

Action for Girls

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

CSW 53 Furthers the Rights of the Girl Child

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Global Framework, #39 states, "Now is the time to recognize the human dignity and worth of the girl child and to ensure the full enjoyment of her human rights and fundamental freedoms." Section L pledges to eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls, specifically addressing violence, education, economic exploitation, and harmful cultural attitudes and practices. It also promises to strengthen families and to promote girls' awareness and participation in their own lives and in their societies. Furthermore, it calls attention to the need to overcome the gender stereotypes that exist

in many societies and create enabling environments in which girls can develop their full potential. Finally, it recognizes that the advancement of women is not sustainable without attention to the rights of girls.

Girls, however, are still repeatedly denied their political, economic, social, and cultural rights and are subjected to cultural and legally sanctioned behaviors that present a grave risk to their physical, psychological, spiritual, and social and emotional development.

The 53rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women offers a unique opportunity for Member States to accelerate programs designed to fulfill previous promises and to ensure all girls their full human rights. CSW 53 will focus on "The Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between Women and Men, Including Caregiving in the Context of HIV/AIDS."

This issue is particularly relevant to the girl child since she is often called upon to increase caregiving resources in households affected by HIV/AIDS. In many cases, older daughters assume the full responsibility for the household and do so at the expense of their own developmentally appropriate needs and pursuits. Social science research on the "parentified child" indicates that these girls are at increased risk for educational deprivation and adverse health and developmental outcomes.

Research also shows that children who lose their parents to AIDS suffer greater psychological distress than children who are orphaned by other causes. In some cases, girl caregivers also suffer from HIV/AIDS. Girls are disproportionately affected by the failure of the international community to meet health care commitments; the social stigma of HIV/AIDS further magnifies the low status for girl caregivers. The State has a major role to play in protecting everyone's human rights. The human rights of the girl child cannot and should not be overlooked in the development of a healthy society.

Yvonne Rafferty
- - Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI)

The Working Group on Girls of the NGO Committee on UNICEF recommends:

- Launch a global campaign to transform attitudes, norms, and gender stereotypes;
- Promote the competence and resilience of girls through education and training;
- Promote the participation, visibility, and empowerment of girls
- Provide resources and funding for gender equality and empowerment of girls;
- Partner with families and communities to address the needs of girls heading households and children without parental care, including in the context of HIV/AIDS;
- Collect, analyze, and disseminate data on girls, disaggregated by sex, age, socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity;
- Strengthen the role of civil society and of organizations for girls' participation and empowerment.



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Faith Meitiaki Will Return for CSW 53

Faith Meitiaki will participate in the 53rd Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women as a delegate from Kenya on behalf of the Anglican Consultative Council. Two years ago, Faith was one of several Anglican girl delegates at CSW 51. Since 2007, while completing her high school studies, she's been an advocate of the



Faith Meitiaki

Agreed Conclusions on behalf of girls. Of CSW 51, she says "I learnt so much, that I am now more confident to face life and its challenges, and will always be ready to help in needs of the girl-child. For one thing, I am holding a two-day workshop at my local church to sensitize girls about various issues that affect us as female children."

Faith was able to use the WGG Tool Kit to discuss indicators of progress for girls in education. During the difficulties in Kenya in early 2008, Faith noted the displacement and

suffering of women and children, and spoke in her school about precautions that girls should take for protection and education. Hearing of her activities, government ministries in Nairobi invited Faith to the capitol to discuss education of girls and empowerment of women. She writes, "I found out that I appeared in the newspaper when I went to the Africa government meeting. I give thanks for all the hard work being done toward promotion of women."

She is also thrilled about this opportunity to come to the CSW 53: "I am so excited on receiving this good news. I am planning to do a community project, which is a campaign against FGM (female genital mutilation) and early pregnancy amongst girls in my community. These two are notorious in my tribal community." Faith herself escaped FGM at the age of 8 when she ran from her own village to a safe house 5 hours away. Today, Faith has been forced to suspend some of her community activities by the illness of her sister. Like many girls in the midst of family illness, Faith is serving as the caretaker for her sister's children. We look forward to seeing Faith in March at CSW 53.

Beth Adamson

--Anglican Women's Empowerment

Girls Will Participate in CSW 53

To demonstrate the Working Group on Girls commitment to girls and highlight the need for girls' issues to be addressed at the international level, girls will have a significant presence at CSW 53. The WGG Task Force on Girls' Participation will ensure that at least 75 girls from the global north and south participate in CSW 53.

The girls who attend CSW 53 will have the opportunity to participate in a Girls' Orientation during the NGO CSW Consultation Day on Sunday, March 1. The Orientation will offer participants time and space to learn about the CSW 53 theme, "The equal sharing of responsibilities of women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS," learn about the CSW process, and connect with girls from other parts of the world. In addition, participants will be able to choose from a large selection of events, which address girls' specific needs and rights.

One of these events is "In Her Shoes: A Girls-Only Workshop," designed to provide students with an interactive and hands-on opportunity to explore the CSW 53 theme. As part of this event, participants will engage

in a cooperative game which will model some of the challenges, conflicts, and potential solutions related to gender equality and responsibility-sharing.

Significantly, the presence of girls at CSW 53 reflects their will to be legitimate partners in the CSW process. Girls have traveled long distances, undergone the arduous process of visa application, sought permission from school administrators to miss classes, as well as spent time reading through information about the CSW 53 theme in to be prepared for the events. It is a sign of hope and progress that girls are present at the CSW. The WGG will be working hard to ensure that these girls are supported and that their ideas, voices, and proposals are heard.

Sharon Joslyn

--International Movement for Fraternal Union Among Races and Peoples (UFER)

Allison Attenello

--Girls Learn International, Inc.

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UNICEF Relieves Burden on Girls' Caregiving for HIV/AIDS

The burden of caregiving in families affected by HIV tends to fall disproportionately on girls and women. In Africa, women currently account for as much as ninety per cent of all caregivers for people living with HIV, and similar trends exist across the developing world. Health and social protection systems in many countries are unable to respond adequately to the needs of people living with HIV. As more working-age women become exposed to HIV, caregiving and breadwinning responsibilities shift to old and young women and girls within the household



Image IMA292: © UNICEF/NYHQ2007-2485/Noorani

A girl assembles an AIDS ribbon at the UNICEF-supported Adolescent-friendly Services Centre in Yaft Abad Health and Medical Centre in the neighbourhood of Yaft Abad, in southwest Tehran, capital of Iran. The centre organizes daily courses on health and hygiene, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmittable diseases (STDs) for medical professionals, social workers, and peer educators.

In partnership with other agencies and stakeholders, UNICEF is working to develop social protection programs and policies to ensure girls' and boys' access to education and health services, and to assist communities and caregivers. One example is a pilot program of cash transfers that UNICEF is supporting in Eastern and Southern Africa: the program provides regular stipends to poor and marginalized families to access basic services and maintain healthy levels of nutrition. Preliminary results indicate that the grants have caused girls and boys to return to school and have improved their nutritional status.

The contributions of girls and women through the provision of community home-based care are a critical element in achieving universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and care and the Millennium Development Goals, particularly Goal 3 on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment and Goal 5 on combating HIV/AIDS, and should be recognized in defining and implementing responses to HIV and AIDS.

However, the impact of these responsibilities on girls is significant. Girls who provide AIDS care are at an increased risk of contacting HIV, as they are often forced to drop out of school and, as a result, become more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and gender-based violence. Caring for ill family members may also be a traumatizing experience for girls, particularly after losing school-based peer networks and facing discrimination and stigma.

Keeping girls in school and ensuring their right to education is instrumental in preventing HIV infection among girls as well as protecting against gender-based violence and against girls' entering inequitable relationships with boys/men, thus improving their long-term economic prospects.

Men and boys can also play a key role. Their engagement is an important aspect of redressing some of society's norms and the unequal power relations between both girls and boys and women and men that result in the uneven distribution of household work and caregiving responsibilities and the denial of girls' rights to education and protection.

UNICEF works to ensure that girls and boys are no longer missing from national AIDS responses around the world. It is critical that the role of girls as caregivers and the impact on their lives is not overlooked.

Mita Gupta

--Gender and Rights Unit, Division of Policy and Practice, UNICEF



The Working Group on Girls in New York

NGOs promoting the institutionalization of the rights of girls within the United Nations system in order to ensure that the UN takes a holistic approach to girls' issues and that UN policies and programs assist girls to develop their full potential.

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ORT Namibia Trains Youth To Help Support Families Affected By AIDS

Since 2004 ORT Namibia with KAYEC Trust, Namibia's leading youth and vocational training NGO, has provided entry-level trade, business, and HIV life skills for school dropouts with poor literacy and numeracy skills. The program, called the Artisan Training for Self Employment (ATSE), operates in two sites in poor rural areas in Namibia. PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) channels the funding through ORT South Africa and USAID.

The KAYEC short term courses teach skills such as bricklaying, plumbing, metal and wood working, computing, and building maintenance. KAYEC is also a major participant in developing



Image IMG19636: © UNICEF/NYHQ2007-1359/Pirozzi
A Grade 4 student writes "I am a girl" and "I love school" on the blackboard during an English class in the primary school in the village of Kigeyo in the Western Province of Rwanda. Half of the school's 1,500 students are girls. UNICEF provides educational supplies and supports teacher-training at the child-friendly school.

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Editorial Committee

Carolyn Donovan -- American Association of University Women

Susan O'Malley -- International Federation of Business and Professional Women

Mary Ann Strain -- Passionists International

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standards for the Namibia Training Authority (NTA), which issues completion certificates that can be used for students to advance in their trade or continue their studies. The target group, 18 to 30 year-old young people and HIV caregivers, has increased their ability to contribute to their households, often affected by HIV. In a 2008 study, more than half of the KAYEC/ORT trainees were earning an income and 20 per cent went on to further education.

The success of the ATSE program offers suggestions for replication of similar youth development activities:

- Specific criteria for target groups must be understood by the project partners and service providers;
- An adaptable tracking system should be built into the project to measure outcomes;
- Strong qualitative data is important in measuring outcomes;
- Vocational training courses should take into consideration current cultural norms but should not be gender exclusive. Some courses may be designed for women but should not keep them in low-paying professions or trades;
- Vulnerable youth in vocational skills courses will most likely need supplemental training in basic life skills such as time and financial management;
- Follow up, such as club meetings, help with resumes, or contacts with the private sector, are invaluable;
- Partnerships between service providers and external support partners, such as local and national government and civil society, help to ensure the success of the program.

Muriel Hertan

--ORT America/World ORT NGO

WGG 'Stands up for Aisha' on Facebook

On January 28, 2009, the three month anniversary of 13-year-old Aisha Duhulow's stoning to death in Somalia, members of the 'Stand up for Aisha' WGG Facebook group changed their profile pictures to a plain image and turned the 'status' on their profile to "Stand up for Aisha."

Aisha Duhulow was raped by three men on the way to visit her grandmother. When her family reported the rape to the authorities, she was accused of adultery and stoned to death in a stadium full of people.

Because the social networking site Facebook.com quickly reaches people all over the world, The Working Group on Girls contacted over 1,000 people from more than 40 countries, including Paraguay, Greece, Ethiopia, Russia, Malawi, Germany, Egypt, Tanzania, Spain, Turkey, Algeria, and Iraq to inform them of Aisha's death and to take action on Facebook.

Ashley Steimer --Loretto Community