

# Action for Girls

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

## WGG Recommendations to Governments

The 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women offers a unique opportunity to review promises made to girls in the Beijing Platform for Action and in the Millennium Declaration to accelerate progress to end violence and discrimination and empower girls. Advancement for women is not sustainable without attention to the rights of girls. Accordingly, the Working Group on Girls offers the following recommendations to governments.

### End Discrimination

- Abolish laws that support discrimination against girls (inheritance, dowry, marriage).
- Reform education by creating rights-based, gender-sensitive curricula, infrastructure and pedagogy designed to promote equality.
- Equip girls with economic tools to achieve economic empowerment.
- Launch public campaigns that seek to eliminate discrimination based on the notion of girls' inferiority and that support girls' full partnership in the household and public spheres.
- Collect, analyze and disseminate data on children disaggregated by sex, age, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity in order to create



School Girls in Menyumbang, Indonesia - J. Foale - Passionists International



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an inclusive gender perspective for planning, implementation and monitoring of government programs and for benchmarking.

### Protect Girls

- Sign, ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.
- Develop gender-responsive budgeting that explicitly allocates monies for programs to end violence against girls, for education and training at all levels and for promoting health and mental health.
- Develop legislation that incorporates the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.
- Invite UNICEF, working in collaboration with UNODC, to identify and replicate best practices across the globe that decriminalize girls victimized by prostitution and prosecute perpetrators.
- Provide gender-sensitive, community-based reintegration programs for children who have been trafficked, commercially exploited or involved in armed conflict.

### Empower Girls

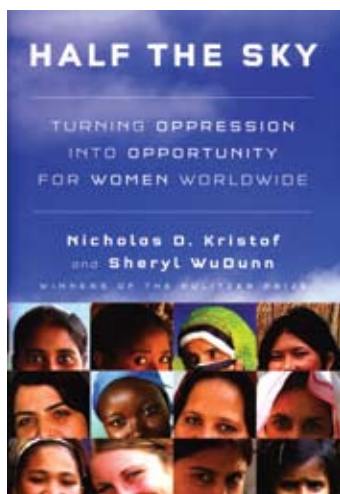
- Remove all barriers to education for girls including school fees, discriminatory attitudes and curricula and ensure their safety in and out of school.
- Increase girls' competence through education and training that includes social, political and economic empowerment to prepare them for their critical roles in their families and communities.
- Promote the participation and empowerment of girls by creating safe spaces for them to speak and to obtain assistance and by strengthening the role of civil society, especially girls' organizations, in tackling gender stereotypes.
- 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, and ensure that programmes are holistic and include measures to increase men's and boys' responsibility for care-giving.
- Monitor and evaluate macro-economic policies and social spending to ensure girls' needs are met.

-- Based on the WGG Written Statement for CSW 54—E/CN.6/2010/NGO/16.

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## Review of *Half the Sky*

**H**alf the Sky: *Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* is essential reading for people concerned with the rights of girls. As the title indicates, Pulitzer Prize winning authors Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn believe that discrimination against women and girls could be an opportunity if the public were educated about sex trafficking, rape, and maternal/infant mortality. In their words, “the plight of girls is no more a tragedy than an opportunity” (xviii).



Empowering girls through education, the authors suggest, elevates not only women but also their children and improves the economic performance of developing countries. The World Bank estimates that for every 1,000 girls who get one more year of education, two fewer will die in childbirth. In addition, some in the military believe empowering girls could disempower terrorists.

But people need to know the extent of discrimination against women and girls and become involved. The authors conservatively estimate that there are at least 3 million woman and girls who are enslaved in the sex trade. Girls as young as 8 are kidnapped by sex traffickers and forced to become prostitutes, often being given addictive drugs to prevent them from running away. Kristof and WuDunn believe that prostitution should be illegal throughout the world because legal brothels tend to attract forced prostitution of girls.

The chapters “Rule by Rape” and “The Shame of “Honor”” are concerned with violence against girls and women, including acid attacks, forced early marriage and fistula, the rape of children in war and honor killings and rapes. The statistics are appalling: 21 percent of South African women report that they were raped before they were 15; it is becoming increasingly common for South Asian men to hurl sulfuric acid in the faces of girls who have rejected them; Ethiopian law allows that a man who marries the woman he previously raped will not be prosecuted. One sixteen-year-old soldier in the Congo stated, “If we see girls, it is our right .... We can violate them.”

Concerning girl child mortality, Kristof and WuDunn use the term “gendercide” to emphasize that “it appears that more girls have been killed in the last fifty years, precisely because they were girls, than men were killed in all of the battles of the twentieth century” (xvii). This is because of sex-selective abortion, girls not receiving medical care, and the vanishing of girls.

*Half the Sky* is full of descriptions of what “social entrepreneurs” have done and suggestions for what needs to be done to improve conditions for girls. Social entrepreneurs offer new approaches and create their own contexts by starting a new organization or movement to address a problem in a creative way. Kristof and WuDunn also stress the importance of young people spending time in developing countries to understand the problems of women and girls. They propose a Teach for the World in which young people could support girls’ education.

*Half the Sky* ends with a chapter on “What You Can Do” with “Four Steps You Can Take in the Next Ten Minutes” and a list of organizations supporting women and girls with websites to further activism.

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

## GA Resolution on the Girl Child Approved

Each year, the General Assembly allocates to its Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Affairs Committee, commonly referred to as the “Third Committee,” agenda items relating to a range of social, humanitarian affairs and human rights issues that affect people all over the world.

The Committee examines human rights questions, discusses the advancement of women, the protection of children, indigenous issues, the treatment of refugees, the promotion of fundamental freedoms through the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, and the promotion of the right to self-determination.

The resolution on the Girl Child (<http://www.un.org/ga/third/pr.shtml>), recommended by the Third Committee and passed by the General Assembly on 18 December 2009, urges Governments to implement the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI). It also calls on them to place enhanced emphasis on quality education for the girl child, including

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catch-up and literacy education for those who did not receive formal education, and to recognize the equal right of girls to education. States are also urged to improve the situation of girls lacking nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, access to basic health care and shelter, among other things.

According to a UN Press release, States will be asked to ensure that applicable requirements of the International Labour Organization for girls' and boys' employment are respected and effectively enforced and to develop gender-sensitive measures to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, including commercial sexual exploitation, slavery-like practices, forced and bonded labour, trafficking and hazardous forms of child labour. Further, States will be called on to address the factors that encourage early and forced marriage and to deplore sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children in humanitarian crises, including cases involving humanitarian workers and peacekeepers.

This year, the NGO Committee on UNICEF, Working Group on Girls, was able to contribute material to the negotiations on several documents. With help from the Research and Writing Task Force, the Advocacy Task Force began to develop position papers and talking points in June of 2009. After submitting statistics and rationale for making girls visible for the July ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review in Geneva, the task force developed good working relationships with several member States. The conversation continued during the months of negotiation on the biennial resolution on the girl child and the resolution on the rights of the child. Our friends in the missions were grateful for our help, and we were impressed with their hard work and the outcomes.

Mary Jo Toll  
-- Sisters of Notre Dame  
Carolyn Donovan  
-- AAUW

## Ms. Mayanja Speaks About Girls and the New Entity

In response to the Resolution adopted by the 63rd General Assembly in September 2009 to create a new gender equality entity headed by a new Under Secretary-General, members of the Working Group on Girls (WGG) Advocacy Task Force met on 16 December 2009 with Ms. Rachael Mayanja, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, and her colleagues, Patience Stephens and Patricia Cortez, to ensure that the needs, rights and participation of girls are recognized within the UN system.

that girls will be fully included in the new entity. Ms Mayanja explained that the WGG could not further influence the design of the new entity, but WGG members could have an influential role in lobbying member states to support financially the new entity. The Report of the Secretary-General was published on 20 January 2010 (ref no: A/64/588), shortly after the visit to Ms. Mayanja. The new entity includes girls fully, has greater authority and has the ability to hold UN entities accountable. Girls are mentioned several times and the entity will add value by providing capacity to meet the need for a strong voice for women and girls at the global, regional and local levels.

The Secretary-General's Report develops a comprehensive proposal, based on a composite model. It recommends that the new gender entity be a subsidiary of the General Assembly and report to the Commission on the Status of Women. It proposes the consolidation of four UN entities: the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

Winifred Doherty  
-- Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd



Under the leadership of Mary Jo Toll, The Working Group on Girls has a very active and dynamic Advocacy Task Force that lobbies heads of regional groups, member states and UN agencies for the implementation of girls' rights and for their participation at the United Nations and in national legislation and policy.

Members of the Advocacy Task Force were warmly received and had a frank and informative exchange of views with Ms Mayanja and her colleagues, who assured the WGG

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## Girls Discuss Rights on UNICEF's Voices of Youth

**E**ducation and awareness about girl's and women's rights should be at the heart of efforts to achieve gender equality, according to members of the UNICEF Voices of Youth online discussion forum.

According to one 15-year-old girl from the United States, "We have to win the hearts and minds of people who don't believe in gender equality." She says, "I think we should raise awareness about gender equality. Not just equality written in the books (laws are important, but they have limited power)."

Voices of Youth is UNICEF's website for children and young people where they can learn about their rights and speak out on issues that are important to them. In preparation for the 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on March 1-12, 2010, Voices of Youth worked with the UNICEF Gender and Rights Unit to create a learning module about girls' and women's rights and to host an online discussion where children and young people can voice their opinions. In addition to the online discussion, coordinators representing UNICEF Rural Voices of Youth in 15 countries are organizing discussions in rural areas that do not have access to the Internet.

One of the questions explored online is whether there are differences between girls and boys. The participants agree that everyone has the same rights. A 15-year-old girl from Ecuador states, "We're equal and different, have the same rights, and like every other human being we like some stuff and dislike some other ... not a big deal!"

An Israeli 16-year-old said that although it is important to include boys and men in the discussion, she warned against too much confrontation and competition: "Protesting against guys won't solve your problem, equality will. To bring equality to the world you have to show you are equal to guys and guys are equal to you. By saying you are against guys you make us unequal!"

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Please address questions about the articles to the authors at [wgs@girlsrights.org](mailto:wgs@girlsrights.org) Reprinting of articles is encouraged with credit given to *Action for Girls*. We welcome articles by NGOs.

For more information, please visit UNICEF Voices of Youth at <http://www.unicef.org/voy> or contact Voices of Youth at [voy@unicef.org](mailto:voy@unicef.org).

Maria Cristina Gallegos and Vidar Ekehaug

-- Adolescent Development and Participation Unit, UNICEF

## Facts on Violence and Discrimination Against Girls

**Girls begin life from a position of disadvantage that continues to plague them.**

- One-third of girls are not registered at birth.
- 64 million women aged 20-24 in the developing world reported they were married before age 18.
- Girls and young women account for 75% of the 15-24 year-olds infected with HIV.
- Girls account for 55% of the out-of-school population.

**Girls continue to be subjected to violence and exploitation at home and in the public sphere.**

- Girls are subjected to harassment and abuse by classmates and teachers.
- Two million girls aged 5-15 are initiated into the commercial sex industry each year.
- More than 100 million girls, between 5 and 17 years old, are involved in child labour.

**Cultural norms and gender stereotypes are at the root of gender inequality.**

- Girls are routinely treated as inferior to boys, limiting their potential.
- Cultural preference for sons has resulted in over 100 million missing girls due to female foeticide, infanticide, malnutrition and neglect.
- Genital cutting has impacted more than 70 million girls and women, violating their human rights and their physical and psychological integrity.

<sup>1</sup>Plan. (2009). *Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls 2009*, p. 38

<sup>2</sup>UNICEF. (2009). *The State of the World's Children: Special Edition*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>Plan. (2007). *Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls 2007*, p.8.

<sup>4</sup>UN Millennium Development Goals, End Poverty 2015: Make it Happen, "Fact Sheet for Goal 3" downloaded November 17, 2009 <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2008highlevel/pdf/newsroom/Goal%203%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>Rafferty, Y. (2007). *Children for Sale: Child trafficking in Southeast Asia*. *Child Abuse Review*, 16, 401-422.

<sup>6</sup>IOL. (2009). *Give girls a chance: Tracking child labour, a key to the future*, p. xi.

<sup>7</sup>O'Reilly, P. (2001). *Learning to be a girl*. In *Educating Young Adolescent Girls*. (P. O'Reilly, E. P. Penn, & K. de Marrais (Eds.), pp. 11- 28. NJ: Erlbaum.

<sup>8</sup>Plan. (2009), p. 37.

<sup>9</sup>UNICEF. (2009), *State of the World's Children 2009*, p. 12.