



**Working
Group on
Girls** NGO Committee
on UNICEF

Out of the MDG Shadows: *Girls and Why They Matter*

Girls have rights not just because they are the women of tomorrow, but because they are citizens today.¹ Investment in girls reaps dividends for entire families and communities and is essential to national development. Yet girls continue to suffer from discrimination, which puts their lives and our future at risk.

MDG 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Gaps in Progress:

- Poverty heavily impacts girls who are expected to help maintain families by assuming childcare, household tasks.
- Domestic work while regarded as safe by some, in reality conceals a wide range of abuse and exploitation, including physical, psychological and sexual violence.²

Recommendations:

- Involve girls in appropriate decision-making regarding what affects their lives.
- Disaggregate data by sex, socioeconomic status, and age. This is crucial if we are to focus attention on those currently left behind (the bottom quintile) and close the widening the gap between rich and poor³

MDG 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education

Gaps in Progress:

- Sixty-two million girls are not in primary school.
- An estimated 100 million more girls will fail to complete their primary education.

Recommendations:

- Undertake systematic reform of education creating rights-based, gender-sensitive curricula, infrastructure and pedagogy designed to promote equality.
- Remove financial barriers to girls' education, including secondary and tertiary education by providing scholarships, cash transfers, and eliminating school fees.

MDG 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

Gaps in Progress:

- Social norms and gender stereotypes limit girls' opportunities to develop their full potential and contribute to their societies.
- Two million girls aged 5-15 are initiated into the commercial sex industry each year.⁴

Recommendations:

- 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.
- Scale up strategies to encourage girls' participation in science and technology and promote educational programs which prepare girls to participate in decision-making at all levels⁵

MDG 4: Reduce Child Mortality

Gaps in Progress:

- Cultural preference for sons has resulted in over 100 million missing girls due to female foeticide, infanticide, malnutrition and neglect.⁶
- One-third of girls are not registered at birth.⁷

¹ Marta Santos Pais, *Address to the NGO Committee on UNICEF Working Group on Girls*, 3 June 2010,

² Plan, (2009) *Because I am a Girl*, 2009, p.6.

³ A/64/665, para 72.

⁴ Yvonne Rafferty, (2007). Children for Sale: Child trafficking in Southeast Asia. *Child Abuse Review*, 16, 401-422.

⁵ E/CN.6/2010/L.5, para 10a

⁶ Plan, (2009), p. 37.

⁷ Plan, (2009), p. 38

Recommendations:

- Register all babies at birth.
- Ensure that public health programs track the health and development of girls.

MDG 5 Maternal Health

Gaps in Progress:

- Adolescent mothers are two to five times more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth than women in their twenties.
- Pregnancy-related deaths are the leading cause of mortality for girls aged 15-19.⁸

Recommendations:

- Continue to educate societies regarding the harm caused by early and forced marriage.
- Enforce, and where necessary develop, laws which prohibit child-marriage.

MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Other Diseases

Gaps in Progress:

- In addition to girls' greater biological vulnerability to HIV, their low economic and social status make them susceptible to multiple forms of violence and infection.⁹
- Neglect and malnutrition contributes to girls' vulnerability to diseases and illnesses, especially anemia and malaria.

Recommendations:

- Create an enabling environment for the empowerment of girls; strengthen their economic independence; and protect their human rights so that they can protect themselves from HIV infection.¹⁰
- Allocate resources for girls' health programs, including adolescent health and HIV/AIDS.

MDG 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability:

Gaps in Progress:

- Climate change will have particularly negative impacts on girls who will have to expend more time and energy to collect firewood and carry water.¹¹

Recommendations:

- Invest in infrastructure. Construct ample water systems that will ease girls' domestic burdens.

MDG 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development:

Gaps in Progress:

- Girls are still generally less educated, less healthy, and less free than their male peers. In 1970, 22 of the world's richest countries pledged to spend 0.7 per cent of their national income on aid. 38 years later, only 5 countries have kept that promise. Invest in girls!
- Equitable participation of girls in public and private spheres has not been achieved in many countries..

Recommendations:

- Build partnerships with civil-society, which mobilize the assets and capacities of marginalized girls and respect their rights.¹²
- Encourage girls' participation and agency. They are key actors in promoting gender equality and their own empowerment.¹³

Girls are the key to meeting the promise of the MDGs. What is needed is the will to act—the will of governments and the international community to prioritize the achievement of gender equality and promotion of girls' and women's rights.

⁸ Miriam Temin and Ruth Levine, *Start with a Girl: A New Agenda for Global Health*, (2009) Washington DC: Centre for Global Development.

⁹ UNIFEM, *Together We Must End Violence against Women and Girls and HIV&AIDS*, p.14

¹⁰ E/CN.6/2010/L.2 Rev.1

¹¹ UNICEF UK, (2008) *Climate Change Report*, p. 21.

¹² UNICEF, *Girl Power and Potential*. p. 3.

¹² Miriam Temin and Ruth Levine, (2009).*Start With a Girl: A New Agenda for Global Health*. Washington D.C.: Centre for Global Development.

¹³UNICEF, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 12.