



~ Girls With Differing Abilities ~

Fact Sheet: August 20, 2011

The Working Group on Girls (WGG) is dedicated to collaborating with girls to promote the rights and status of girls in all aspects of their lives. WGG has undertaken a review of the literature around girls with differing abilities and seeks to promote a paradigm shift towards full inclusion of girls with differing abilities while actively removing society's barriers to their success. WGG's effort in advocating for girls with differing abilities coincides with the focus of the Resolution of the Rights of the Child for the 66th session of the General Assembly. WGG seeks to highlight the UNICEF goal for children with differing abilities to reflect the unique need of girls for inclusion in mainstream society. WGG seeks to center attention on girls with differing abilities as they are more vulnerable to violence, rape and contracting HIV/AIDS, especially during times of crisis and civil unrest. They are also less likely to have opportunities to achieve their full potential in family, in school and in society at large.

WGG seeks to accomplish this work through raising awareness and advocating for key policies, to enable girls with differing abilities to reach their full potential with integration into their community. WGG promotes equal rights and equal opportunities for girls with differing abilities, and seeks to ensure that they are valued and equally accepted as people and as contributors to society. WGG objects to stigmatizing girls with differing abilities insofar as they have varying strengths, weaknesses, abilities and deficits, thus deserving equal respect and access to opportunities.

Furthermore, WGG fosters the potential leadership role of girls with differing abilities to partner with us and other stakeholders of the international UN community to help girls with differing abilities achieve their individual and collective goals and aspirations. WGG seeks to champion disability rights and promote a framework of inclusion of girls with differing abilities in all aspects of life, rather than one that focuses on their impairments.

WGG gratefully acknowledges the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), UNDESA, UNICEF, UNESCO, UN Women CSW, The World Bank, The World Health Organization (WHO), the USA Agency for International Development (USAID), International Disability Alliance (IDA) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as major sources of information and support as WGG developed this paper.

KEY ISSUES:

Absence of Reliable Statistics:

According to the latest World Disabilities Report by WHO and World Bank, there is a lack of institutionalized systems worldwide for the systematic collection of data to measure disabilities at large. Because of the especially high level of exclusion and invisibility of girls with differing abilities, the figures pertaining to this specific and most-at-risk population sector are virtually non-existent.

- According to UNESCO, there are no reliable data on the number of children [and girls] with disabilities globally. Some estimates put their number at some 200 million world-wide, with around four in five million children with disabilities living in developing countries. However, actual numbers are likely higher due to wide-scale under-recognition and under-reporting ⁽¹⁾.
- As indicates UNICEF, 30 per cent of street youths are disabled ⁽²⁾. USAID adds that women with disabilities comprise 10% of all women worldwide. Approximately 300 million women and girls around the world have an intellectual, mental, sensory and/or physical disability. Globally, women and girls make up three-fourths of the disabled people in low and middle income countries. Between 65% and 70% of these women live in rural areas ⁽³⁾.

- According to the World Bank-WHO Disability World Report, there are over one billion people with disabilities in the world, of whom between 110-190 million experience very significant functional impairments. This corresponds to about 15 per cent of the world population; this figure is increasing through population growth, medical advances and the ageing process, says the World Health Organization (WHO)⁽⁴⁾.

Violence against Children and specifically Girls with Differing Abilities:

Physical, psychological and sexual violence, against children, and specifically girls, with differing abilities, occurs at alarming rates- in absence of a legal framework to prevent it- within families, in institutions, and throughout society.

- OECD studies suggest that 39-68% of girls and 16-30% of boys with intellectual or developmental disabilities will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday ⁽⁵⁾. According to CRPD, research indicates that violence against children with disabilities occurs at annual rates at least 1.7 times greater than for their non-disabled peers ⁽⁶⁾.
- Women and girls with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to abuse. A small 2004 survey in Orissa, India found that virtually all of the women and girls with disabilities were beaten at home, 25 per cent of women with intellectual disabilities had been raped and 6 per cent of women with disabilities had been forcibly sterilized, adds CRPD ⁽⁷⁾.
- Girls and women with disabilities are exposed to sexual violence and rape and, consequently, to HIV/AIDS ⁽⁸⁾. Rapists target women [and girls and boys] with disabilities as they are unable to run away if they are physically impaired, scream if hearing impaired and unable to speak, and identify the rapist later if visually impaired ⁽⁹⁾. Disabled girls are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted ⁽¹⁰⁾.
- In Africa, the vulnerability of women [and girls] with disabilities to sexual violence, rape and HIV is aggravated by a well-known myth that sex with a disabled person will cure AIDS- presumably a twisted version of the so-called "virgin cure" that is based on the common misconception that people with disabilities have to be virgins ⁽¹¹⁾.
- A form of violence against women [and girls] that is creating disability is female genital mutilation (FGM) which can cause infertility, sexual dysfunction and serious ongoing medical conditions. Although beginning to be outlawed in some countries (MS. Magazine, Vol. VII, No. 6), FGM continues to threaten millions of women [and girls] and has been identified as a priority for action by the World Health Organization and UNICEF ⁽¹²⁾.

Discrimination:

Evidence shows that discrimination against girls with differing abilities is extremely prevalent throughout society, most notably in developing countries.

- As reported by International Disability Alliance (IDA), often girls and women with disabilities face multiple forms of discrimination on the basis of gender and disability. As stated by General Assembly Resolution S23/3, girls and women of all ages with any form of disability are generally among the more vulnerable and marginalized of society ⁽¹³⁾.
- Comparative studies on disability legislation shows that only 45 countries have anti-discrimination and other disability-specific laws, notes CRPD ⁽¹⁴⁾. Around the world, disabled [girls and] women are subjected to involuntary sterilization, pressured to or required to seek abortions and denied appropriate health care and assistance during pregnancy and childbirth ⁽¹⁵⁾.
- When infected with HIV/AIDS, girls and women with disabilities are not only discriminated against on the ground of the disease, but also for being women as well as for having a disability ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Access Barriers to Healthcare:

Children, and especially girls with differing abilities, are often excluded from their rightful access to health care services, notably in developing countries.

- Mortality for children with disabilities may be as high as 80 per cent in countries where under-five mortality as a whole has decreased below 20 per cent, says the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, adding that in some cases it seems as if children are being "weeded out" ⁽¹⁷⁾. In developing countries, there is a higher reported mortality rate

for girls and women with disabilities due to neglect, lack of medical care, and less access to food or related resources ⁽¹⁸⁾.

- Children with disabilities in poor developing countries often have little to no access to health care ⁽¹⁹⁾. Many maternal health facilities around the world lack staff with knowledge of providing care to pregnant women with disabilities, and information on the topic is scarce ⁽²⁰⁾.
- Women with disabilities, of all ages, often have difficulty with physical access to health services. [Girls and] women with mental disabilities are particularly vulnerable, while there is limited understanding, in general, of the broad range of risks to mental health to which they are disproportionately susceptible as a result of gender discrimination, violence, poverty, armed conflict, dislocation and other forms of social deprivation⁽²¹⁾.
- According to the World Bank, women [and girls] with disabilities face unique challenges in preventing HIV infection, due to the heightened risk of gender-based violence, lack of access to reproductive health care services, and low awareness of mother-to-child HIV transmission. Effective strategies to combat diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria include the provision of health education, prevention and promotion; however, this information is often not available in formats accessible to persons with varying types of disabilities ⁽²²⁾.

Access Barriers to Education:

Girls and children with differing abilities are often excluded from their legitimate right to access to education, especially in developing countries.

- Less than five per cent of children and young persons with disabilities have access to education and training, and girls and young women face significant barriers to participating in social life and development ⁽²³⁾.
- It is estimated that of the 75 million children of primary school age who are out of school, one third are children with disabilities ⁽²⁴⁾.
- UNESCO notes that Ninety per cent of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school ⁽²⁵⁾. In the OECD countries, students with disabilities in higher education remain under-represented, although their numbers are on the increase, says the OECD ⁽²⁶⁾.

Poverty as a Cause and Result of Disability:

Evidence shows that there is a highest incidence of disability among population stricken by poverty.

- As noted by the World Disability Report, disability is not just a medical issue- although still regarded as such by many countries- but is a social issue with large impact on poverty levels. Children and girls with differing abilities are predicted to experience a higher level of poverty with increased costs of catastrophic health expenditures, which pushes them into deeper poverty. WHO, UNICEF and country experts project that as childhood mortality decreases around the world that there will be a rise in numbers of children and girls with differing abilities.
- The World Bank estimates that 20 per cent of the world's poorest people are disabled, and tend to be regarded in their own communities as the most disadvantaged ⁽²⁷⁾.
- It is estimated that of the world's poorest people, meaning those who live on less than one dollar a day and who lack access to basic necessities such as food, clean water, clothing and shelter, 1 in 5 is a person with disabilities ⁽²⁸⁾.

Millennium Development Goals:

The achievement of the MDGs is highly impacted by the exclusion of large marginalized populations with disabilities, most notably girls and boys, and women, from the development agenda.

- The high numbers of persons with disabilities who are disproportionately represented among the world's most marginalized groups have a profound significance with respect to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals ⁽²⁹⁾.
- The Millennium Development Goals, in fact, cannot be achieved if persons with disabilities are not included in these efforts ⁽³⁰⁾.

PROMISING DEVELOPMENTS:

A New Social Approach. According to the most recent June 2011 World Disability Report by the World Health Organization and the World Bank, there has been a paradigm shift in approaches to disability. In recent decades, the move has been away from a medical understanding towards a social understanding. Disability arises from the interaction between people with a health condition and their environment. CRPD reflects this emphasis on removing environmental barriers which prevent inclusion.

Strong Rate of Success by Women with Differing Abilities. New Zealand Rehabilitation International/World Institute on Disability reports a growing phenomenon of small business development by disabled entrepreneurs in Africa, Asia and Latin America noting that “disabled women are demonstrating a strong rate of success in self-employment, sometimes surpassing that of disabled men.”

India Proposed Law Gives Disabled People Right to Fertility, Prohibits Forced Abortions, and Secures their Right to Political Participation. As reported by Women’s United Nations Report Network (WUNRN), a new law- Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill 2011- was proposed last July 3, 2011 in New Delhi, India.

Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA) Submission to UN Special Rapporteurs on “Forced Sterilization of Disabled Women and Girls”, June 2011, requests that the Special Rapporteurs urgently intervene to prohibit the non-therapeutic and forced sterilization of women and girls with disabilities in Australia.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

WGG urges the General Assembly 66 and member states to put forward the following initiatives:

- 1. PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE GIRL CHILD AND CHILDREN WITH DIFFERING ABILITIES THROUGH KEY POLICY MAKING, A BINDING LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION:** WGG strongly recommends the promotion and protection of the rights of children and girls with differing abilities to ensure their full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Most notably, WGG promotes:
 - The Right to Access to comprehensive Health Care of the Girl Child and Children with Differing Abilities.
 - The Right to Access to Education and Advanced Technology of the Girl Child and Children with Differing Abilities.
 - The Right to Social Justice and Full Inclusion in All Aspects of Society of the Girl Child and Children with Differing Abilities.
 - The Right to Living with their Family and not being institutionalized of the Girl Child and Children with Differing Abilities.
 - The Right to Full Legal Protection against Violence, Discrimination and Abuse of the Girl Child and Children with Differing Abilities.
 - The Right to Equal Opportunity Employment for Youth with Differing Abilities.
- 2. INTEGRATE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND SPECIFICALLY GIRLS WITH DIFFERING ABILITIES TO ACHIEVE MDGS:** WGG promotes the full inclusion of girls, boys and youth with disabilities as agents and beneficiaries of economic development, and adheres to General Assembly Resolution 64/131 on Guidelines and Principles for the Development of Disability Statistics. WGG underscores that MDG success will not occur if girls and children with differing abilities are not targeted. Action must scale up and girls and children with differing abilities must be actively included in program design and well defined outcomes if MDGs are to be achieved by 2015.
- 3. COLLECTION OF DISAGGREGATED DISABILITY DATA:** WGG encourages data collection and classification by gender and age range, given the virtual non-existence of statistics related to girls with differing abilities as a group, and as they are a sector especially at risk, thus calling for special attention and care. This is in alignment with, and reaffirms the recommendation on improvement of disabilities data

collection by both the Secretary-General's report on the MDGs and the UN Inter-Agency Support Group (IASG) Strategy and Action Plan.

4. **HIV/AIDS ACTION PLANNING AND EDUCATION:** WGG promotes HIV/AIDS education for children, and specifically girls, with differing abilities for prevention against this disease and its consequences, since they are especially at risk to contract it, and are generally less exposed to sexual information than their non-disabled peers. As noted above, girls with differing abilities are more at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS due to influencing factors, such as lack of education, social isolation, poverty, and most importantly, overexposure to rape and sexual abuse.
5. **RURAL SETTING:** WGG supports mainstream action planning around children and specifically girls with differing abilities who live in rural settings as they are identified by experts and per WGG's reports as being at greater risk for violence, and early death.
6. **OUTREACH:** WGG encourages the development of inclusive outreach strategies to reduce the social isolation experienced by marginalized children, and specifically girls, with differing abilities.
7. **PEER SUPPORT GROUPS:** WGG promotes the creation and expansion of strong networks and peer groups, both national and international, to enable children, and specifically girls, with differing abilities to support each other in their efforts to join the world.
8. **PARENT AND GUARDIAN EMPOWERMENT:** WGG supports the development of creative, targeted outreach strategies addressed to families with disabilities in an effort to empower parents, so they understand their daughters with differing abilities do belong in school. To this effect, mainstream media campaigns that include disability content and images can be an efficacious tool to encourage parents to send their daughters to school.
9. **SEX EDUCATION:** WGG reinforces the development and implementation of sex education programs for children and girls with differing abilities, designed in a culturally sensitive way, given that girls and children with differing abilities have less access to informal sources of sex education than their non-disabled peers.
10. **SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS:** WGG fosters the creation of scholarship programs, at the local and global level, specifically designed for children and girls with differing abilities to enable them to cover fees and transportation costs, as a way to provide an important incentive for school enrollment. This is an important measure given the fact that children, and specifically girls, with differing abilities are overrepresented in poor families and notably in developing countries.
11. **"NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US":** WGG encourages including children, and specifically girls, with differing abilities to be at the planning table, as programs are developed and implemented in order to respond to their special needs, thus encouraging them to play a leadership and participatory role.
12. **MAINSTREAMING AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:** WGG promotes the incorporation of women and men of all ages with differing abilities into the fields of education, health, community planning and other public services in order to provide girls and boys with differing abilities, as well as their parents, with role models. For this, scholarships should be provided to women and men of all ages with differing abilities to enroll in teacher and other public service training programs; additionally, incentives should be given to inclusive institutions that hire them.
13. **EMERGENCY PLANNING AND RESPONSE:** WGG underscores the need for action planning around children and girls with differing abilities in disasters, crisis and civil unrest.
14. **FINANCING:** WGG highlights the creation of special financial programs to support the educational, health and economic needs of children and girls with differing abilities living in rural, isolated and impoverished areas, which are at greater risk of violence and removed from health and educational centers.
15. **DIFFERING ABILITIES: TERMINOLOGY:** WGG notes that there is widespread acceptance of the word 'disability' in the UN policy statements. WGG promotes efforts to use the concept of "differing abilities" as disability may potentially marginalize children and girls with functional limitations rather than promote their success.

The Working Group on Girls represents more than 100 organizations around the world promising to advance the rights and status of girls in achieving their full potential.

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End Notes: Appendix to WGG Fact Sheet Document

1. UNESCO, Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the marginalized, p. 181.
2. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Fact Sheet, web page: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/pdfs/factsheet.pdf> (last visited July 21, 2001)
3. USAID Women in Development, Women with Disabilities, web page: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/gender/wwd_statistics.html
4. World Health Organization-World Bank Report on Disability. Factsheet: main messages and recommendations, available at http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report (last visited July 20, 2011).
5. USAID Women in Development, Women with Disabilities, web page: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/gender/wwd_statistics.html
6. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Fact Sheet, web page: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/pdfs/factsheet.pdf> (last visited July 21, 2001)
7. Ibid.
8. Center for Women Policy Studies, February 2011, Barbara Faye Waxman Fiduccia Papers on Women and Girls with Disabilities 2011, web page: http://www.centerwomenpolicy.org/programs/waxmanfiduccia/BFWFP_TheRightsofWomenWithDisabilitiesinAfrica (last visited August 20, 2001).
9. H Kotze 'A situational analysis of the state and status of disability issues and rights in Southern Africa: OSISA. Project on Disability Rights and Law Schools' (2010)51 commissioned and funded by the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (Osisa).
10. Violent Acts Against Disabled Women, DAWN Toronto Survey, 1986, website: <http://www.dawn.thot.net/fact.html> (last visited August 20, 2011).
11. H Kotze 'A situational analysis of the state and status of disability issues and rights in Southern Africa: OSISA. Project on Disability Rights and Law Schools' (2010)51 commissioned and funded by the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (Osisa).
12. Rehabilitation International and the World Institute on Disability Fact Sheet, under Dawn Ontario Disabled Women's Network, web page: <http://dawn.thot.net/fact.html> (last visited August 20, 2011).
13. 'Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action', General Assembly Resolution S23/3 of 10 June 2000, annex, paragraph 63.
14. United Nations Enable- Development and Human Rights for All; Women and Girls with Disabilities; Using Both: the gender and the disability lens, web page: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1514> (last visited July 20, 2011).
15. Rehabilitation International and the World Institute on Disability Fact Sheet, under Dawn Ontario Disabled Women's Network, web page: <http://dawn.thot.net/fact.html> (last visited August 20, 2011).
16. Human Rights Watch Report (August 2010) 25, in H Kotze 'A situational analysis of the state and status of disability issues and rights in Southern Africa: OSISA.
17. United Nations Enable, International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Some Facts about Persons with Disabilities, web page: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/pdfs/factsheet.pdf> (last visited July 20, 2011).
18. United States Agency for International Development (USAID) USAID Office of Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment: What's New, 7/22/2011
19. United Nations Enable, International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Some Facts about Persons with Disabilities, web page: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/pdfs/factsheet.pdf> (last visited July 20, 2011).
20. United States Agency for International Development (USAID) USAID Office of Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment: What's New, 7/22/2011
21. Violent Acts Against Disabled Women, Dawn Toronto Survey, 1986, website: <http://www.dawn.thot.net/fact.html> (last visited August 20, 2011).
22. World Health Organization-World Bank Report on Disability. Factsheet: main messages and recommendations, available at http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report (last visited July 20, 2011).
23. [Report by Secretary- General of the United Nations on the Implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled, A/59/169](#), paragraph 79.
24. UNESCO, Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the marginalized, p.181.
25. Ibid.
26. United Nations Enable, International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Some Facts about Persons with Disabilities, web page: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/pdfs/factsheet.pdf> (last visited July 20, 2011).
27. World Health Organization-World Bank Report on Disability. Factsheet: main messages and recommendations, available at http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report (last visited July 20, 2011).
28. United Nations Enable, Mainstreaming disability in the development agenda, web page: www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=708
29. United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, The UN Development Goals and Disabilities, web page: www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1470 (last visited July 20, 2011).
30. Ibid.

Addendum: Girls With Disabilities/Differing Abilities Fact Sheet

Some important links to further understanding of girls with differing abilities:

- Working Group on Girls: Girls with Differing Abilities Fact Sheet: www.girlsrights.org
- *World Health/World Bank report on Disabilities, 2011*
www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/index.html
- *Indicators for boys and girls by country may be found at* www.childinfo.org
- *UNICEF: Placeholder.....report on children with disabilities*
- Annual Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children". which may be found at:

http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/document/a-66-227_382

- WUNRN
<http://www.wunrn.com>
- European Disability Forum
http://www.edf-feph.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=22112&thebloc=27908
2nd Manifesto on the Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities in the European Union Manifesto Direct Links in English, French, & Spanish, follow text. 'Promoting the equal rights of women and girls with disabilities is one of the **most important aspects of the work of the European Disability Forum** and I am convinced that this manifesto will be a key tool for ensuring the full respect of these rights in practice' says **EDF President, Yannis Vardakastanis**. This second manifesto is needed following the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is the first human rights convention that has been adopted and concluded by the EU itself, in addition to its Member States. EDF is honoured that the European Women's Lobby (EWL), of which EDF is a full member, has endorsed this manifesto. Their support is crucial in order to **dismantle the multiple discrimination that women and girls with disabilities still face in many areas of life**. EDF encourages policy makers as well as all persons involved in the disability movement – and elsewhere – to make use of this manifesto. By **mainstreaming gender and disability into all policies we are able to together create a society where discrimination no longer has a place: a society based on respect of the human and civil rights for all persons**.
[2nd Manifesto on the Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities in the European Union: A toolkit for activists and policymakers](#)

[2º Manifiesto de los Derechos de las Mujeres y Niñas con Discapacidad de la Unión Europea: una Herramienta para Activistas y Actores Políticos](#)

[2^{ème} Manifeste sur les Droits des Femmes et des Filles handicapées de l'Union européenne: Un outil pour les activistes et les responsables politiques](#)