

Action for Girls

Newsletter of the NGO Committee on UNICEF Working Group on Girls (WGG) and its International Network for Girls (INFG).

WGG Prepares Fact Sheet on Girls and MDGs

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on world leaders to attend the Millennium Development Goals Summit on 20-22 September 2010 in New York City to accelerate progress toward the achievement of the MDGs by 2015. The Summit will take stock of the successes, best practices, lessons learned, obstacles, and gaps related to the MDGs. General Assembly Resolution 64/184 outlines the planning for the Summit under the leadership of the Permanent Representatives of Senegal and Denmark. The Millennium Development Goals, adopted in 2000 by 189 Member States of the United Nations, are a set of eight specific and measurable development objectives. Whereas progress has been made in achieving the MDGs, much remains to be done by 2015. The Secretary-General has issued "Keeping the promise:

A forward-looking review to promote an agreed action agenda to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015."

To prepare for the Summit in September, on 14-15 June the General Assembly held Informal Interactive Hearings with representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations, which provided the governments with clear, concise statements on how to move forward to achieve the MDGs. Under the theme, "Building a better tomorrow: local actions, national strategies and global structures," the WGG welcomed the remarks by Deepali Sood from Plan International, who spoke persuasively for both formal and informal adolescent girls' education in economics. She urged that girls be taught market relevant skills, including financial education and career guidance, to enable them to function economically. Another respondent who emphasized girls was Gulalai Ismael from Girls Aware, Pakistan, who called for gender-based development initiatives which stress young women's entrepreneurship; sexual and reproductive health services; and HIV/AIDS education, services, and initiatives which include young women in decision-making.



Students from the Government Girls High School in Bangalore prep for an animation workshop. They were nervous about being able to make cartoons...but they were excited. [Creative Commons]

WGG distributed to the participants a fact sheet on the eight MDGs entitled "Out of the MDG Shadows: Girls and Why They Matter" http://www.girlsrights.org/Fact_Sheets.html. For each of the eight MDGs the fact sheet lists Gaps in Progress and Recommendations. The fact sheet concludes with "Girls are the key to meeting the promise of the MDGs. What is needed is the will to act--the will of governments and the international community to prioritize the achievement of gender equality and promotion of girls' and women's rights." The outcomes of the June Hearings will be issued as an Assembly document and integrated into discussions at the September Summit and into the outcomes document.



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The UN Interagency on Adolescent Girls has also issued a report entitled "Girls' Power and Potential: A Joint programming Framework for Fulfilling the Rights of Marginalized Adolescent Girls" that addresses how achieving the MDGs affects adolescent girls.

Susan O'Malley
-- IFBPW

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Climate Change Affects the Girl Child

It is an acknowledged fact that when climate change strikes, people living in poverty, 70% of whom are women, are in the frontlines. Girls, however, are rarely mentioned in these accounts of climate change. Why?

Is it that girlhood is a life stage that is not recognized in some cultures and that, as suggested by statistics on violence against women (e.g. March 2010 issue of *Action for Girls*), a girl can be catapulted into womanhood at the age of five? This would explain why girls seem to be ignored in discussions about climate change. Their identity has become subsumed into that of a woman. And so, their lives are shaped by socio-cultural norms that institutionalize gender inequality into a woman's roles and responsibilities, making them especially vulnerable, like adult women, to the direct and indirect threats to human security that come in the wake of climate change.



A girl in the shanty town of Cité Soleil, Haiti, near Port-au-Prince, smiles after having struggled for a bucket of water.

UN Photo/Logan Abassi

Consider, for example, the impact of climate change on basic resources and on the weather.

Girls as food providers

In rural societies, women and girls are expected to provide food for their families. They are responsible for collecting, using, and managing water and the energy sources necessary to prepare the food. The scarcity of these basic resources and the need to travel further to access what is available increase women's workload requiring girls to provide additional help:

- This lessens girls' opportunities to attend school.
- The lack of education limits their future life options to care giving, domestic labor, and agricultural work.
- The need to travel further to provide resources for the household puts them at risk to attacks and violence in insecure environments.
- Faced with these added burdens, girls are prone to stress-related illnesses.
- Their use of inferior energy sources and exposure to contaminated water leads to health problems.

Girls' experience of natural disasters

Research has shown that extreme weather events, such as cyclones, hurricanes, floods and heat waves, are likely to claim the lives of more women than men. This also applies to girls whose roles and responsibilities subject them to the restrictions experienced by adult women, i.e. in the face of natural disasters:

- Care giving responsibilities can prevent them from fleeing the home.
- Cultural norms require that they not leave the home in search of safety without a male relative.
- They have not been allowed to acquire life-saving skills, such as swimming.

Climate change and human rights

In their briefing paper, *Climate wrongs and human rights* (2008), OXFAM lists the Right to Life and Security, the Right to Food, and the Right to Health, as examples of human rights which, they maintain, climate change is set to undermine on a massive scale. Particularly at risk, they note, are the rights of marginalized groups, such as women. Indeed, as the above examples have shown, climate change also violates the human rights of girls.

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Can girls contribute to the human struggle to preserve planet Earth for present and future generations?

Indeed, they can begin by sharing their experiences and raising their concerns about climate change with one another both locally and globally. For example, the World Association of Girls Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) Environment Program provides opportunities for girls and young women to learn, engage, and have a voice on environmental issues that affect their communities, countries, and the world. It develops solutions to the difficult issue of climate change and its impact on girls and young women. To learn more go to <http://www.wagggsworld.org/en/planet>

Anita L. Wenden
Chair, NGOCSW/NY Subcommittee on Women and Climate Change
-- International Peace Research Association

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Ritha Baraka, Social Worker from the Congo, Speaks at WGG

Ritha Baraka, a social worker at Panzi Hospital in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), spoke about her work with raped and sexually abused women and girls at the WGG meeting on 6 May 2010. Speaking with Baraka were Scott Blanding and Greg Heller (Women in War Zones), who have made a film about sexual violence against women in war zones that features Panzi Hospital.



Patient at Panzi Hospital [Creative Commons]

introduces an object or a piece of wood into the vagina causing a fistula which causes the girl not to be able to control her feces or urine. If the fistula is corrected, and most families do not have the money for the operation, often the girl will be unable to conceive a child when she is older. Thus the girls say that they will never be able to find a husband because they are damaged. The girls also suffer from severe emotional trauma and the possibility of AIDS.

What the Congolese women need, according to Baraka, is “peace because all the problems result from unsafety and conflict in our regions.” Baraka concluded by saying, “I am sorry to say that the Congolese woman will be condemned to live under trauma and suffering until the war conflict is stopped in Congo.”

A clip of Blanding and Heller’s film on the treatment of sexually abused girls at Panzi hospital is available at <http://www.girlsrights.org>. There is some good news for the women and girls of Panzi Hospital: This summer Women in War

Zones is sending a team to the Hospital to establish a library and educational facilities.

Susan O’Malley
-- IFBPW

Girls Respond to CSW 54

I think inspiring other students within the school is not enough. Inspiring others is a good way to spread the movement. However, inspiring just stops. . . . What women who are in bad situations want is not the discussion. It is an action.

-- Kumhyun Song

The UN Commission and workshops have opened my eyes to the perceptible (human trafficking, prostitution) and imperceptible (objectification of women in media) injustice against women and girls. I vow never to shut those eyes again.

-- Marian Guerra

Dozens of girls from all over the world had the opportunity in March 2010 to attend the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York City. Thanks to the NGOs that sponsored their participation, they were able to talk with girls with the same interests coming from different cultures and having different backgrounds. Together they built a web of contacts and connections, learned about their human rights as girls, and improved their skills of advocacy at the United Nations.

Common themes that arose from their responses were gaining more respect for themselves, the importance of education and spreading awareness of what they had learned, and the necessity of action.

In the words of Adeola Okoduwa, “Going to the UN was about more than just gaining knowledge; it was about experience. The people I met and the stories and lectures that I heard have enlightened my mindset on women and girls. I have gained more respect and have learned how to help others do the same.”

-- VIVAT International

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STEM Will Be Theme of CSW in 2011

The 55th session of the CSW in 2011 (28 February through 11 March) will have as its theme: “Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s access to full employment and decent work.”

The Commission will also evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions from its 51st session on “The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.” Both topics are of great interest to us in the Working Group on Girls.

In an era when girls are increasingly enrolling in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) courses, and women are increasingly prominent in medicine, law, and business, why are there so few women scientists and engineers? There is compelling evidence of environmental and social barriers—including gender bias, stereotypes, and the climate within university science and engineering departments—that continue to limit women’s participation and progress.

“Why So Few?,” a report published by the American Association of American Women (AAUW), at <http://www.aauw.org/learn/research/whysofew.cfm> presents relevant research and suggestions for action to remedy this problem. Please watch the website of the Division for the Advancement of Women (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/>) for further information. Since CSW 51 in 2007, a WGG Task Force has developed discussion questions and collated responses from members of the International Network for Girls on the topic of violence and discrimination against girls.

The “Tool Kit” at <http://www.girlsrights.org> increases knowledge and awareness about promises made to

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girls and motivates women and girls to address these promises by becoming catalysts for change. It is not too late to take part in the discussions. The latest topics and questions, available in several languages, are on protection, migration, and trafficking of girls.

Carolyn Donovan

-- AAUW

WGG Member Joins Plan Advisory Panel

Catherine Moore and Mary Ann Strain, co-chairs of The Working Group on Girls, are proud to announce that Yvonne Rafferty, Professor of Psychology at Pace University, who represents the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), has been appointed to Plan International’s “Because I am a Girl” advisory panel. Dr. Rafferty leads the WGG’s Research and

Writing Task Force. At Pace she has developed a course entitled “The Girl Child: A Global Perspective” which incorporates the “Because I am a Girl” theme and reports. This new association will greatly strengthen the Working Group on Girls’ international ties.

Plan International promotes child rights to end child poverty. Based in the United Kingdom and active globally, Plan is one of the oldest and largest children’s development organizations.



“Because I am a Girl” is Plan’s campaign to improve girls’ lives. It fights gender inequality, promotes girls’ rights, and lifts millions of girls out of poverty. It addresses the fact that across the world, girls face the double discrimination of their gender and age, leaving them at the bottom of the social ladder. Dr. Rafferty will work with the Advisory Panel’s co-coordinators Sarah Hendricks and Keshet Bachan.

Plan is producing one girl report each year in the run up to 2015, the target year for the Millennium Development Goals. The 2009 report focuses on the global economy and warns that failing to send girls to school is costing the world’s poorest countries billions of pounds each year. To learn more go to <http://www.plan-international.org>.