Box 3. HIV/AIDS and Disability

"The belief, that sex with an individual who is disabled can rid one of a sexually transmitted disease, is an old one. According to Smith, brothels in Victorian England were "stocked with intellectually disabled 'virgins' because it was believed that a syphilitic man could lose the infection by having sex with them."... Individuals with disability are presumably at risk both because they are, incorrectly, often assumed to be sexually inactive, hence virgins, and because they are easy targets. Even before the AIDS crisis, women and men with disability suffered an equal, or up to three times greater, risk of stranger or acquaintance rape as their non-disabled peers... Individuals with disability are also at increased risk of "virgin rape" because of a lack of legal protection. Police, lawyers, judges, and even rape-crisis councillors often have no knowledge of how to help citizens with a disability. Officials frequently dismiss individuals with disability who report rape, assuming them to be confused or victims of a misunderstanding. In many countries, people with disability are not allowed to submit police reports, take oaths, or give testimony in court... Because of these barriers, reporting of sexual abuse by individuals with disability is infrequent, and perpetrators can expect to go unpunished. Low rates of reporting not only have legal implications but can mean that potential antiretroviral prophylaxis is not made available to disabled men and women."

- Dr. Nora Groce (2004). *Rape of individuals with disability: AIDS and the folk belief of virgin cleansing*

FAMILY SUPPORTS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL: BUILDING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

All too often degradation, poverty and then violence seriously hamper the development and maintenance of viable social networks. Threat and violence hollow out communities as people become too afraid to participate in public spaces if not eradicate such networks completely. This transforms communities whose activities, relationships, and general investments in physical and social infrastructure dramatically decline, generally leaving all families in more difficult circumstances as they become increasingly detached from the networks they used to rely on to juggle competing priorities (such as care giving and employment).

Fostering a culture of conflict prevention entails investing in tangible services and programs such as education and health care as well as intangible qualities such as trust, understanding and solidarity among peoples of different ethnic, religious, socio-economic and other groups. Healthy and supportive communities are vital to preventing conflict because, when approached with an inclusive lens, they tend to create interdependent networks and links among family and community members; provide public space for community dialogue and action; and, offer informal opportunities to build trust and relationships among individuals and families. This is particularly important for families who have a member with a disability as well as any other family with particular care giving responsibilities (including families who care for a member with HIV/AIDS and aged parents). Social networks provide a lifeline for families and a safety net for people with disabilities choosing to live independently.