

Action for Girls

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

WGG Submits Statement to Commission for Social Development

In February 2011 the Working Group on Girls submitted a written statement to the Commission for Social Development endorsed by 23 organizations. Twenty-four NGOs submitted written statements to the Commission, but only six made reference to the special needs of girls. The International Association of the Schools of Social Work statement, entitled "Poverty Eradication through Girls' Education", however, was entirely dedicated to girls.

The 49th session of the Commission for Social Development was held at the United Nations from February 9-18, 2011. The priority theme for this two-year cycle 2011-2012 is Poverty Eradication. The Commission is following up on the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in March

1995 when the Heads of State pledged to put people in the center of development. The Declaration and Programme for Action of the World Summit for Social Development has three pillars: poverty eradication, full employment and social integration. It is interesting to remember that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was also negotiated in 1995 with the special needs of girls being outlined in Section L The Girl-child.

The full implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme for Action would benefit girls. There were seven references to girls in the document including girls' rights to education and lifelong learning; adequate nutrition and health care; the establishment and strengthening of school and community-based health education; access to nontraditional and vocational training and traditionally male-dominated occupations; and literacy as a priority for girls. Governments were urged to promote equality and social justice by providing equal access for girls to all levels of education.

The Commission for Social Development reviews the condition of the Family, Youth and Disabled People. The Secretary General (SG) prepares a report with separate resolutions to be adopted at the end of the Commission. In this year's SG Report there is no reference to girls in the resolution on Family. In the resolution on Disability there are seven references to girls; the Youth Resolution makes reference to the United Nations Adolescent Girls Task Force.

The outcome of this year's Commission was a Chair's Summary where it is noted that "gender inequality reflects social structures, culture and values and manifests itself in unequal opportunities and outcomes for girls." The emerging theme of the Commission is the Social Protection Floor. In the presentations on this topic it was noted that universal access to basic social protection and social services is necessary to break the cycle of poverty. The Commission noted that the Social Protection Floor is affordable, even in the poorest countries, if implemented progressively.

-- Winifred Doherty, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Co-Chair Working Group on Girls



Ms. Michele Bachelet interacts with participants at GIRLS STAND UP (story on p. 2)



Action for Girls
VOLUME III, NUMBER 10, June 2011

WGG Submits Statement to CSocD.....	1
Girls Speak Out on WGG's Girls Stand Up!.....	2
Book Review: <i>Rebel Girls</i>	2
UN Women: Will the Girls be Included?.....	3
Girl Guides Provide Pakistani Flood Relief	4

Action for Girls

Girls Speak Out on WGG's Girls Stand Up!

On 20 February 2011 at Pace University one hundred twenty-five girls from many different countries attended Girls Stand Up!, organized by the Working Group on Girls.



"We honestly admired Fabiola for being able to tell us the stories of the harsh treatment of girls in the Cameroon. The first step we can take to improve the situation is to promote the rights of females and stand up for ourselves and each other when any person tries to put us down." (Arbenita)



"Someday YOU can be just as influential in the world as she was and a high school student like myself will be looking up to YOU and delivering a speech praising YOU. So you decide, What role will you play? How will you ensure that your voice is heard?" Tanisha and Ms. Leymah Gbowee in picture.

Madame Michelle Bachelet, the head of the new entity UN Women and former President of Chile, and Leymah Gbowee, Executive Director of Women, Peace and Security Network-Africa, and the subject of the award-winning documentary "Pray the Devil Back to Hell" on the efforts of Liberian women to end their country's civil war through non-violent protest, were the featured speakers. Girls learned advocacy skills and became familiar with the work of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Following are some of the voices of the girls about Girls Stand Up!

"We didn't know quite what to expect as we arrived at Girls Stand Up, the orientation meeting for the CSW. As each event was introduced and orchestrated for us by girls our own age or a little bit older, we found ourselves totally engaged. It was thrilling to hear Michelle Bachelet herself explain her five goals as Director of UN Women:

- Expanding women's voices, leadership and participation
- Ending violence against women
- Strengthening the women's peace and security agenda
- Enhancing women's economic empowerment
- Making gender equality central to national, local and sectoral planning and budgeting.

Through her instruction we came to understand that violence against women means not only physical rape but also exclusion from life, education and having our voices heard. We began to see new roles for ourselves in the

initiative for peace and security by training for new roles like that of women mediators."

Students at Mount St. Ursula

"Attending the CSW55 was an important moment of learning and sharing of experiences. I am part of a group that was formed after CSW51 when the theme was ending discrimination and violence against the girl child. During that meeting young girls were heard and had opportunities to learn and speak up. Today, the group to which I belong brings together young girls and boys to make a difference within the larger youth group of the society by fighting for gender equality and growing in the spirit to help and respect the humanity and creativity of each member. The CSW55 gave me an opportunity to bring the group new work methodologies, new challenges and above all, strength, dynamism and determination to put in practice all the dreams and plans that we've prepared."

Isabel Naisse Miranda, Mozambique

"Ms. Leymah Gbowee's work has proved that our most powerful tool is our voice. She used her words to bring a voice to thousands of women who were abused daily in her war-torn homeland of Liberia. We were especially inspired by these women who effectively use their voices to cause drastic positive changes in the lives of women. Because of the vital knowledge we gained from the Girls Stand Up! orientation, we have made it our mission to inform our peers and bring immediate change to young women around the world."

Peggy Adu Kyei, Mount St. Ursula

"Michelle Bachelet said 'we should not be women of tomorrow but of now.' Leymah Gbowee said 'Fight for what you believe in.' As a young woman who has been in the United States and was originally from Nigeria, I will fight for peace.

Adaku Ihekwe, College of Notre Dame of Maryland

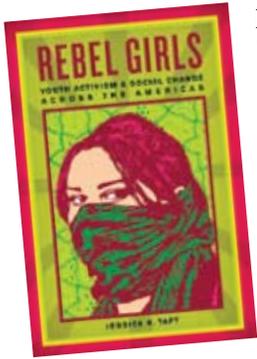
More voices of girls may be found on the WGG website.

<http://www.girlsrights.org>

Book Review *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism and Social Change Across the Americas*, By: Jessica K. Taft, New York University Press, 2011

Girls' studies scholar Jessica K. Taft's recent book, *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism and Social Change Across the Americas*, provides an exciting and intriguing account

of girls' civic identities and practices in the twenty-first century. Interviewing over seventy-five girl activists throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, the United States; Mexico City, Mexico; Caracas, Venezuela; Vancouver, Canada; and Buenos Aires, Argentina, Taft challenges the invisibility of girls' political activism in mainstream society and academia. Throughout the text, Taft brings girls' political voices into conversation with that of adult scholars and activists, and illustrates the ways in which girls' experiences and perspectives inform more effective models of social change.



Divided into two parts, the first half of the book examines how teenage girls construct their activist identities, while the second half addresses girls' political practices. According to Taft, girl activists articulate a new understanding of girlhood that runs counter to popular images of passive victimhood and empowered consumer citizenship. They

actively reject the notion that they need to be empowered and, instead, draw a clear distinction between their empowerment and activism. Empowering girls, Taft states, encourages girls to think of their lives in individualized terms and "to see their problems as personal troubles, rather than as issues of public concern" (30), whereas girls' activism engages in a collective vision and requires "actually doing something" (31) as the girls in her study argue. It is in this way that girl activists seek to redefine and reshape the terms of their girlhood identities, moving beyond narratives of self-esteem and individualized girl power, and into sociological critiques of privilege, power, inequality and discrimination.

Girl activists likewise engage in a wide variety of tactics and strategies to achieve their goals, including political education (workshops, film screenings, study circles and cultural events), formal political intervention (lobbying, petition drives, party building and public policy strategizing), traditional social movement practices (community service, charity, fundraising and development work on human rights or poverty issues) and political action alternatives (developing youth institutions, cooperatives, organizations, health clinics, community-run kitchens and childcare programs).

This book is a must-have for anyone working with, on behalf of, or interested in girls and girlhood. Taft writes an accessible and critical text that takes seriously girls' political voices and agency as contemporary peers in local and global social justice movements.

--Emily Bent, PhD Candidate and Galway Fellow, Global Women's Studies Programme, National University of Ireland, Galway, Contact: emilycbent@gmail.com

Action for Girls

UN Women: Will the Girls be Included?

Believing that girls can be well served by the UN agency dedicated to Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, the Working Group on Girls (WGG) has been following the early days of UN Women closely. Our hope is that the new entity, established by the General Assembly in July 2010, will address issues specific to girls and not just add the words "and girls" without recognition of their particular potential and vulnerabilities.

Girls who are in school and who are preparing for leadership provide vast new possibilities to families and communities. We need to recognize girls when we address international policies. For example, why don't we hear more of the realities of girls' higher rate of death when we speak of MDG #4 (Reduce child mortality)? In 2012 the priority theme of CSW 56 is the empowerment of rural women. Will we recognize that the work of rural girls keeps them out of school and threatens their health?

At the "Girls Stand Up" program during CSW 55, Executive Director Michelle Bachelet powerfully engaged the over 150 girls present when she described the new entity's thematic areas and told of her path to success which included being Minister for Defense and President of Chile. Girls attending the meeting felt a strong call to be present at the policy table in their communities across the world.

Since the official launch of UN Women at the end of February there have been many speeches and panel presentations, but references to girls are few when girls are not the audience or the subject of the discussion.

Only when the theme of a presentation is directly related to girls, for example, the briefing on "Empowering Disadvantaged Girls and Young Women" during the lead up to the High Level Conference on Youth, are there substantive remarks made about girls and their special needs and vulnerabilities. Members of the WGG and its International Network for Girls must remain vigilant and question the "and girls" add on; they are urged to question whether UN Women addresses substantive issues specific to girls such as female infanticide, FGM and early marriage.

Girls' needs and vulnerabilities should be addressed coherently throughout the UN System, and UN Women is strategically placed to ensure that the girls of today, the women of tomorrow, are no longer discriminated against. Paying attention to girls will ensure worldwide leadership and participation by empowered women.

- Winifred Doherty, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Co-Chair Working Group on Girls
- Carolyn Donovan, American Association of University Women
- Mary Jo Toll, Sisters of Notre Dame

Action for Girls

Girl Guides Provide Pakistani Flood Relief

The massive floods of July 2010 badly hit Pakistan. More than 20 million Pakistanis were affected throughout the country. In the time of need NGOs, governmental departments, and the people of Pakistan have always provided help to their country men and women.

As the news channels flashed the flood news on television, my first thought was how to find a way to help the people devastated by the floods. The print and electronic media reported the efforts of the Pakistani Army, Navy and Air Force in the emergency evacuation process. Thus, in my capacity as Managing Director of the Pakistani Girl Guides Association, it was not difficult for me to make an initial plan to gather supplies needed for the affected people.

After a natural disaster, human aid workers and development workers follow three crucial stages for those affected by the disaster:

1. Emergency Evacuation of the Those Affected
2. Immediate Relief Supplies/ Food/ Medication
3. Reconstruction & Rehabilitation



Being a Girl Guide, I am always ready to render my services during an emergency or natural disaster. Previously I had been involved with the Girl Guides Association in the earthquake relief activities in 2005 in Pakistan. In my additional responsibility as Managing Coordinator of the Pakistan Girl Guides, it was necessary to

work with the organization's management to prepare a strategic framework to address this disaster. Therefore, a relief cell was setup at Lahore. A team of volunteers, Junior Guides, Girl Guides, Senior Guides, executive members, trainers and staff of the Association responded immediately and generously to the call for assistance following the tragic and devastating floods. The team of Guides were divided into groups that collected food items, bedding, clothing, shoes, medicines, daily necessities for women and children, clean drinking water and tents. The relief goods were sent in a hired truck to an identified area at Gurmani Sharqi near Muzaffargarh in Punjab, an area badly hit by the ruthless floods.

The same strategy has been followed by the Girl Guide members in other provinces and districts of Punjab, including Sargodha, DG Khan, Multan, Khanewal, Muzaffargarh, Layyah and Chakwal, who have also delivered relief goods and food items to the affected families taking refuge in schools and camps, following the framework setup in Lahore.

I have also been involved with the disaster management committees of a few rural schools that have few financial resources, but who are well-motivated to do fund raising from the wealthier members of society, in addition to the packing of items, the loading of trucks, record keeping and report writing.

My future agenda is to help formulate a strategy for the reconstruction and rehabilitation phase for the affected persons. As the disaster is massive, they need constant looking after for the immediate future. Funding is required to rebuild their houses, schools and hospitals.

-- Mahira Afzal, Emergency and Rehabilitation Coordination Unit (ERCU) of Food and Agriculture Organizations of the UN, Islamabad; formerly Managing Director of the Pakistani Girl Guides Association.

Mahira Afzal attended the 50th and 51st Sessions on the Commission on the Status of Women, sponsored by WAGGS/UN in 2004 and by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in 2005. On 9 March 2005 she delivered the statement on point of view through the eyes of girls and young women during the Governmental and Non-Governmental Interventions and also took part in a WGG Girls Speak Out.

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VOLUME III, NUMBER 10, June 2011

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