

Action for Girls

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

It's Proclaimed! A Day for Girls!

Please flag October 11, 2012 in your calendar. This is the date for the newly established UN International Day of the Girl, adopted by the General Assembly last December. Planning for 10.11.12 is underway to focus attention on the struggles that girls face and their potential power as change agents. All sorts of events are in the works from Plan International, LitWorld and other NGOs.

Last year one of School Girls Unite's strategies that mobilized U.S. support for this annual girls' rights day was to obtain city and county Day of the Girl proclamations. The hands-on process of girls drafting official declarations and collaborating with their local

policymakers exceeded expectations. These public statements, written by students, emphasized the Millennium Development Goals and gender-based violence. Member Dandio Coulibaly, age 16, says "At the proclamation ceremony, we spoke about girls getting unequal treatment and they [legislators] really paid attention to us". These advocates, some as young as 10, learned that a proclamation can be a powerful tool to raise awareness not only among their peers but also with politicians. This firsthand experience has the benefit of introducing girls to the policymaking process and perhaps to future civic participation.

We invite schools, community-based organizations, even unaffiliated groups of girls anywhere, to seek local proclamations to recognize 10.11.12 and build on our pilot program. It is ideal to allow six weeks for this girl-driven proclamation project. This time frame will provide the opportunity for a face-to-face meeting to review the draft language with the sponsor of the proclamation and arrange for an official presentation ceremony. In addition to resources currently available on our website, we will be offering a free online toolkit with complete step-by-step suggestions and a sample proclamation at www.DayOfTheGirl.org.

Alternatives to proclamations are also encouraged, especially overseas. Our sister chapter in Mali is exploring the possibility of an official government International Day of the Girl declaration. In light of the recent coup in this stable democracy, another possible option is a local village celebration to coincide with the start of school for the 60 younger students who receive School Girls Unite scholarships.

The beauty of the International Day of the Girl is it can be celebrated in an infinite number of ways and venues. We hope you'll join the essential mission: "to help galvanize worldwide enthusiasm for goals to better girls' lives, providing an opportunity for them to show leadership and reach their full potential".

-- Wendy Schaetzel Lesko
School Girls Unite & Day of the Girl



"We spoke about girls getting unequal treatment."



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The State of the World's Children 2012 - (UNICEF) Focuses on Urban Children

Over half of the world's population, including one billion children, is living in cities and towns. By 2050 that number will increase to nearly 70%.

Urban children are often regarded as better off than rural children because cities attract more economic development. Yet, gaps between rich and poor in towns and cities can sometimes exceed those found in rural areas. Millions of children live in urban environments where unequal access to services jeopardizes their health, education and even survival.

According to UN-Habitat, one in three urban dwellers lives in slum conditions where housing is precarious, overcrowded and unhygienic, and families struggle daily with pollution, traffic, crime, a high cost of living and grueling competition for limited resources.

This report describes the complex set of challenges to the development and fulfillment of the rights of urban children and suggests an equity-focused approach is needed to direct more attention and investment to those marginalized children who are hardest to reach.

Safe Cities for Girls

One area of concern is the largely neglected fact that sexual harassment and violence are a daily threat to girls in urban public places. The risk of walking in insecure areas prevents girls from reaching school or work or going out publicly. Public transportation and public toilets are two major areas where girls and women face harassment.

The UN-Women Global Programme on Safe Cities Free of Violence against Women and Girls is developing a model, based on its successful



"No one takes care of injustices in the slums. That was my ambition".

pilot programs, for local authorities and decision-makers to effect change through better allocation of budgets and the participation of local residents who have faced the problems. Better lighting of public streets and bus stops and the inauguration of single-sex buses are two simple innovations that have a big impact.

Safe Cities for Girls - a Kenyan Example

Peninah Nthenya Musiyami grew up in the Muthare slums of Nairobi, surrounded by violence and with no expectations, except her own - to go to school. In primary school, she washed clothes and dishes to help feed her family and graduated at the top of her class. Still poor, she talked a school into giving her a scholarship, but the school was nine miles away so she walked and eventually graduated. Hoping to study law, she discovered that a local college was giving scholarships for basketball players, so she taught herself to play in one month. She even made Kenya's national basketball team, and she earned that law degree.

Because of poverty and cultural norms in Kenyan slums, girls are often discriminated against, forced to marry very early and are at high risk for HIV infection. cont. p.3

CRC Expands the Legal Framework for a Child's Right to Participate

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) took another step forward in fulfilling its guiding principles in December 2011 when the General Assembly approved a Third Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure which will allow individual children to submit complaints to the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding specific violations of their rights under the Convention and the first Two Optional Protocols on armed conflict and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Complaints would be addressed to The Committee on the Rights of the Child, a body of independent experts that monitors the implementation of the commitments made by State Parties that have signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the two Optional Protocols.

The new Optional Protocol will enter into force when it is ratified by 10 UN Member States.

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Girl Delegate Relates Experiences at CSW 56

The United Nations 56th Commission on the Status of Women was the most enriching seven days of my life. Having turned eighteen just the day before, it was the best way to begin my life as an adult.

The second I stepped into the Youth Orientation, I felt like I was entering an entirely different world, a sort of mini-Earth, which had all sorts of people from almost every culture in the world. It was great to meet the rest of the Girls Learn International (GLI) Delegates who were from 8th to 12th grade. Talking with them made me realize how extremely dedicated they are to GLI as well as to women's and girls' rights in general. Besides the GLI Delegation, there were youth delegates from many different organizations including the Girl Scouts, Plan International and Young Marines. The large number of boy delegates who came to attend the CSW 56 was quite surprising. They were also equally involved in the fight for empowerment of rural women, the theme for the CSW 56.

The orientation began with a motivating speech by Dr. Michelle Bachelet, the first female President of Chile and Executive Director of UN Women. Her speech urged us youth to be more politically active and to strive harder to attain our goals of achieving gender equality and stopping gender discrimination. She spent extra time with us to answer all our questions. After she left, we had a series of activities arranged by the different organizations. The one I enjoyed the most was "The Impossible Budget" activity conducted by GLI. It made participants realize the difficulty rural women face when it comes to financing their everyday lives. The Nobel Peace Prize laureate from Liberia, Leyhna Gbowee, paid us a short visit. Even though she only talked for a few minutes, her energy and enthusiasm left us all cont. p.4



Dr. Michelle Bachelet at WGG Youth Orientation



"Tough times never last but tough people do. I am back again in the slum empowering my fellow girls."

In 2008 Nthenya founded Space Spaces, an organization run by and for young women which creates safe environments for adolescent girls growing up in the slums. It provides much needed opportunities for recreation, mentoring and discussions.

Safe Cities for Girls-an Ethiopian example

Biruh Tesfa (Bright Future) focuses its efforts on migrant girls (7-24) from poor rural areas who migrate to the urban slums seeking work or educational opportunities, often to escape forced marriages. With little or no education or family, these girls are vulnerable to exploitation for sex or labor. This program is a joint project by the Ethiopian Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Addis Ababa Youth and Sport Commission, with the technical assistance of the Population Council and support from UNFPA, DFID, and the Turner Foundation.

The program seeks to create a safe space in which girls can build networks with each other, as well as relationships with supportive adults. The program promotes literacy, life skills, livelihood and reproductive health information.

One challenge is reaching these girls who are often out-of-sight and inaccessible and whose employers do not always approve of their being away from work or engaged in social activities. Biruh Tesfa has local, well-known leaders who go from house to house and introduce the program and enlist support.

Over 35,000 out-of-school girls in 18 cities of Ethiopia have now participated in the program. One-third of the beneficiaries have been child domestic workers, one-third daily manual laborers.

Jackie Shapiro
-- ECPAT-USA

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in awe. At the end of the orientation, we had another great talk from a representative from Kenya, who gave us useful advice on how to approach the official CSW Delegations from the different Member States.

Throughout the rest of the week, I attended several NGO sessions, at which representatives from different nations talked about the status of rural women in their countries. The real life experiences shared by young girls from Pakistan, Columbia, Uganda, Malawi, Sierra-Leon, Tanzania and so many other countries, were extraordinary and an eye-opener. They talked about their own experiences with sexual abuse, child marriage, forced marriage, FGM (Female Genital Mutilation), rape and other violence against women. Mariam, a seventeen-year old girl from rural Pakistan, related to us a story of her 12-year-old friend who was married to a middle-aged man. The man then divorced her a year later on the grounds that his wife was acting like a child! It was shocking to hear girls speak about their everyday experiences.

The most memorable event was the Youth Reception. All the girls from different parts of the world, speaking various foreign languages, found one language in common: dance. We danced non-stop and even learned dances from the different cultures. It was an incredibly fun night.

Apart from all this, other experiences included going into the General Assembly and attending the high-level conferences. These were once-in-a-lifetime opportunities that allowed me to get an idea of how the United Nations works.

The whole CSW was a life-changing experience. I really look forward to attending CSW 57 in 2013.

-- Sheethal Josem,
Girls Learn International (GLI) Delegate

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Editorial Committee

Susan O'Malley

-- International Federation of Business and Professional Women

Carolyn Donovan

-- American Association of University Women

Jackie Shapiro

-- ECPAT-USA

Layout: Mary Ann Strain -- Passionists International

Please address questions about the articles to the authors at wggcontact@gmail.com Reprinting of articles is encouraged with credit given to Action for Girls. We welcome articles by NGOs.

Girls' Statement

56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

We the girl delegates of the 56th session on the Commission on the Status of Women hereby recognize the human rights of girls and stand to address the needs, experiences and concerns of girls both internationally and domestically. We stand to highlight the issues confronting rural girls such as sexual violence, access to education and health services.

Sexual violence is not only an issue for women and girls but is a human rights issue. Rape and sexual assault are prevalent in all realms of society. For rural girls, the effects of sexual violence are often amplified as these girls are isolated and at the mercy of their families and communities. Sexual violence, and the stigma associated with it, create silence and prevent girls from seeking help.

We demand that governments engage and educate men and boys on the value of girls, as only they can stop rape and sexual assault.

Child marriage is another instance of sexual violence, in which a young girl's human rights are violated. Girls who marry before the age of 18 are more likely to be abused mentally, physically and sexually. Girls who are married at a young age often become pregnant, and childbirth is the leading cause of death among girls ages fifteen to nineteen. Early pregnancy is also an obstacle girls must overcome in order to exercise their right to an education.

We demand that governments create educational opportunities for pregnant girls, prioritize childcare for young mothers so that they may attend school and inform communities of the importance of educating girls and delaying marriage.

Education is an essential human right that should not be denied based on gender, race, religion, location or current health status. A lack of infrastructure and transportation are obstacles girls must overcome to attend school. Unsafe conditions and inadequate resources also prevent girls from receiving a quality education.

We demand that governments provide girls with access to quality schooling in a safe environment.

Millennium Development Goals 5 and 6 are supposed to achieve universal access to treatment and reproductive health, yet a lack of access to health education, clean water, feminine hygiene products, prenatal care, qualified medical professionals and proper medical treatment perpetuates the cycle of poverty. The lack of access to these resources affects all aspects of life for rural girls.

We demand that governments provide girls with compulsory health education not only as a preventative measure but also as way of spreading awareness to end the stigma associated with seeking medical treatment.

We are the leaders of today. Listen to girls, respect girls, educate girls and empower girls.