

# THE GIRL CHILD: NEW CHALLENGES



## BEIJING AT 10 : PUTTING POLICY INTO PRACTICE

## Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action



### Critical Area L. The Girl Child<sup>1</sup>

*States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or status.*

-Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 2, paragraph 2)

In many countries throughout the world, girls face discrimination from the very moment they are born, and in some cases girls become the victims of gender norms and stereotypes while still in the womb. Harmful practices such as female infanticide and prenatal sex selection are eliminating girls from the world at the earliest possible stages, perpetuating son preference and discrimination against girls within the family, schools, and society as a whole. Other practices such as early marriage, including child marriage, violence against women, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation and general discrimination against girls in food allocation and other practices related to health and well-being mean that girls face disproportionate challenges to their individual and social development.

One of the key questions to be answered with regard to this Critical Area is exactly how to define "the girl child" within the context of significant cultural discrepancies and considerable controversy. The cautious definition provided by the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) reflects this controversy: "For the purposes of the present convention a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier". By ceding to national law, the CRC leaves the definition of childhood to the discretion of individual States parties, thus failing to set an international standard for fighting discrimination against children, "early" marriage, child abuse, child labour, and other violations of the rights of young people. Moreover, the CRC does not differentiate between the rights of the "child" and those of the "adolescent;" two very distinct groups who face different issues and challenges that require significantly different responses. For the purposes of this review, "the girl child" will be divided into children and adolescents (meaning girls of reproductive age) in order to better address the distinct problems that each group faces.

<sup>1</sup> Prepared for INSTRAW by Sybille Koenig

The issue of the girl-child has been controversial because it is difficult to strike a balance between the rights of the child and the rights of the parent(s) that allows for the protection of the human rights of children, for the desire of the parents to raise their children with specific cultural, religious or social beliefs and norms, and for the ability of the parents to raise children in conditions of economic and social deprivation, exclusion or exile.

Recognizing the need to protect children in a non-discriminatory way and regardless of their sex, many human rights instruments implicitly, if not explicitly, address the rights of the girl-child. Among these are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>2</sup> (UDHR, 1949); the Convention Against Discrimination in Education<sup>3</sup> (CADE, 1960), the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages<sup>4</sup> (CCM, 1962), the Minimum Age Convention<sup>5</sup> (MAC, 1973); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women<sup>6</sup> (CEDAW, 1979); the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict<sup>7</sup> (DPWCEAC, 1974); the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>8</sup> (CRC, 1989); the Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights<sup>9</sup> (Vienna PoA, 1993); the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women<sup>10</sup> (DEVAW, 1994); the Declaration and Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development<sup>11</sup> (Cairo PoA, 1994); the Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women<sup>12</sup> (Beijing PfA, 1995); the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention<sup>13</sup> (1999); Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security<sup>14</sup> (2000); the Millennium Development Goals<sup>15</sup> (MDGs, 2000); and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children,<sup>16</sup> supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2003).

Few conventions or declarations address the girl-child as a separate issue from "children" as a whole, obscuring the fact that children face distinct obstacles to their development, threats to their health, and discrimination simply because of their sex. The failure of many states to adequately address childhood particularly affects the rights and the well-being of girls; for instance, more than 10 million girls aged fifteen to nineteen give birth each year;<sup>17</sup> it is estimated that between 100 and 130 million girls and women in at least twenty-eight African countries have undergone female genital mutilation<sup>18</sup> (FGM); and over 10 million young people (aged 15-24) are living with HIV/AIDS.<sup>19</sup>

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PfA) was among the first documents to specifically and comprehensively address the rights of the girl child. The partial existence of a legal and policy framework establishing the rights of the girl-child, and the global and national efforts made to promote and protect those rights constitute a good beginning. As with many of the other Critical Areas in the Beijing PfA however, much remains to be done

<sup>2</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights <http://www.unhcr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Convention Against Discrimination in Education [http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/d\\_c\\_educ.htm](http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/d_c_educ.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/convention.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Minimum Age Convention <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/ageconvention.htm>

<sup>6</sup> CEDAW <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/e1cedaw.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/protectionwomen.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Vienna PoA <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu5/wchr.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/eliminationvaw.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Cairo PoA [http://www.unfpa.org/icpd/icpd\\_poa.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/icpd/icpd_poa.htm)

<sup>12</sup> Beijing PfA <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/index.html>

<sup>13</sup> Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/childlabour.htm>

<sup>14</sup> SC Resolution 1325 [http://www.un.org/events/res\\_1325e.pdf](http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Millennium Development Goals <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

<sup>16</sup> Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instrree/trafficking.html>

<sup>17</sup> Fertility and Contraceptive Use, UNICEF Statistics, 2005 <http://www.childinfo.org/eddb/fertility/index.htm>

<sup>18</sup> Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, UNICEF Statistics, 2005. <http://www.childinfo.org/eddb/fmc/index.htm>

<sup>19</sup> HIV/AIDS, UNICEF Statistics 2005 [http://www.childinfo.org/eddb/hiv\\_aids/young.htm](http://www.childinfo.org/eddb/hiv_aids/young.htm)

in terms of implementing the “actions to be taken,” which were intended to ensure that girls are raised in an environment of equality and tolerance, free from the discrimination that currently hinders their physical, educational, social, economic and political development

## Strategic Objective L.1

### **“Eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child”**

Actions to be taken by governments, international and non-governmental organizations and other actors include to: take urgent measures towards signing and ratifying the Convention on the Right of the Child; eliminate the injustice and obstacles in relation to inheritance faced by the girl child; enact and strictly enforce laws to ensure that marriage is only entered into with the free and full consent of the intending spouses; enact and strictly enforce laws concerning the minimum legal age of consent and the minimum age for marriage; generate social support for the enforcement of laws on the minimum legal age for marriage, in particular by providing educational opportunities for girls.

Gender roles are a learned attribute – not a biological inheritance. By age five, most girls and boys have already internalized the gender role expectations communicated to them by their families, schools, the media and society as a whole, and these norms will influence their behaviour and their development for the rest of their lives. Most societies have implicit definitions of masculinity and femininity, or gender stereotypes, which they use to differentiate girls and boys, both in the way they are treated and the way they are expected to behave. While a number of national and international legal norms protect the rights of the girl child in theory; in practice cultural and social beliefs about gender and the value of girls and boys have been much more difficult to overcome.

Discrimination against girls is often practiced first within the family, and either reinforced or challenged by girls’ experiences at school and within their communities, and by the growing influence of the media in children’s lives. Discrimination itself can take many forms: allocating less, or less nutritious food to girls; sending only boys to school or allowing them to stay in school for longer; visiting health services only when boys are sick, etc. Other more subtle forms of discrimination include the encouragement of boys over girls in terms of their ambitions and their studies or the differential treatment of boys and girls with respect to behaviour expectations. Discrimination against girls is often exacerbated in families or households with scarce resources, where choices must be made about which children will be fed, sent to school, or taken to the doctor.

Television and other media are playing an increasing role in children's development, which can be either a challenge or an opportunity for the creation of alternative gender norms and roles.<sup>20</sup> Mainstream media continue to communicate images of men in leadership and aggressive roles using violence to establish their authority, which are complimented by images of women in traditional domestic, submissive and sexualized roles. A growing trend, particularly in North American media is to present women in the aggressive or violent roles traditionally played by men, while preserving the aspect of sexualization. While these new images do challenge traditional female gender stereotypes, they also perpetuate the use of force as a method of resolving conflict and do not challenge the hegemony of violent masculinity; insisting instead that girls conform to it.

<sup>20</sup> For more information on women and the media, download INSTRAW's *Progress Report on Critical Area J. Women and the Media* <http://www.un-instraw.org>



The family, schools, communities and the media and other information conduits can also play a positive role in changing conceptions about gender roles and overcoming negative stereotypes. Strategies for Hope has developed the *Stepping Stones Training Package on HIV/AIDS, Gender Issues, Communication and Relationship Skills*,<sup>21</sup> which aims to bring young people together in discussion and workshop groups in order to question traditional gender roles and behaviour and how they affect the spread of HIV/AIDS, and promote the development of alternative gender roles based on mutual respect for human rights and communication.

#### Areas for Future Action:

- Based on existing successful experiences, develop more materials and methodologies for addressing gender roles in various settings (schools, youth centres, discussion groups, etc.) in order to promote positive change in attitudes and behaviour;
- Target the media, as an increasingly influential actor, for gender sensitization training and for innovative ways to convey alternative gender roles and models of masculinity and femininity;

## Strategic Objective L.2

### “Eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls”

Actions to be taken by governments, international and non-governmental organizations and other actors include to: encourage and support efforts to promote changes in negative attitudes and practices towards girls; take steps so that tradition and religion and their expressions are not a basis for discrimination against girls; set up educational programmes and develop teaching materials and textbooks that will sensitize and inform adults about the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices on girl children.

*States Parties shall prohibit and condemn all forms of harmful practices which negatively affect the human rights of women and which are contrary to recognised international standards. States Parties shall take all necessary legislative and other measures to eliminate such practices, including:... b) prohibition, through legislative measures backed by sanctions, of all forms of female genital mutilation, scarification, medicalisation and para-medicalisation of female genital mutilation and all other practices in order to eradicate them;*

- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights  
 Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (article 5)

In 2001 the UN General Assembly approved a resolution<sup>22</sup> that called on States to “...develop, adopt and implement national legislation, policies, plans and programmes that prohibit traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation, and to prosecute the perpetrators of such practices;” According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), between 100 million and 140 million women worldwide have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM), and two million girls are at risk each year.<sup>23</sup> Though the age at which FGM is performed varies from area to area, WHO confirms that most of the victims are female infants, children and adolescents. An estimated eight thousand young girls in Europe born to immigrant African families have been

<sup>21</sup> Stepping Stones: Training package on HIV/AIDS, gender issues, communication and relationship skills. Strategies for Hope, 2003.

<http://www.stratshope.org/t-training.htm>

<sup>22</sup> A/RES/56/128 <http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguide/r56.htm>

<sup>23</sup> “Fact Sheet: Female Genital Mutilation.” World Health Organization, 2000. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

subjected to genital mutilation, though no official data exists on the practice of FGM by immigrants.<sup>24</sup>

Since the Beijing PfA was adopted, thirteen African countries have passed legislation banning or outlawing the practice of FGM. In September 2001 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on FGM, calling on Member States of the European Union to pursue, protect and punish any resident who has committed the crime of FGM. The Economic Commission for Africa and the Inter-African Committee hosted the International Conference on "Zero Tolerance to FGM" in 2003, which adopted a common agenda for action and declared 6 February the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation.<sup>25</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women<sup>26</sup> has included FGM as a form of violence against women in her reports to the Commission on Human Rights.

In Ghana, FGM was outlawed in 1994 but it is still widely practiced in north of the country, along the borders with Burkina Faso. The Ghana Association for Women's Welfare (GAWW) has been waging a twenty-year community education campaign against FGM – using the key messages that FGM has nothing to do with Islam, that it is a punishable criminal offence, and that it is an unnecessary practice that puts women's health at risk. GAWW has successfully worked with Islamic leaders, teachers, the police, traditional chiefs and politicians to spread these messages through brochures, question and answer books, and education programmes.<sup>27</sup>

Experts assert that a decade of communication on the health risks of FGM has only resulted in a slight drop in figures. The Programme for Appropriate Technologies in Health (PATH) has developed, in collaboration with the Kenyan women's NGO Maendeleoya Wanawake, alternative rites of passage for girls that preserve some of the traditional aspects of the transition to womanhood – seclusion, family life education, celebration, and gift-giving – while excluding the genital mutilation itself. By 1998, more than 1,100 girls had undergone these alternative rites of passage, and none of them has yielded to societal pressure to undergo FGM.<sup>28</sup>

"Honour killings," the murder of girls and women by male family-members or community leaders in the name of honour, are ritualistically practiced in Egypt, India, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Turkey, Yemen, and other Mediterranean and Gulf countries, and also occur within immigrant communities in several countries, including Germany, France and the United Kingdom.<sup>29</sup> However "honour" is used as a defence for the murder of women throughout the world, including in Brazil where men who murder their allegedly adulterous wives are often acquitted by juries. The reasons behind honour killings vary, but can include the perception of "shameful conduct" (adultery, flirting), rape (which "dishonours" the family of the victim), bringing food late, answering back, or undertaking forbidden family visits. Honour killings are often considered a rite of passage for young men, and are responsible for the deaths of thousands of girls and women every year, though accurate data on the practice do not exist.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> "Genital Mutilation 'On the Increase in Europe.'" *The Scotsman* Nov 26, 2004, <http://www.libertypost.org/cgi-bin/readart.cgi?ArtNum=76761>

<sup>25</sup> "African First Ladies proclaim ZERO TOLERANCE to FGM." Inter-African Committee, 2004.

[http://www.iac-ciaf.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=18&Itemid=44](http://www.iac-ciaf.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=18&Itemid=44)

<sup>26</sup> *Cultural practices in the family that are violent towards women*. Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (E/CN.4/2002/83). New York: United Nations ECOSOC, 2002. <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/7/b/women/documents.htm>

<sup>27</sup> "Real Stories: A global front against genital cutting." Countdown 2015, 2004. <http://www.countdown2015.org/ContentController.aspx?ID=4184>

<sup>28</sup> "Female Genital Mutilation." Washington DC: PATH, 2005. [http://www.path.org/programs/p-chi/female\\_genital\\_mutilation.htm](http://www.path.org/programs/p-chi/female_genital_mutilation.htm)

<sup>29</sup> ECOSOC, 2002. <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/7/b/women/documents.htm>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

The Devadasi system in India involves the pledging of young girls to serve as temple prostitutes in exchange for economic compensation or to appease gods and goddesses. Devadasi girls' health is endangered by frequent pregnancies, abortions and deliveries, as well as reproductive tract and sexually transmitted infections.<sup>31</sup> Similar systems exist in Benin, Nepal, Nigeria, Togo and Ghana, where girls are sold as slaves to gods for a variety of reasons.

Early or child marriages are a common phenomenon in many parts of the world, with girls as young as ten married off in order to ensure their virginity, maximize their child-bearing years, for economic gain, or to ensure the girl's own financial and social security.<sup>32</sup> Child marriages are also often forced marriages, conducted without the consent and even without the understanding of the girl being married in order to preserve family ties or religious and cultural traditions or control female behaviour. An Indian NGO, Myrada, brought children's groups together in order to negotiate with the parents of several girls that were about to be married, and the groups were successful in convincing the parents to delay marrying their daughters.<sup>33</sup>

Accurate data on the number of child and forced marriages conducted every year are not available as so many marriages are unofficial or not registered. Girls who marry young face a variety of obstacles to their development and risks to their health, including leaving school at a young age and early or frequent child-bearing. The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages<sup>34</sup> (1962) commits States Parties' to specifying a minimum age for marriage, and ensuring that marriage is entered into with the "full and free consent" of both parties. The Convention however does not specify what the minimum age should be, nor does it define full and free consent, making it of little use in protecting girls against child or forced marriages. The Convention on the Rights of the Child does not address the issue of child or forced marriage even though it constitutes a significant threat to girls' education and social development.

#### Areas for Future Action:

- Based on successful experiences, replicate existing initiatives to address and eliminate FGM, as well as other harmful traditional practices, taking into account local cultural traditions and beliefs and involving influential local actors;
- Focus on education and skills-development for young girls in areas where child marriage is common, and encourage parents to invest dowry money in girls' development

## Strategic Objective L.3

### **"Promote and protect the rights of the girl child and increase awareness of her needs and potential"**

Actions to be taken by governments, international and non-governmental organizations and other actors include to: generate awareness of the disadvantaged situation of girls among policy makers, planners, administrators and implementers at all levels, as well as within households and communities; make the girl child aware of her own potential, educate her about the rights guaranteed to her under all international human rights instruments; educate women, men, girls

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> "Fact Sheet: Early Marriage." New York: UNICEF, 2005. <http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/earlymarriage.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> *The State of the World's Children*. New York: UNICEF, 2003. [http://www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_4810.html](http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_4810.html)

<sup>34</sup> Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/convention.htm>

and boys to promote girls' status and encourage them to work towards mutual respect and equal partnership between girls and boys.

The year 2004 concluded the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education and according to Human Rights Education Associates (HREA) a great impact was made during the decade, with more human rights learning materials available for classrooms and other, non-traditional settings.<sup>35</sup> Human rights education is fundamental to girls' own ability to understand and exercise their human rights; yet globally a lack of public education campaigns and an inadequate dissemination of information mean that many girls, as well as their families, are unaware of their rights. HREA manages several projects designed to mainstream human rights education into classroom settings, including: the Democratic and Human Rights Education for Croatian Schools project, which supports trainings and materials development for primary and secondary schools in Croatia; and the Human rights in China project, which supports the development of a children's rights training manual.<sup>36</sup>

Human rights education in schools is ineffective however unless it is complemented by human rights education campaigns that target parents, community leaders, national decision-makers, health workers, law-enforcement officials and others who are instrumental in protecting the human rights of girls. In general, societies value girls less than boys, so effective human rights education focuses on the social and economic contributions that girls are capable of making when they are given the same opportunities as boys. Targeted human rights education also sensitizes police and other law-enforcement officials, doctors and traditional health workers, community leaders and the general public to the violations of girls' human rights posed by FGM and honour killings, violence against girls, forced and child marriages, and the sale of girls into sexual or economic slavery.

Largely as a result of the Millennium Development Goals, specifically goal #3, most countries now disaggregate their data on the education of children by sex, providing a clearer picture of the gender differences in school enrollment. Effective human rights education must be supported by reliable, timely and accurate data and information on the situation of the girl child, including statistics on health, education, marriage, violence and other issues, as well as specific indicators of girls' educational achievement relative to boys, girls' labour force participation relative to boys, and the burden of girls' domestic responsibilities, among others.

In addition to disaggregating data by sex, data disaggregated by age are also crucial to forming an accurate picture of the situation of girls, especially in the case of sexual and reproductive health data. Data are generally collected on "women of reproductive age" which encompasses both girls and women aged fifteen to forty-nine. This somewhat arbitrary division ignores the fact the girls younger than fifteen can also be of reproductive age, and indeed pregnancy often occurs in thirteen and fourteen-year old girls. Moreover, by classifying girls aged fifteen to eighteen as "women" of reproductive age, this division obscures the impact of adolescent pregnancy on these girls' personal development.

#### Areas for Future Action:

- Based on successful experiences, replicate existing human rights education curricula and materials in schools and other non-formal settings in order to raise human rights awareness among girls and boys;

<sup>35</sup> "Concluding the Decade for Human Rights Education." HREA Press Release December 10th 2004.  
<http://distancelearning.hrea.org/pubs/newsletter/december2004.html>

<sup>36</sup> Human Rights Education Associates <http://www.hrea.org/curriculum-projects.html>



- Continue efforts to develop human rights education campaigns that focus on conveying specific messages, such as the dangers of FGM or the benefits of schooling for girls, to target audiences, such as parents, teachers or community leaders;
- Encourage national statistical offices to disaggregate data collected on children by both sex and age in order to develop a clearer picture of the situation of boys and girls in terms of health, education and other development issues, particularly in the case of sexual and reproductive health data.

## Strategic Objective L.4

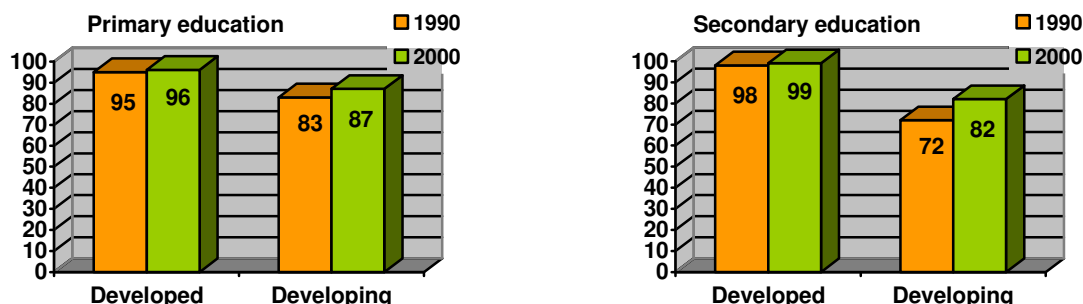
### **"Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training"**

Actions to be taken by governments, international and non-governmental organizations and other actors include to: ensure universal and equal access to and completion of primary education by all children and eliminate the existing gap between girls and boys; ensure equal access to secondary education by the year 2005 and equal access to higher education, including vocational and technical education, for all girls and boys; increase enrolment and improve retention rates of girls by allocating appropriate budgetary resources and by enlisting the support of the community and parents through campaigns and flexible school schedules, incentives, scholarships, access programmes for out-of-school girls and other measures; develop training programmes and materials for teachers and educators, raising awareness about their own role in the educational process, with a view to providing them with effective strategies for gender-sensitive teaching.

*...there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls*  
- UN Secretary General Kofi Annan<sup>37</sup>

"Girls' education is more than just reading and writing and the skills you need to get by in life; it's about public health," says Edmond McLoughney, representative in Turkey for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Numerous studies have shown that educating girls lowers birthrates and maternal and child mortality. "You are affecting not just education itself, but health and quality of life in general. Of course, education is also a basic human right."<sup>38</sup>

**Figure 1 – Gender disparity in school enrollment** (number of girls per 100 boys)<sup>39</sup>



<sup>37</sup> State of the World's Children 2004: Girls, Education and Development. New York: UNICEF, 2004. [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Eng\\_text.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Eng_text.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> "Advocacy campaign for Girls' Education." Say Yes, Autumn 2003. New York: UNICEF, 2003(a).

[http://www.unicef.org/turkey/untr/sy8/sy8\\_nv.html?ge26a.html&1](http://www.unicef.org/turkey/untr/sy8/sy8_nv.html?ge26a.html&1)

<sup>39</sup> How are we doing? Implementing the Millennium Declaration. Geneva: United Nations, 2005. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/MDG-Page3.pdf>

Although the number of educated children has grown over the past twenty years, boys have proportionately fared much better than girls. In 1990, 130 million children had no access to primary school, and 81 million of these (or sixty-two percent) were girls. The percentage of girls enrolled in secondary school remains significantly low in many countries. In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals committed UN Member States to Promoting Gender Equality and eliminating "gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015." Five years later, many countries have already achieved gender parity in primary-level education, and most are within reach of achieving the goal. Most countries have made less progress in achieving gender parity in secondary school education, or in achieving parity in literacy between girls and boys.<sup>40</sup>

In collaboration with the Turkish government, UNICEF is implementing a program called *Haydi Kizlar Okula!* (*Come on girls, let's go to school!*) that aims to eliminate gender disparity in school enrollment by 2005. The project - launched during 2003 in ten mostly rural and economically troubled provinces of the southeast - was expanded during 2004 into another twenty-three provinces, including urban areas such as Istanbul, Izmir and the capital. Teachers and volunteers from villages were trained by UNICEF to go door-to-door speaking with families to convince them of the personal, social and economic benefits of sending their girls to school. As a result, 40,000 girls started their education last year, according to UNICEF, which hopes to see that number rise to 300,000 during 2005.<sup>41</sup>

Parity in the numbers of girls and boys attending school is, however, only the first step on the road to ensuring **gender equality in education**, which also requires an examination of boys and girls' distinct experiences and attainment within the school system. Ensuring that girls are treated equally by instructors and other school staff, that school curricula and educational materials promote positive gender role change and respect for human rights, that girls are safe at school and traveling to and from school, and that male and female students are given the same opportunities for academic achievement and extra-curricular activities are all fundamental components of gender equality in education that cannot be measured through enrollment rates. In addition, efforts to promote children's participation in school must take into account the different pressures and demands that both male and female students face outside school in terms of paid employment of domestic work.<sup>42</sup>

In Burkina Faso, a network of 229 "satellite schools" has allowed over 100,000 girls and boys to complete the first three grades of primary school in or near their own villages, eliminating travel time that would otherwise impede their going to school.<sup>43</sup> Through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme in India, the State of Kerala conducted a study of 168 schools in order to develop a gender-sensitive teacher-training module, which was then administered to almost 28,000 teachers with an eye to creating girl-friendly classrooms.<sup>44</sup>

#### Areas for Future Action:

- Based on successful experiences, work with families and communities to highlight social, economic, health and other benefits of educating girls and delaying marriage;
- Develop information and education campaigns that highlight girls' skills and abilities, and that show girls in non-traditional and empowering roles;

<sup>40</sup> Millennium Development Goals: Progress Report. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and Department of Public Information, 2004. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/mdg2004chart.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> UNICEF, 2003(a)

<sup>42</sup> For more information on girls' education, download the *INSTRAW Progress Report on Critical Area B. Education and Training of Women* <http://www.instraw.org>

<sup>43</sup> UNICEF, 2004

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

- Replicate successful programmes that aim to increase the gender-sensitivity of classroom environments, school policies, teachers and curricula, as well as ensure girls' safety both at school and on the journey to and from school.

## Strategic Objective L.5

### "Eliminate discrimination against girls in health and nutrition"

Actions to be taken by governments, international and non-governmental organizations and other actors include to: provide public information on the removal of discriminatory practices against girls in food allocation, nutrition and access to health services; raise awareness of the health dangers and other problems connected with early pregnancies; design quality health programmes that meet the physical and mental needs of girls; establish peer education and outreach programmes to reduce the vulnerability of girls to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; ensure education and dissemination of information to girls, especially adolescent girls, regarding the physiology of reproduction, reproductive and sexual health; emphasize the role and responsibility of adolescents in sexual and reproductive health and behaviour through the provision of appropriate services and counselling.

*Discrimination against the girl child in her access to nutrition and physical and mental health services endangers her current and future health. An estimated 450 million adult women in developing countries are stunted as a result of childhood protein-energy malnutrition.*  
 -Beijing PfA (paragraph 266)

Numerous agreements, including the MDGs address the issue of child malnutrition, though without specifically emphasizing the link between social discrimination against girls and women and malnutrition among girls. In general, data on nutrition and other aspects of health for children is not disaggregated by sex, making it difficult to form a clear picture of the extent to which girls suffer more from malnutrition and related health complications than boys. While both boys and girls suffer from malnutrition as a result of poverty, higher malnutrition in girls can be a result of differential food allocation within households that favours boys.<sup>45</sup>

**Table 1 – Child malnutrition**

	Infants with low birth-weight (1998-2003)	Under-fives suffering from underweight (1995-2003)	Under-fives suffering from wasting (1995-2003)
Central/Eastern Europe, CIS	9%	6%	4%
East Asia & Pacific	8	17	3
Latin America & Caribbean	10	7	2
Middle East and N.Africa	15	14	6
South Asia	30	46	15
Sub-Saharan Africa	14	29	9
World	16	27	8

Source: State of the World's Children 2005 New York: UNICEF, 2005.  
<http://www.unicef.org/sowc05/english/statistics.html>

The same is often true of boys and girls' access to health services – scarce household resources will be spent to take boys to health service facilities but will not be spent on girls,<sup>46</sup> but once again a clear picture of this situation is not available due to lack of data, and lack of sex-disaggregated data.

<sup>45</sup> *Women of South-East Asia: A Health Profile*. New Delhi: World health Organization, 2000. <http://209.61.208.100/women2/Default.htm>

<sup>46</sup> DeRose, L. et al. *Who's hungry? And how do we know? Food shortage, poverty, and deprivation*. Geneva: United Nations University Press, 1998. <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu22we/uu22we00.htm#Contents>

**Table 2 - Global Adolescent Fertility**

	Annual number of births to girls aged 15-19 (millions) 2000-2005	Annual births per 1000 girls aged 15-19 2000-2005
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.3	127
East & Southern Africa	1.9	111
West & Central Africa	2.4	143
Middle East & North Africa	0.7	39
South Asia	3.7	56
East Asia & the Pacific	1.4	18
Latin America & Caribbean	1.8	71
CEE/CIS & Baltic States	0.7	35
World	13.4	50

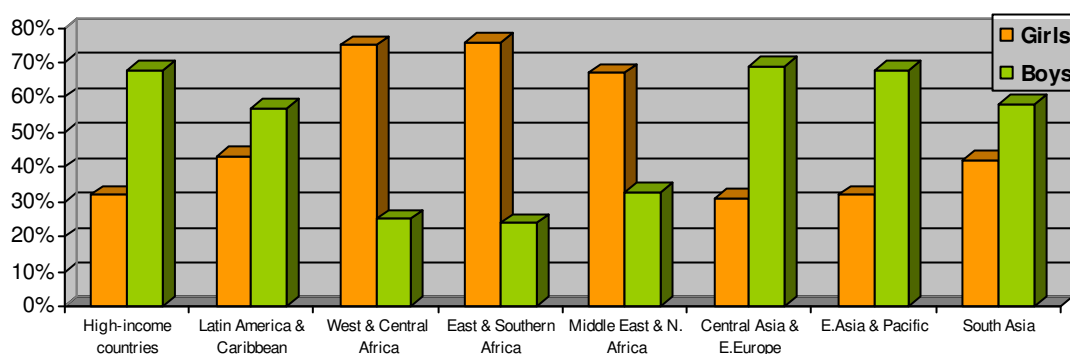
Source: UNICEF <http://www.childinfo.org/eddb/fertility/index.htm>

Early motherhood can entail complications during pregnancy and delivery and a risk of maternal death that is much greater than average; it increases a woman's risk of falling into poverty, limits her ability to find and keep stable employment, often prevents her from completing or continuing her education, and can raise a multiplicity of other social and economic problems. The children of young mothers have higher levels of morbidity and mortality. Overall, early marriage and early motherhood can severely curtail educational and employment opportunities for young mothers and are likely to have a long-term adverse impact on both their and their children's quality of life.<sup>47</sup>

Data from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization (WHO) show that at the end of 2004 there were an estimated 2.2 million

children under 15 years of age who were living with HIV, many of whom were infected with HIV at birth. Though there are drugs that can reduce the chances of a child becoming infected with HIV during pregnancy or delivery from about forty percent to about two percent, these drugs are unavailable in many parts of the world where the need for them is greatest.<sup>48</sup> HIV can also be passed from mother to child through breast-milk, but campaigns to encourage mothers to switch to breast-milk substitutes have been largely unsuccessful because i) breast-milk substitutes do not provide the same antibodies against other childhood infections; ii) breast-milk substitutes made with unclean water may actually increase a child's exposure to certain diseases; and iii) in many communities a mother using breast-milk substitutes is immediately identified as being HIV-positive. WHO recently published *Guidelines on Care, Treatment and Support for Women Living with HIV/AIDS and their Children in Resource-Constrained Settings* whose aim is to assist health workers in addressing HIV-infection with pregnant women and minimizing the transmission of the virus to their children in areas where access to drugs and other resources is limited.<sup>49</sup>

**Figure 2 - Young people (15-24) living with HIV/AIDS (2003)**



<sup>47</sup> "Meeting the Needs of Young Adults" *Population Reports*, Series J (No. 41). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Centre for Communications Programs, 1995. <http://www.infoforhealth.org/pr/41edsum.shtml>

<sup>48</sup> *Guidelines on Care, Treatment and Support for Women Living with HIV/AIDS and their Children in Resource-Constrained Settings*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2004. <http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/mtct/guidelines/en/>

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

According to UNAIDS and WHO, young people (15-24 years old) accounted for half of all new HIV infections worldwide in 2003, and more than 6,000 of them became infected with HIV every day.<sup>50</sup> "Of particular concern are the dramatic increases in HIV infection among young women," says a report from the United Nations Population Fund<sup>51</sup> (UNFPA). "Globally, women make up for 60% of the 15-24 year olds who are HIV positive" (see Figure 2<sup>52</sup> for a regional breakdown of HIV-infection among young people).

Girls are often unable to choose their sexual partners or spouses, or control the sexual behaviour of their partners, meaning that they are unknowingly or unwillingly exposed to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Early marriage does not protect girls from HIV infection; recent studies in India, for instance, show that more than ninety percent of women infected with HIV are married and monogamous.<sup>53</sup> In certain countries, the spread of HIV/AIDS is strongly related to rape being used as a weapon of war in conflict situations. In Rwanda a study conducted in 2000 by AVEGA revealed that 66.7 percent of 1125 surveyed rape survivors were HIV-positive.<sup>54</sup>

In Nicaragua, UNFPA has supported the Ministry of Health in establishing the only youth-centred clinic in the country, which offers reproductive health services exclusively to young people. The programme emphasizes information, education and communications services, reaching youth in rural populations through Mobile clinics and theatre groups.<sup>55</sup> According to recent data from the Dominican Republic, however, HIV education programmes for girls are not sufficient. The majority of young Dominican girls possess comprehensive knowledge about HIV and AIDS,<sup>56</sup> but "for young Dominicans, sexuality is ultimately related to living on a Caribbean Island where close to 60 Percent of all HIV-AIDS infected are adolescents" - according Jeannette Tineo of Family Care International.<sup>57</sup> This highlights the importance of combining information and education about HIV with programmes that examine gender and sexual roles and behaviour in order to empower young women to negotiate sexual relations and insist on condom use without fear of abuse or rejection.

#### Areas for Future Action:

- With parents and community leaders, develop campaigns that promote the importance of child nutrition and access to health services for girls as well as boys;
- Replicate successful programmes that allow young mothers, whether married or unmarried, to continue their education;
- Develop information and education programmes that not only provide young people with comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, but that encourage discussion and re-thinking of gender and sexual roles and behaviour.

## Strategic Objective L.6

### "Eliminate the economic exploitation of child labour and protect young girls at work"

<sup>50</sup> 2004 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic. Geneva: UNAIDS, 2004(b). <http://www.unaids.org/en/default.asp>

<sup>51</sup> Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis. New York: UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNIFEM, 2004. <http://www.unfpa.org/hiv/women/report/chapter1.html>

<sup>52</sup> Data compiled from: "Young people and HIV/AIDS." UNICEF Statistics, 2005. [http://www.childinfo.org/eddb/hiv\\_aids/young.htm](http://www.childinfo.org/eddb/hiv_aids/young.htm)

<sup>53</sup> Gangakhedkar, R. "Spread of HIV infection in married monogamous women in India." *Journal of the American medical Association* 278(23) 1997.

<sup>54</sup> Rwanda Association of Genocide Widows <http://www.avega.org.rw/englishhome.htm>

<sup>55</sup> Working to Empower Women: UNFPA's Experience in Implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. New York: United Nations Population Fund, 2004. <http://www.unfpa.org/intercenter/beijing/girl.htm>

<sup>56</sup> Tineo, J. "Mirandonos como juvenes en tiempos del VIH/SIDA" *A primera plana* 3(12), 2004.

<http://www.aprimeraplana.org/www/No.12/paginas/tiemposdesida.htm>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



Actions to be taken by governments, international and non-governmental organizations and other actors include to: protect children from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development; define a minimum age for a child's admission to employment in national legislation; protect young girls at work.

*The training was very difficult. They don't care if it's a rainy or sunny day. If you get too tired and can't continue, they will beat you. Once when I first joined, I was dizzy. I couldn't continue and asked for a rest. They said, "This is the LTTE. You have to face problems. You can't take a rest." They hit me four or five times with their hands.*

— Selvamani, 15-year old girl recruited by the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka<sup>58</sup>

In conformity with article thirty-two of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, many States have already defined a minimum age for a child's admission to employment. However, progress has been much slower in terms of enforcing that minimum age, and protecting children from economic exploitation or from performing work that is hazardous, harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development or that interferes with the child's education. The ILO Minimum Age Convention,<sup>59</sup> further urges states to take action against the "worst forms of child labour" including slavery, trafficking, bonded labour, forced recruitment into armed conflict, prostitution, pornography or illegal activities such as the sale and trafficking of drugs.

Very little reliable data exist on child labour, though it remains a prevalent practice in many countries, exacerbated by the rapid growth of the export-processing industry throughout the developing world, which targets children, in particular girls, in its constant search for docile and uncomplaining workers. In India, reliable estimates from Human Rights Watch put the number of children working at between 60 to 150 million despite the existence of an extensive legal framework prohibiting certain forms of child labour and protecting the rights of child workers.<sup>60</sup> Human Rights Watch has also documented forced labor in Kuwait, Brazil, Thailand, and the Dominican Republic.<sup>61</sup>

**Table 3 - Girls in Child Labour (millions)**

Trafficked	1.2
Debt bondage or other forms of slavery	5.7
Prostitution or pornography	1.8
Armed conflict	0.3
Other illicit activities	0.6

Source: UNICEF Statistics, 2005

[http://www.unicef.org/protection/index\\_childlabour.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_childlabour.html)

An estimated 246 million children throughout the world are engaged in child labour, with approximately seventy percent of them engaged in agricultural labour.<sup>62</sup> Young girls perform a variety of labour, including agricultural, textile, factory, informal and domestic labour, sex-work and unpaid household and care-giving duties. They are often withdrawn from school by their parents to begin working in order to supplement family income,

which limits their future possibilities. In many countries in the world and usually for economic reasons, girls are sold into bonded labour, sexual slavery or to traffickers in order to pay off debts, provide a dowry for another child, pay hospital fees, or supplement household income.

Child labour increases profits, thus it has been one of the most intractable disputes between human rights advocates, States and the private sector. Efforts to eliminate child labour,

<sup>58</sup> *Living in Fear: Child Soldiers and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004

<http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2004/11/10/slanka9653.htm>

<sup>59</sup> *ILO Minimum Age Convention*, 1973. <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C138>

<sup>60</sup> *The Small Hands of Slavery: Bonded Child Labour in India*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1998. <http://hrw.org/reports/1996/India3.htm>

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Child Labour, UNICEF Statistics, 2005. [http://www.unicef.org/protection/index\\_childlabour.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_childlabour.html)

improve working conditions, or protect the rights of child workers have been largely unsuccessful as a result of apathy, obstruction, corruption and a general lack of real and effective implementation and enforcement of the legal and policy framework that applies to child labour. Successful alternatives to the child labour system include free universal education for all children, non-formal and flexible education systems for children that are already working, and income-generating opportunities for the families of working children. The International Labour Organization's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) has supported the CEASE project in Andhra Pradesh, India, which mobilizes employers' associations against child labour, organizes school enrollment campaigns, runs vocational skills training for older children and has successfully reduced the incidence of child labour in the State.<sup>63</sup>

#### Areas for Future Action:

- Based on existing initiatives, replicate programmes that have successfully reduced child labour by increasing school or educational programme enrollment rates;
- Using micro-credit and other programmes, make income-generating opportunities available to the families of child labourers
- Disseminate information about the real health and other dangers of many forms of child labour, and the advantages of education.

## Strategic Objective L.7

### "Eradicate violence against the girl child"

Actions to be taken by governments, international and non-governmental organizations and other actors include to: take effective actions and measures to enact and enforce legislation to protect the safety and security of girls from all forms of violence at work; take appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the girl child, in the household and in society, from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse; Undertake gender sensitization training for those involved in healing and rehabilitation and other assistance programmes.

Violence against girls is practiced in various ways, including at the earliest stages of their lives though sex-selective abortion and female infanticide, both of which are most commonly practiced in China and India, though accurate data on the extent of either practice is not available.<sup>64</sup> In India, nearly sixty percent of girls born in Salem District are killed within three days of birth, according to the local social welfare department, which doesn't include a growing number of abortions carried out on female fetuses. In India, Community Services Guild (CSG), works to discourage sex-selective abortion among rural women by teaching them income-generating skills such as basket-weaving or selling produce, and educating them about the value of girls to society.<sup>65</sup>

Due to such factors as their age and inability to refuse or negotiate sex, social pressure, lack of protective laws, or failure to enforce laws, girls are more vulnerable to other kinds of

<sup>63</sup> IPEC Action against Child Labour: Highlights 2004. Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2004.

[http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/publ/download/implementation\\_2004\\_en.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/publ/download/implementation_2004_en.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> Weiss, G. "Sex-selective Abortion: A Relational Approach." *Hypatia* 12(3), 1995.

[http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/rt21/medicalization/WEISS\\_Sex-selective.html](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/rt21/medicalization/WEISS_Sex-selective.html)

<sup>65</sup> "For India's Daughters, a Dark Birth Day; Infanticide and sex-selective abortion yield a more skewed gender ratio." *Christian Science Monitor*, Feb 9<sup>th</sup> 2005. [http://search.csmonitor.com/search\\_content/0209/p11s01-wosc.html](http://search.csmonitor.com/search_content/0209/p11s01-wosc.html)

violence, particularly physical abuse; sexual violence including rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation; trafficking; and forced labour. Sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, have a devastating effect on children's health, and girls are more vulnerable than boys to the consequences of unprotected and premature sexual relations. A report prepared by the Canadian Federation of University Women disclosed that fifty-four percent of girls under sixteen had experienced unwanted sexual attention, twenty-four percent had been raped or experienced coercive sex, and seventeen percent had been the victims of incest. The report further showed that sixty-three percent of sexual assaults reported to police involved girls younger than eighteen.<sup>66</sup>

Violence is linked to a number of physical and mental health complications in girls, including depression, eating disorders, sexual dysfunction, and suicide. Appropriate interventions for girls who have experienced violence or are living in situations of violence are crucial to addressing and resolving these complications. In Sri Lanka, UNFPA is supporting efforts to eliminate the sexual abuse and exploitation of young girls by sponsoring seminars and workshops for adolescents and their parents to discuss reproductive health issues. A violence counseling programme was introduced in a medical clinic where women and girls received reproductive health information. In addition, the project helped the police to detect cases of child abuse and bring the offenders to justice by training female police officers in dealing with child-abuse.<sup>67</sup>

#### Areas for Future Action:

- Develop information campaigns on the value and potential of girl children to counter practices such as sex-selective abortion and female infanticide, and give more weight to the punishment of doctors and others who carry out these practices;
- Re-examine efforts to eliminate violence against women to ensure that the specific physical and psychological needs of girls are addressed in policies and programmes;

## Strategic Objective L.8

### **"Promote the girl child's awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life"**

Actions to be taken by governments, international and non-governmental organizations and other actors include to: provide access for girls to training, information and the media on social, cultural, economic and political issues and enable them to articulate their views; support non-governmental organizations, in particular youth non-governmental organizations, in their efforts to promote the equality and participation of girls in society.

Girls are less encouraged than boys to participate in and learn about the social, economic and political functioning of society, with the result that they are not offered the same opportunities as boys to take part in local and national and international decision-making processes. Education is crucial to girls' ability to participate in decision-making processes, as is the sensitization of community and national leaders to the fact that girls can make important contributions to these processes. In 1965, UN Member States endorsed the *Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and*

<sup>66</sup> Jiواني, Y. *Violence Prevention and the Girl Child: Phase One Report*. British Columbia: Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence, 1999.

<http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/reports/gc.htm>

<sup>67</sup> UNFPA, 2004.

*Understanding between Peoples*,<sup>68</sup> and twenty years later adopted the *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond*,<sup>69</sup> which identified ten priority areas for action: Education; Employment; Hunger and poverty; Health; Environment; Drug abuse; Juvenile delinquency; Leisure time activities; Girls and young women; and The full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making.

A number of national and international youth summits have brought young people together in order to address development issues in general, and the impact that issues have on youth in particular. The first session of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System was held in 1991, and a second session was held in 1996. The forums were a consultation of non-governmental youth organizations, youth-related agencies and organizations of the United Nations system, and of other intergovernmental organizations which represent regional conferences of governmental ministers responsible for youth affairs.

Other spaces include: the Youth Forum of the European Union,<sup>70</sup> which brings together national youth councils and youth NGOs to allow them to participate in EU decision-making processes; the World Indigenous Youth Conferences<sup>71</sup> bring together youth from indigenous communities throughout the world to discuss common issues and challenges; and the International Youth Leadership Conferences<sup>72</sup> simulated the sessions of entities such as the UN Security Council in order to give youth a chance to develop leadership capabilities.

#### Areas for Future Action:

- Encourage and empower girls to participate in youth events through scholarships and other forms of support, and ensure that youth forums take gender considerations into account;
- Ensure that the resolutions, recommendations and other conclusions reached at international youth events are taken seriously by national and international actors, and integrated into policies and programmes designed to address youth issues.

## Strategic Objective L.9

### “Strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl child”

Actions to be taken by governments, international and non-governmental organizations and other actors include to: formulate policies and programmes to help the family in its supporting, educating and nurturing roles; provide an environment conducive to the strengthening of the family with a view to providing supportive and preventive measures which protect, respect and promote the potential of the girl child; educate and encourage parents and caregivers to treat girls and boys equally and to ensure shared responsibilities between girls and boys in the family.

*In different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of the family exist. The rights, capabilities and responsibilities of family members must be respected. Women make a great contribution to the welfare of the family and to the development of society, which is still not recognized or considered in its full importance...The upbringing of children requires*

<sup>68</sup> Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples

<http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/65.htm>

<sup>69</sup> World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. <http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/res/1995/eres1995-64.htm>

<sup>70</sup> Youth Forum of the European Union <http://www.youthforum.org/en/>

<sup>71</sup> World Indigenous Youth Conference <http://www.itv.se/boreale/wiyceng.htm>

<sup>72</sup> International Youth Leadership Conferences <http://www.czechleadership.com/index.php>

*shared responsibility of parents, women and men and society as a whole. Recognition should also be given to the important role often played by women in many countries in caring for other members of their family.*  
 -Beijing PfA (paragraph 29)

As mentioned under Strategic Objective L.1, the family is the first place that both girls and boys internalize gender roles. The family therefore can play a positive role in forming both girls and boys' attitudes towards each other and their place in society. In Mexico, the NGO *Salud y Género* (Health and Gender) holds workshops with groups of men in order to address some of the more destructive manifestations of masculinity such as violence towards women, risk-taking behaviour and rejection of "weakness," with a view towards constructing new models of fatherhood and the family. *Salud y Género* advocates for changes in the socialization of children that define more equitable gender roles for boys and girls as the basis for creating change in societies' definitions of gender roles, beginning with the family.<sup>73</sup>

Aside from alleviating women's domestic burden, family-friendly policies, paternal leave and other measures designed to re-distribute domestic and family responsibilities among working parents can play an important role in shaping both parents and children's conceptions of "the family" and allow fathers to play a more active and positive role in their children's development. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development publishes *Babies and Bosses*,<sup>74</sup> a series designed to examine the impact of family-friendly policies on both workplaces and families in OECD Member States.

#### Areas for Future Action:

- At the family level, encourage the re-negotiation of gender roles through promotion of the girl child and empowerment of women;
- Evaluate the impact of family-friendly and work-life balance policies on household gender roles and the status of the girl child within the family.

## Additional Areas of Concern

*As AIDS forces girls to drop out of school -- whether they are forced to take care of a sick relative, run the household, or help support the family -- they fall deeper into poverty. Their own children in turn are less likely to attend school -- and more likely to become infected.*<sup>75</sup>  
 UN Secretary General Kofi Annan

Little is known in general about the health, economic and other costs imposed on women by their domestic burden, and even less is known about the burden of domestic labour borne by girls. In many cases, girls start to undertake heavy domestic chores at a very early age, including carrying heavy loads of water for long distances, and are expected to manage both educational and domestic responsibilities, often resulting in poor scholastic performance and an early drop-out from schooling.

Evidence indicates that girls in female-headed households are particularly hard hit by a growing reliance on their ability to perform both paid and domestic labour, including caring for younger siblings, older relatives or even their parents. These responsibilities have

<sup>73</sup> Involving Men to Address Gender Inequities. Washington DC: Population Reference Bureau, 2003.  
<http://www.prb.org/pdf/InvolvMenToAddressGendr.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> *Babies and Bosses: OECD Recommendations to Help Families Balance Work and Family Life*. Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004. [http://www.oecd.org/document/13/0,2340,en\\_2649\\_34819\\_33844621\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/13/0,2340,en_2649_34819_33844621_1_1_1_1,00.html)

<sup>75</sup> Message on International Women's Day 2004 <http://www.un.org/events/women/iwd/2004/sg.html>



particularly increased in the countries hardest-hit by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, where parents struck down by AIDS are forced to rely on their children for economic support and care.<sup>76</sup>

Some children are particularly vulnerable; especially abandoned, homeless, displaced, migrant and street children, children in areas in conflict, and children from ethnic and racial minorities who face discrimination and violence. UNAIDS estimates that there are 15 million AIDS orphans in the world,<sup>77</sup> many of whom do not have other relatives to look after them. Policies and programmes that target children in general can be further refined to ensure that these vulnerable children are not overlooked.

## Conclusion

Gender inequality continues to represent a significant threat to the development, the safety, and even to the lives of girls throughout the world – depriving them of access to nutrition, education, health, information and other resources essential to their development. Far from addressing one specific area of the Beijing Platform for Action, Critical Area L requires that we address all of the remaining critical areas from the perspective of girls. Girls face a number of obstacles and challenges that are obscured from view by the category “women,” but that are fundamental to their physical, social, economic and political development as girls and, later in life, as women. Girls possess a value and a potential that is as yet unrealized in most parts of the world – and it is time that governments, UN agencies and non-governmental organizations at the local, national and international levels helped them realize that potential.

The utility of periodic reviews of international agreements such as the Beijing Platform for Action or the Convention on the Rights of the Child is that we can re-evaluate them in the light of new and emerging issues, and give States the opportunity both to re-affirm their commitment to promoting and protecting the health and human rights of the girl child, and to put into practice specific programmes and projects designed to further their development.

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<sup>76</sup> Waring, M. *Human Rights and Unpaid Care-giving*. Toronto: Association for Women's Rights in Development, 2004. [http://www.whrnet.org/docs/issue-unpaid\\_care.html](http://www.whrnet.org/docs/issue-unpaid_care.html)

<sup>77</sup> 2004 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic. Geneva: UNAIDS, 2004(b). <http://www.unaids.org/en/default.asp>