could disagree or hold out against the way consensus was leaning. They needed to be able to give shape to the questions within their own, very differing inner dialogues with, for example, religion, family ethos, acquired notions of homosexuality, ambivalent personal sexualised experiences, personal investments in certain “performances” of gender or “the attractive male or female”, or even dreams of love, romance or seduction. The education process does not need to produce a homogenous cohort where all agree on every dimension of gender politics. It needs rather to create conditions where a coherent enough critical mass can agree that addressing the issues really does matter, that there *are* gender problems that lead to damaging consequences and it is really worth working together to address them.

Sexual health education always runs the risk of moralising, or simplifying images of “the correct way”, or can risk making assumptions that things are covered, because they have been raised once. But different people need to be able to encounter ideas and information from different angles in order for it to connect meaningfully to what is going on in their lives and minds. Living for Tomorrow tried to find ways to include simpler and more complex processes of learning, serious and fun, disturbing and entertaining, demanding and easy, experiences where you were more passive and receptive, then others where you were active and responsible, themes that might engage boys and girls differently. The diversity of learning experiences, all differently seeded with gender issues and sexual safety concerns aimed at a richer harvest of involvement.

It was interesting to hear the young people themselves highlight the importance of this in their last evaluation:

*The project gave people different ways in. The recognition of different routes into involvement of different people was important.*

*In creating of trust, it was important to respect where people were coming from, the different perspectives they brought. Then people don't close off from each other. We were all different, but grew to be friends. It made us more open-minded.*

### 3. Reflections on difficulties and challenges

#### 3.1 Recruitment issues

Recruitment of adults interested in taking up the explorations of gender was a challenge. Keenness to work with young people and to be open to non-didactic, less hierarchical methods of working was a key issue in this. Navigating the diplomacy of the HIV/sex education field was at times delicate. But it was crucial to limit the imposition of any kind of authority which could sabotage the gender focus with scepticism or privileging established, or expert knowledge that might be mobilised to devalue the gender questions related to sexual behaviour. It is a sobering fact worth reflection that during the project three men with professional responsibilities linked to HIV prevention education were implicated in forms of sexual harassment or efforts at inappropriate sexualising of relations with young people in the project.

As regards the recruitment of the young people, the young participants themselves brought to our attention that part of the polarising of the Russian and Estonian groups within the project was facilitated by them having been recruited from only one Estonian school and one Russian school. This meant that there were already established friendship groups and they clustered together on familiar terrain simply because of a shared common reference point. When the NGO went on to run its own youth workshops they recruited smaller numbers from a wider range of schools – which might have been one significant contributing factor to a feeling of easier cross ethnic/national tension in ensuing workshop groups.

#### 3.2 The question of boys and men

Living for Tomorrow worked to recruit as many men and boys as women and girls, and aimed at designing education processes that men could feel as included in as women. At each stage it was easier recruiting women, and the drop out rate was higher among the teenage boys.

In relation to the young people, some of the reasons for drop out were circumstantial. One boy became ill and had to withdraw. The confidence of the 15-year-old Russian boys in using English turned out to be significantly less than the girls'

– and we realised this too late. So four of the Russian boys were at a disadvantage because of the language, and at times retreated into in-group, disruptive behaviour that lack of understanding fertilised. Some of these Russian boys, however, asked to rejoin the new wave of workshops that the NGO went on to run. It seemed that while 15 was an age that worked well for all the girls, for involvement with the ideas and issues, it may have been better to recruit boys a year older.

Gender research is emerging out of some 30 years of women's studies research, fired by the women's movements that focused primarily on women's issues, experiences and concerns. Masculinity and men's studies are newer and rarer. Gender studies and gender politics involve much smaller numbers of men, everywhere. We are still dealing with contexts where gender issues are seen as women's issues, where gender problems are imagined as the problems women face. The political imagining necessary to problematise masculinity in ways that heterosexual men can become implicated as progressive agents of change regarding the gender system and sexual behaviours – is still relatively new. This newness impacts on HIV/AIDS education everywhere, marking it with traditions that are led by women and speak more easily to women's issues than men's.

While men made important contributions to the Capacity Building, Core Group, Youth Workshops, questionnaire research and the forming of the NGO, women were in the majority as the dust settled at each stage. The dynamics of masculinity within the mixed group often (but not always) positioned male participants as slightly more reticent, distanced, defensive, nervous or sceptical about gender discussions. The questionnaire feedback highlighted how invested both girls and boys are in a less communicative, more controlling, more "powerful" and more risk-taking masculinity. Perhaps questioning the gender system, critically examining gendered sexual behaviour and visualising safer sex strategies, present risks of insecurity and anxiety that young men find it more difficult to take, given these masculine expectations.

Having the work of Living for Tomorrow facilitated and developed by strong collaboration of a women and man, both alert to the politics of gender, did help keep alive a concern about men's involvement and men's perspectives. The project

made progress but also had its limits concerning the sustainability of men's involvement in HIV and gender issues.

Some of the participants, in the final evaluation workshop, invoked the need to think more carefully and creatively about how to involve men with comments such as these:

*We didn't manage this very well. Something was missing or wrong – because we lost quite a few young men participants as the project progressed.*

*You need to strategize more about how to recruit men, how to make them feel welcome and stay on board. Gender issues (and ghost of "feminism") provoke range of reactions in men: they set in motion traditional male resistance and even reinforce traditional masculinity.*

### 3.3 Bridging academic research and educational implementation

The need to weave research into the HIV and gender workshops involved a lot of time and preparation. The project had to:

- seek out relevant research to incorporate
- resource participants with hand-outs, references, publications made available, selected videos etc
- identify local researchers and educators to involve, and help prepare their input into the project context
- identify international input that could provide experienced support
- document the processes involved to leave useful records for others

Then, as well as resourcing the implementation work from research, there was the work of developing and carrying out relevant, small-scale research that could be explore the Living for Tomorrow agenda and contribute to gender awareness about sexual behaviour and risk.

There was also the issue of bridging academic language with learning processes of people not immersed in academic processes. It was striking that some of the gender researchers who presented very important findings about gender in contemporary Estonian society and media within the Capacity Building, received more restrained and qualified evaluations – which was because of their mode of delivery. The need to help researchers prepare and present their work in more engaging and connected is essential – if the input of research

into HIV and gender education is to help people ground their understanding.

Stephen Clift and I both had academic footings. We found it useful as facilitators of the Capacity Building or other key moments in the project action, to discuss and critique together ways we had of talking, relating to people, and enabling participation in the sessions we led and in the orchestration of the 6 days as a whole. We were very aware that as we presented issues we were also modelling an enactment of those issues, demonstrating non-verbally their importance. This meant that we sought to be consciously aware of our own agendas, reflective about our mistakes and our own learning processes even as we were responsible and “in charge”. It became useful to make this self-evaluation criticism and self-awareness of process explicit to the group at times. In this way they were not only receptive of the fruits that our facilitation enabled, but conscious of the decisions, strategies and tactics involved in approaching the issues in the way we did, with the educational effects we were seeking.

Not seeing young people as the mere receptors of education, but also showing them the processes of education and creating contexts for them to experience more enabling educational methods became a crucial part of involving them in the issues and concerns under discussion. Questioning gender inequalities and assumptions and informing about risks and safer sexual behaviours need educational methods where the young people feel informed of process and strategy, not just objects of its “manipulations” of experienced delivery.

### 3.4 Under-estimation of challenges of bridging differences between people

In any group of young people becoming involved in HIV awareness and in gender issues, their relationship to these concerns will be refracted through different experiences, different positions in society, and differences of identity that those backgrounds shape. In Living for Tomorrow it was the post-Soviet era, cross-ethnic challenge that came to the fore. So the relationship to HIV and AIDS and gender issues was interwoven with these differences and polarisations.

Working with young people with the hope to mobilise them in collaborative initiatives for HIV prevention and education

meant we had to engage with these differences - and the tensions or anxieties, the differentials of power, the resistances – all of which risked sabotaging that collaborative mobilisation.

So a reflection that emerges from this is that HIV projects need resources that give them margins of possibility, extra support or time at key moments, to take on these other dimensions of working together.

### 3.5 Impermeability of international bodies as experienced “from below”

As a project that was not simply an academic exercise, but seeking to develop methods and structures that might enable participants to engage with its work usefully, the question of sustainability was on the agenda. Sustainability is helped by networks, by connections and by mutual outreach of exchange for collaboration.

People in the project were working with outstanding goodwill and commitment, and engaged in concrete action. The NIKK project witnessed the independent birth of the NGO from within it. It was striking, then, to see how difficult it was from the perspective of a small, new NGO working to network an initiative into the resources or support of larger international bodies. When people are working as volunteers, or in conditions where they have really limited resources – the UN or EU or Nordic systems that exist to help resource and support development and collaboration appear extremely unbroachable from the outside. Visits to the modernised, Western-style resourced offices, often just down the road, involved crossing invisible boundaries. The path leads from offices where there is no funding for paper, schools with very restricted availability of text books and where computer access is barely beginning, and homes where salaries are phenomenally less than the Western or international agency incomes. The Soviet system of hierarchy still lingers in imaginations, and the right to cross these invisible borders seems tenuous – especially when to succeed you need to feel confident you can play the game by terms set by these international bodies. On the Western side, the realities and the lack of resources people are coping with, at every level of their daily and working lives, are frequently not really grasped. The Western presence is insulated from them by the Western resources and conditions that are invisible to people from the West because we take them for granted.

It was interesting to see how hermetic the international funding

systems seemed, how hard it was to make meaningful connections through the international organisations, to understand their processes and criteria, and to garner small sources of extra support. For young people working uphill with great effort in new processes and with huge daily odds against active personal commitment, no recent history of autonomous organising or NGO work and no national governmental interest (or means) yet to support NGO initiatives – the links with international bodies seemed very foreign and inaccessible. This means that their energies and innovations are wasted, their own self-motivation thwarted by lack of resources, while projects that are delivered to them by adults and experts and “outsiders’ are prioritised.

There is a need, for example, for looser margins in funding availability, to pick up creative ideas that projects or small groups generate requiring smaller amounts of money at shorter notice, and without all the palaver and paperwork of major funding applications. The rigidity of the funding structures and administration makes it hard to get support that could make all the difference, as ideas emerge and develop. This gives very little room for creative improvisation as young people proceed with ideas and plans. The severe limits in local funding sources make accessibility to international support very important to young people for new ideas and for up scaling from starting initiatives.

For example, the significance of including theatre/drama work in the Capacity Building and Youth Workshops came into clearer focus as *Living for Tomorrow* progressed. It was not easy to “make the case” that convinced Nordic, UN, EU or Foundations to grant amounts (relatively small to them but significantly large to *Living for Tomorrow*, and of huge enablement significance to an NGO in countries of limited resources) of extra funding to add extra drama input, for example, to the educational processes. In the end, *Split Britches* actors’ participation was funded by an anonymous American feminist donor, and the *Loudmouth Theatre* actors was funded through the British Embassy in Tallinn. The drama involvement proved crucial, however, to grounding personal understanding of the “embodiment” of gender.

Finally, I observed that the wider international agencies and organisations were often unresponsive to outreach requests to help network the new NGO in with projects and agendas that had similar concerns. This could either be that people

are too busy within these organisations, that their priorities do not allow response to work they have not themselves initiated – or, of course, that they did not manage to identify projects where gender and HIV were being explored in depth. Or maybe this kind of networking and support just takes more time, as information gradually trickles through grapevines.

### 3.6 Time and energy

*“It took much more time and energy than any of us imagined. We’ve had to work really hard. It is a real commitment to work on these issues.”*

This was one of the messages the participants wanted to communicate about what important things they felt were learned in the project.

It was extremely important for the project to nourish and replenish energy, and to recognise achievements with pleasurable collective interactions or celebrations. Late night meetings with drinks and chocolates suddenly became the occasion for a series of individual evaluations of what each person felt about being in the project, about how these gender issues were resonating into people’s lives, about the impact on families and friends of their involvement with HIV/AIDS issues. Everyone came into focus for each other differently, around the margins of the actual work at hand, by the project having resources for meals or drinks or refreshments. Coffee, soda or hot chocolate and a piece of cake eased difficult collaborative processes between Estonian and Russian young people working in small groups on sections of the Booklet vocabulary lists. Pizza and soda cohered invitations to the young people to come and talk about their views on life in Estonia – and created the round table occasions where small groups met for hours and hours with me, bringing into circulation images about their lives and views that no workshops alone could have brought into focus.

It proved very important, therefore, to have planned margins of resources in the project budget to nourish the kind of commitment, energy and courage the young people needed to stay involved with challenging issues, especially against conditions of daily life that can demoralise, sabotage or depress energies. This is, ultimately, not “luxury” funding – but essential to support the building of the spirit of HIV pre-

vention work, which needs ever widening, collaborative networks of people expanding and developing it with commitment and energy.

### 3.7 Uncertainty of progress at any one point: need for more flexible resourcing of time

It is perhaps important to record that it was always only in retrospect that the success of the implementation work could be recognised. Education and awareness building processes are fraught with human interactions, group dynamics and a myriad of practical and circumstantial factors that can lean each moment in the process towards high or low energy, and increased or decreased commitment.

This is worth mentioning merely to acknowledge the amount of energy and focus needed to weather the immediate uncertainties of the processes working well, and to recuperate the work from difficulties and challenges that emerged as it progressed. Gender and HIV/AIDS hover over volcanoes of fear and insecurity, and managing the processes of engaging with them meaningfully needs time and support.

Initiatives that envisage the “delivery” of HIV/AIDS education as involving a couple of hours or a day of seminars risk wasting time and money. Funding needs to resource more *time* for the important gender issues to be opened up constructively, for the HIV/AIDS education to take root more effectively and for the importance of changing the gender conventions of sexual behaviour to make more sense for people. And more resources need to be made available to replicate small scale, small group initiatives and provide more full-time, gender-educated facilitator/educators building these engaged, small units of preventive initiatives that inspire young people to take the HIV prevention work further.

## 4. Final Summary of the Achievements of the Living for Tomorrow project

The main achievements of Living for Tomorrow include visible and more invisible outcomes, which are listed here to end this report.

### 4.1 The founding of an independent NGO

The Capacity Building and Core Group involvement in the ensuing Youth Workshops generated a desire among the young adult participants to continue the work that the NIKK project began. In August 1999, they legally established themselves as an NGO, named after the NIKK project. In December 2001 this NGO is still running strong, with continued involvement of Russians and Estonians, and what appears to be more effective recruitment of young men. It works with a network of active teenage volunteers, and has now included some of the original young people participants in its formal membership. The NGO has run new, 8-day Youth Workshops with further cohorts of teenage recruits. It has led workshops in schools, mobilised youth participation in World AIDS day events and run audience participation workshops in different towns in collaboration with the Tallinn Russian drama company. In November 2001 it ran a 6-day Capacity Building with adults in Viljandi in order to establish a sister branch of the NGO based outside Tallinn. The AIDS Prevention Centre is currently supporting expansion of the NGO activities.

The existence of the NGO was not a pre-planned goal of the project. It was an outcome that the NIKK project celebrated with great delight - and pride. This unexpected development underlined that in the NIKK Living for Tomorrow project:

- conditions of participant ownership and sustainability had been effectively developed
- the project's education methods had been effective in resourcing people with skills that helped build confidence to "go it alone"
- participants' expertise and competence was enabled effectively at practical levels (budget & financial management, funding application processes, public speaking and public relations, participatory education facilitation, media management, energy strategies for facilitation and mobilisation etc.)

- the networking it had modelled has encouraged continuation of outreach strategies – at local, national and international levels
- Last, but not least, however, the NGO's enthusiasm to take the work forward has vindicated the effectiveness and inspiration of the Living for Tomorrow gender-focused approach.

Given the soaring rates of HIV in Estonia in the last year, the existence of this NGO is more than timely. Their work is able to respond relevantly to the current urgent need to mobilise HIV awareness and prevention work among young people.

### 4.2 Publications, resources and records

The following Living for Tomorrow materials were produced from the project:

**Mobilising Gender Issues: Report from the Living for Tomorrow project on youth, gender and HIV/AIDS prevention**, by Jill Lewis, an overview of the issues the project addressed, its implementation processes, challenges and outcomes.

**Challenging Gender Issues. Report on young people's attitudes to men, women and sex**, by Jill Lewis and Stephen Clift, charting and analysing findings from data collected from a sample of teenagers in Estonia, with wider cross-cultural implications for gender-focus in HIV prevention.

A youth information/education booklet authored and illustrated by young people from the Living for Tomorrow Youth Workshops:

**How to Bridge the Gap between Us. Gender and Sexual Health** In its pocket-size format, each page of the booklet folds out to present parallel texts in English, Russian and Estonian. As its introduction says:

*This is NOT a "know-how" booklet. It is a tool, made by young people themselves, working together crossing post-Soviet Russian/Estonian divides, that aims to provoke discussion among other young people (maybe older people too). It doesn't provide answers, but wants to stimulate questions about attitudes to men and women, and to give some bits of practical information about some aspects of sexual safety that these young people chose to prioritise – that they consider urgent concerns for today's young people to live safer tomorrows.*

The themes and content of this booklet were decided by the young people themselves out of the debates and activities that Living for Tomorrow facilitated. The themes the booklet focuses on are: *Being man or woman, Attraction, Stereotypes, Jobs men and women do, Why young people have sex, HIV/AIDS, Marriage and the family, Condoms; Excuses, excuses*. The booklet ends with a 3-language vocabulary/glossary of words, chosen by the young people, listed under the following headings: prevention, risks of unprotected sex, sexual intimacy and behaviours, the body side of sex, different colours of sex (feelings) and the social side of sex - gender issues. Making this booklet involved the young people in a concrete, collaborative project to crystallise and disseminate fruits of their involvement in the project. It also drew on their abilities as writers, illustrators, designers and translators and gave them active experience in the business/professional and computer design aspects of publication. 20,000 copies were printed. The booklet is now in wide circulation in Estonia, and copies have been requested from many other parts of the world.

A Living for Tomorrow **Bibliography** of resources identified as useful for addressing the project's concerns can be accessed through the NIKK web site. It makes available a pool of references that can help others explore the issues that Living for Tomorrow engaged with, without having to start their explorations from scratch.

The Bibliography can be accessed selectively via theme key words, such as gender, women, men and masculinity, heterosexuality, youth, education methods, post-Soviet, HIV/AIDS, safer sex etc. at:

<http://www.nikk.uio.no/forskningsprojekt/livingfortomorrow/>

Templates of the Living for Tomorrow **Questionnaire on young people's attitudes to men, women and sex** can be downloaded from the NIKK web site for use as education or research tools. The questionnaire can be adapted to address different cultural situations or different age groups, and can be used to stimulate discussion of gender issues and sexual expectations/behaviours, to strengthen gender-focused sexual health awareness among young people. It can also be used to help generate new kinds of data about ways young people understand the gendered world that surrounds them, and translate their wider gender beliefs into sexual assumptions and behaviours.

Two versions of the questionnaire are available: the original questionnaire used to collect Estonian data in Living for Tomorrow, and a modified version that was revised and re-piloted as a "cross-cultural" resource, in collaboration with researchers and educators from Sweden, Norway, Lithuania, Croatia, England, NW Russia, Estonia and Norway.

NIKK holds a limited number of copies of a 25-minute video, **The Living for Tomorrow Capacity Building**. It introduces Living for Tomorrow, presents responses of participants to their experience of taking part in the Capacity Building and catches some of the facilitators' reflections about where the project has got to and what it faced at that stage of its development.

The project has also produced hours of unedited video footage filmed during the project: the youth workshop sessions; interviews with the young people at end of the Youth Workshops; footage filmed by the young people (interviews, discussions, responses of family and friends, a short dramatised episode etc) independently during summer 1999; individual interviews with some 20 participants at end of the final group evaluation day; the public launch celebration of the Booklet.

### 4.3 Networking – ideas in wider circulation

The project generated a wide range of interactions, connections and dialogues. These contributed to furthering discussion of gender issues in HIV prevention work in many different contexts. The exchanges and initiatives that were set in motion from Living for Tomorrow's ideas did not always come to "product" achievement, but were significant for the web of dialogues they initiated and the circulation of the gender-HIV prevention discussions they seeded.

A selection of the networking processes are listed here to give a sense of the span of outreach the project achieved:

#### 4.3.1 International interactions

- Twenty-four researchers and sexual health educators from Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Lithuania, NW Russia (St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad), Croatia, England and Estonia collaborated to revise the questionnaire and re-pilot it.

- UNICEF and UNDP in Estonia were kept informed of all stages of development of the project. People working at UNAIDS in Geneva (in UNICEF, WHO, at the Gender section, African partnership section, and Eastern & Central European desks) met to hear about the project, and have been kept informed of its progress.
- People from UNICEF and UNFPA developed a concept paper for internal UN bidding that was based on up-scaling the Living for Tomorrow approach and focus.
- The NGO has independently received support from UNDP and UNFPA for its ongoing work.
- Researchers and educators from each of 11 countries (the above list, plus Sierra Leone, Swaziland and Australia) collaborated to draft a proposal to WHO for cross-cultural collaboration of education/research initiatives based around the Living for Tomorrow questionnaire. The WHO programme involved preferred finally to back single country applications, and our Croatian colleagues took the proposal forward and received funding to carry out the work in Croatia to help build school sex and HIV education curricula.
- The Council of Europe Division on equality between men and women requested copies of the Booklet and project ideas for circulation at their Central European conference on youth and reproductive health in Bratislava.
- Two teenagers, one Estonian and one Russian, with support from the British Embassy in Tallinn, presented the project in Wales at an International Youth & HIV prevention conference and were hosted by Youth Link, a Welsh HIV prevention youth organisation
- Project ideas have been requested to inform new initiatives being developed at The Centre for Gender Studies, University of Durban, Kwazulu Natal, South Africa, and by the African American Women's Association in Vancouver, Canada.
- The project was presented at international seminars on *Adolescent Sexuality, gender and change*, Institute of Social Medicine, Oslo University; *Youth and Health in Transition*, organised by Cambridge University and London School of Economics, England; in a seminar series at the Five College Women's Studies Research Centre, South Hadley, Massachusetts, USA, and at the Centre for European Studies' *Gender in transition* program at New York University
- The Living for Tomorrow focus and methods shaped 2 Norwegian Refugee Council HIV education trainings - for refugee teacher trainers, and for young people from Freetown youth organisations in Sierra Leone in June 2001
- Project ideas and methods will inform 3 days of Gender Awareness Building workshops in the Norwegian sponsored *Balkan Dialogue Project* in Neum, Bosnia and Herzegovina, June 2002. Its content and methods are being sought to resource a project on HIV prevention mounted through a collaboration between McGill University in Montreal and the University of Toronto, Canada and Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg, South Africa; are to shape trainings being planned for refugee teachers in Congo, Burundi, Uganda (Norwegian Refugee Council); are being considered for input to national HIV prevention teacher trainings in Zambia (Centre for International Education, Oslo College, Norway)
- Requests for information about the project have been received from some 40 countries as far ranging as Vietnam, Russia, Thailand, Mexico, Nigeria, India, Uganda, Italy, England, Lithuania, South Africa, Canada, Brazil, Sweden, USA etc.

#### 4.3.2 Nordic networking

##### Sweden

- Four NGO adults and 5 youth participants spent 4 days in Sweden in meetings facilitated by AnnaStina Henriksson (NOPUS, Ministry of Education) with students from Karlstad University, members of a marginalised youth project and sexual health educators.
- The project approach and ideas were presented to a group of teachers and social workers from Swedish schools and youth clinics involved in a sex education initiative in Värmland County.
- The National Institute of Public Health in Stockholm supported a piloting of the revised questionnaire in Sweden.

##### Norway

- Two Estonian members of the Core Group went from Tallinn to present the project at the international Women's Worlds 1999 conference in Tromsø.

- Living for Tomorrow was presented to NGOs and people working on youth sexual health at a special seminar organised by the Norwegian Centre for Gender Equality. This Centre was also interested in the project's ideas for youth education initiatives against sexual violence being developed in Norway, and for initiatives under discussion in the Ministry for Children and Families. This Ministry proposed Living for Tomorrow for consideration in the Norwegian follow-up to the UN Fourth World Conference on Women action plan.
- Project ideas were trialled in seminars with youth in the *Immigrant HIV Prevention initiative at Norwegian Red Cross*.
- The Norwegian Association of Medical Students for Sex Education (Medisinerenes for Sexualopplysning) included sessions on Living for Tomorrow's ideas and gender-focused approaches in their annual conference in 2000. Living for Tomorrow was presented at Løten, Norway as a best practice example in the EU project involving Norway, Italy, Spain and Ireland on "Women's Presence in the Public Sphere".
- The Questionnaire was used with Oslo high schools pupils on a day focused on AIDS for *Operasjon dagsverk* in 2000 (a national day of school participation in issues of international concern).
- A workshop on Living for Tomorrow concerns with gender and sexual health was run for the Conflict Resolution and Management Centre, Oslo for training of trainers for crisis situation work internationally.
- Two young people from the project in Tallinn came to Oslo to take part in a Norwegian AIDS Association week-end seminar for representatives from youth organisations, and presented the Booklet and gave a workshop on Living for Tomorrow ideas.
- Experience from the project was fed into the writing of *HIV/AIDS and gender – an awareness-raising folder*, a booklet produced by the gender and HIV/AIDS group of AIDSNETT; a Norwegian network set up by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry (2001).
- Presentations on Living for Tomorrow ideas were given to the Norwegian AIDS Association/Red Cross *World AIDS Day seminar* and to the Statens Helseundersøkelser.

### Finland

- Sirle Blumberg from the NGO and Elisabeth Lorenzen from NIKK represented the project at a meeting in Helsinki on *HIV/AIDS in Baltic Sea Region* organised by the Finnish and US governments.
- Members of the project in Estonia have been in dialogue with initiatives at STAKES, Helsinki, on prostitution and trafficking.

### Denmark

- A Danish researcher and a youth sexual health project leader were involved in discussions and revisions of the Questionnaire.
- The project ideas were presented at Aarhus University, Denmark, in a conference on *Talking Gender and Sex*

## 4.3.3 Baltic/NW Russian networking

### Estonia

- The NGO helped the Women's Studies and Information Centre at Tallinn Pedagogical University in a Norwegian – Estonian *Gender Awareness Training project for teachers*
- Living for Tomorrow teenagers are now regularly active in Tallinn on World AIDS Day
- The project was presented to students of Psychology at Tartu University
- Tallinn Pedagogical University's Women's Studies & Information Centre held a public seminar on the project
- NGO has already undertaken a new series of workshops for youth from Tallinn schools; has run audience participation workshops in different towns in collaboration with performances of the Russian Theatre and has run Capacity Building with adults in Viljandi to establish a sister branch of the NGO based outside Tallinn.
- Russian and Estonian TV networks have reported on the NGO, and reports about the project have appeared in the Teachers Union magazine and daily papers.
- The NGO is working in full active co-operation with the Estonian AIDS Prevention Centre

### Russia

- Information about the project was discussed with the NW Russian and the St. Petersburg AIDS Centres, and gender researchers at The Institute for Independent Social Research
- Researchers from the Institute for Independent Social Research and St. Petersburg University (Kaliningrad branch) were involved in the Capacity Building and questionnaire development.
- Researchers at the Centre for Social Policy and Gender Studies at Saratov State Technical University translated articles about the project and circulated information about the Booklet

### Latvia

- Living for Tomorrow researchers/facilitators Jill Lewis and Stephen Clift were advisors in the development of a national Latvian campaign to involve men in reproductive and sexual health.
- NGO representatives took part in UNICEF Peer Education Baltic network trainings in Riga, Latvia
- The Education Director of the Latvian AIDS Prevention Centre in Riga and their Youth Against AIDS initiative were informed of the project, as were several gender and women's studies researchers at Riga University and institutes.

### Lithuania

- The project's work was a key resource in the development of the first gender-focused, sexual health education courses for students of education at Klaipeda University.
- The Questionnaire was piloted by researchers at Klaipeda University and the Lithuanian AIDS Prevention, Vilnius.
- Meetings on Living for Tomorrow were organised in Vilnius by Lithuanian AIDS Prevention with Vilnius University's Women's Studies Centre, and attended by members of Family Planning Association, Red Cross, NGOs, and the Health and Education Ministries.

## 4.3.4 European connections

### England

- The Questionnaire was piloted in schools in the Isle of Wight and in Canterbury, Kent

- The project was presented at an international conference in Cambridge on *Youth and Health in Transition* organised by Cambridge University and London School of Economics.

### The Balkans

- Croatia: a 3 day training seminar based on Living for Tomorrow was run for a Croatian NGO initiative on gender awareness in 1999. They became involved in the questionnaire revisions, and their research/action proposal to WHO *Adolescents and Reproductive Health Programme*, based on the questionnaire was later funded and is now underway.
- Seminars on gender and sexual health based on Living for Tomorrow strategies are contributing to the Nansenskolen/PRIO Balkan Dialogue Project. A 3-day seminar based on the project is being organised in Bosnia in 2002 by the Sarajevo Dialogue Centre for participants from Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia.

### Switzerland

- Two days of Living for Tomorrow workshops were held for all students and teachers at Riverside International School, Zug, Switzerland

## 4.3.5 Less formal networking

It is worth noting that the project established connections and exchanges of information with a wide range of gender studies and sexual health researchers and lecturers in universities, institutes and projects, as well as with sexual health educators linked to schools, youth projects and HIV/AIDS prevention work. Its work bridged these disparate areas and generated new sites of exchange. For example, Tallinn Pedagogical University's Women's Studies & Information Centre (ENUT) hosted a public seminar on Living for Tomorrow attended also by gender studies students. It later invited the Director of the Estonian AIDS Prevention Centre to give a talk there, and welcomed the young people to use its computers and table space for writing and editing the Booklet *Bridging the Gap between Us: Gender and sexual safety*. NGO members also became involved in seminars at this gender-focused Centre, and the Norwegian embassy hosted events involving gender equality activists and people from the

AIDS field. In Lithuania gender equality activists and researchers were brought into dialogue with people working in sexual health strategy and education around meetings generated by the project. In Croatia a gender-focused NGO became involved in HIV prevention – new on its agenda, after interactions with Living for Tomorrow. Similar new intersections of gender and HIV prevention interests occurred in many places throughout the duration of the project.

A concrete outcome of the project was the harnessing of energy of a new pool of young people to the uphill (and under-resourced) work of the Estonian AIDS Prevention Centre. Its Director claims this has made a significant difference to the HIV prevention awareness they can initiate and to the public profile of HIV prevention issues with young people in Estonia. She saw clear influence of the grapevine information circulating about Living for Tomorrow when she was elected as “the person in Estonia who had served the interests of youth best in 2000” by the youth-elected Youth Parliament that sits in the capital's Parliament Buildings at the end of each year. This was the first time that it was neither the President nor a Member of Parliament/politician who won this vote from the youth representatives.

The other “informal” fall-out of the project was the increase in conversations about gender and HIV/AIDS among networks of friends, family and schools of the young people involved – about which we received a wealth of informal feedback.

A crucial element of the project's work was also the impact it had on people personally, which can only be visualised through anecdote. At the end of the Youth Workshops a Russian schoolteacher phoned the Director of the AIDS Prevention Centre and asked what this strange project was doing to her girls. She laughed saying how impressed she was that they seemed so changed, walked and talked with more confidence and outgoing energy. Stories circulated among us of heated discussions - with a mother, a husband, a boyfriend over getting involved with HIV issues, or getting uppity about conventional gender roles, stories of insisting on changing gender roles (Marika taking photos of an institute director ironing the family clothes in Oslo, Poliina finally voicing her dislike of expectations to have dinner ready and fit in with her male partner's preferences). There were stories of

animated discussions with spouses or elder sisters late into the night, of talking through the booklet text with a father or mother with whom sexual safety had never been discussed before, of open, engaged discussions of homophobia with friends or brothers. All these and more criss-crossed the daily work of the project. New practices emerged out of the enthusiasms of collaboration – like hugging each other in greetings, holding a Christmas candlelit dinner together to celebrate the work together at the AIDS Centre, or visits by teenagers and colleagues alike to support an ill member of the NGO.

These and many other small key moments of insight and change cannot be under-estimated in their long-range effects on the HIV prevention work sense of empowerment, personal possibilities and capacities that crystallised throughout the project. A small but committed and growing network of people came into being with new strategies, capacities and competencies at their fingertips. Lived experience of new kinds of friendships and collaborative encounters in their lives (which had navigated differences, tensions, celebrations, exhaustion of effort) interwove with new personal alertness to gender and HIV concerns alive in their minds and actions.

## 5. Youth involvement in HIV prevention

Throughout its workings with the intersections of gender issues, sexual safety and HIV/AIDS prevention Living for Tomorrow stressed the crucial importance of the agency of young people in HIV prevention work. It integrated in its work invitations and opportunities for young people to take initiative: to interview friends and family, to comb the media for weekly items; to, design and make small video projects; to lead workshop sessions; to open up to less inhibited improvisation activities; to think about and discuss the ways they related to other people; to create a vocabulary/glossary in 3 languages, or plan, write and illustrate and help produce a booklet for other young people; to give their individual opinions and accounts of experience in interviews; to help plan and orchestrate public relations initiatives; to present the project's work publicly and internationally, – and to get actively involved in education processes with other young people. The gender nerve of the project's work galvanised many sparks that helped their interest take fire and engaged them in questions, arguments and new insights, not least on the terrain of sexual relations.

The project saw it as significant to anchor the discussions on gender and HIV/AIDS in possibilities that would concretise involvement and encourage responsibility and initiative. It was very important to give young people the sense that they were part of some important larger work affecting young people *everywhere*, having a sense that they were helping explore and develop new ideas which could go into further circulation. They took the project ideas – with nervousness and great responsibility – into discussions in Norway, Sweden, Britain, Finland, Latvia. They were not the objects of the project or a study – they were invited to be included in the making of its process and outcomes. Some of them commented in interviews at the end of the Youth Workshops that they had all been amazed to feel that they themselves were so central, and important within the project.

The feeling that taking on these issues enhanced their opportunities for further involvement and responsibility lent an important excitement to the work. The energy expended would be met by energising chances to experience new possibilities and to acquire exchange expertise where they, as young people, would be important conduits of discussion, information and motivation.

These perspectives, incorporated in the work, bore fruit for everyone involved. On the final evaluation day, among the important messages that others could benefit from about the project the participants listed *the importance of giving the initiative to young people*. They emphasised this in their own words, which are perhaps the most important words to end this summary of the Living for Tomorrow project:

*“This project gave us responsibility. And gave us possibilities. We young people were able to do things for themselves.”*

*“Everyone was necessary and useful. It was good not to feel alone.”*

*“We learned: expect that things **can** be done, and they **will** be done.”*

*“Living for Tomorrow created the possibility for people growing and changing”*

*“All young people should get a chance to work in this kind of project. After working with this project we are more open, not ashamed or shy to talk. That’s why everyone needs the possibility to work like this. Others around us have seen how we’ve been changed by it. We are different now. In discussions at school, we realise how much we’ve changed – in ways we think and speak and argue.”*

*“We got the feeling that how we think and what we do can make a difference. The issues that the project focused on really touched everyone. You feel you’ll make the world better by doing this work: that you can really make a difference.”*

## 6. Key elements of Living for Tomorrow: an HIV/AIDS era initiative

At heart of its sexual safety work a radical centring of questioning GENDER norms and traditions (when and if they lead to damaging consequences).

Active linking of gender-focused RESEARCH to resourcing the development of HIV/AIDS prevention EDUCATION action Sustained investment in using and helping people learn to use.

Inter-active participatory LEARNING METHODS drawing on educational strategy research High commitment to mobilising the participation and commitment of young people – with a vision that it is.

YOUNG PEOPLE’S AGENCY that will intervene most effectively in stemming the epidemic.

Commitment to a philosophy of INCLUSIVITY, collaboration across differences: whether those be ethnic/national/religious/age/race/sex (men and women) and sexual identities.

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**Notes:**



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