

girls' rights gazette



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Thursday 11 October 2012

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD

Photo: Plan



A young girl at school in Niger with 11 October written on her blackboard, after the United Nations declared this the "International Day of the Girl Child" **SEE PAGE 5**

Because I am a Girl...

"Born in one of the poorest regions of the world, I am one of the most disadvantaged people on Earth.

Because I am a Girl, I will have fewer chances at every stage of life. I am less likely to go to school than my brothers.

Because I am a Girl, I am likely to be

forced to marry early, to a man two, three or even four times my age; to be subjected to violence, and have my sexual rights controlled by others. Because I am a Girl, I am too easy to ignore.

But I am also a symbol of hope, Because I am a Girl. With a good

education, I can in turn educate my community, and my country. I will earn more in the future, marry later and have fewer, healthier children.

I have the right to this education, and I have the power to break the cycle of poverty forever, Because I am a Girl.

You can help me, and four million girls like me, achieve our dreams. Because I am a Girl, I want to go to school, to learn the skills I need to succeed in life. I want to escape a life of poverty and help make a better future for everyone.

If you believe in me, and millions of

girls like me, raise your hand now."

This is the story of millions of girls living in poverty around the world. Help them escape this life and achieve their dreams. With your support, they can realise their potential.

www.raiseyourhandnow.com

Too young to wed: Working together to end child marriage

DR. BABATUNDE OSOTIMEHIN
Executive Director of UNFPA

Child marriage is commonplace in many countries worldwide, even where laws forbid it. The practice jeopardises girls' rights, such as the right to education, because new brides are usually forced to drop out of school to bear children and to provide household labour. In addition, married girls have few social connections, restricted mobility, limited control over resources and little or no power in their new households and are thus especially vulnerable to domestic violence. The practice excludes girls from decisions regarding the timing of marriage and choice of spouse. It marks an abrupt and violent initiation into sexual relations, often with a husband who is a considerably older adult and a relative stranger.

No cultural, religious, or economic rationale for child marriage can possibly

justify the damage these marriages do to young girls and their potential. A girl should have the right to choose whom she marries and when. Parents want the best for their children, and need to support their girls' choices and decisions to marry.

When a girl delays marriage, everyone benefits. A girl who marries later is more likely to stay in school, work, and reinvest her income into her family, which helps lead her family and eventually her community out of poverty. Crucially, a girl who marries later is more empowered to choose whether, when, and how many children to have. She and her family are more educated and healthier.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is working with governments and partners at all levels of society to deliver comprehensive programmes addressing the needs of vulnerable and married girls, including

access to livelihoods, social support and health programmes, including sexual and reproductive health. The ultimate aim is to end child marriage in this generation and to shift cultural attitudes to

protect girls' rights.

There is a huge cost to inaction on child marriage. It is time for policymakers, parliamentarians, communities, families and young people

to address this issue head on. Let's deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled. Let girls be girls.

Photo: Russell Watkins/Department for International Development



UNFPA co-chairs – together with UNICEF – the UN Adolescent Girls Task Force which promotes the rights of adolescent girls, especially the most marginalised, to reach their full potential. The Task Force also includes ILO, UNESCO, UNHCR, UN Women and WHO

International Day of the Girl Child

Schulz: Improving girls' literacy must be 'a priority'

MARTIN SCHULZ

President of the European Parliament

Girls' rights should never be underestimated, and is an issue I care passionately about. Girls' rights touch on a number of issues.

The European Parliament's own declaration on the International Day of the Girl recognises that across the world, girls are more likely to suffer from malnutrition, be subject to violence or intimidation; be trafficked, sold or coerced into the sex trade; be forced into an early marriage; become infected with HIV or suffer life-threatening conditions from a pregnancy which was not of their choosing.

The Parliament warmly welcomes the recent decision of the United Nations to create an International Day of the Girl Child on 11 October. The day is a powerful way to highlight the particular needs and rights of girls, and to advocate for greater action and investment to enable girls to reach their full potential in line with international human rights standards and obligations.

At least 500,000 women and girls in Europe are living with female genital



Photo: European Union 2012 EP

European Parliament President Martin Schulz: "I care passionately about girls' rights"

and an estimated 180,000 girls are at risk, according to the World Health Organisation. Since female genital mutilation is mostly performed on young girls between infancy and 15 years of age, it constitutes a violation of the rights of the child. The European Parliament has rightly stressed that all 27 member states have committed themselves to protecting children's rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have to ensure that all relevant UN organisations and bodies incorporate the protection and promotion of the rights of girls not to be subjected to female genital mutilation into their country programmes.

As to the employment field, the EU must plan and implement measures to facilitate satisfactory education, training and studies for girls and young women, providing particular support for girls and young women with a migration background. Improving the literacy of girls must be priority, especially in developing countries given women's importance in educating families.

The Parliament is also working on a report on the phenomenon of

sexualisation of girls. This is manifested in various areas: sexualisation of products for girls such as clothes and toys, in entertainment for children and adults (movies, TV, internet, music, press) as well as in advertisements. Sexualisation increases sexism and undermines the role of women with an impact on the image of women in the professional world. The draft report aims to sensitise public authorities on the issue and develop concrete strategies against this phenomenon.

The draft report underlines that a series of integrated actions must be taken in order to broaden the horizons and develop the outlooks of small girls and boys in relation to their guiding values, by means of deliberate strategies to protect children from the process of sexualisation and objectification and to create new tools and spaces where young persons will be able to develop and discover their sexuality at an appropriate time and in their own way.

The European Week of Action for Girls is held under the Patronage of the President of the European Parliament.

Photo: Plan



Efia ran away from school when she was six years old because she was terrified by corporal punishment. Now 13, she has not been to school since. Today she makes cakes and sells them in the market. She says, "I would like the opportunity to go back to school. I don't want to get married. You have to do housework and grind millet every morning. I would like help to be able to return to school."

EU wise to invest in girls' future

**VÉRONIQUE MATHIEU,
JEAN LAMBERT, EDITE ESTRELA,
KATARINA NEVEĐALOVÁ,
ROBERTA ANGELILLI**

Members of the European Parliament

Count to three. While you're doing that, one more girl, somewhere around the world, has been forced into a marriage against her will, to a man she didn't choose. This is a violation of her human rights. Sadly, it is just one of many violations girls are subjected to every day.

In every sphere, girls face discrimination, often being forced to suffer in silence. Girls are more likely to be denied an education, pushed to the back of the healthcare queue, subjected to violence and intimidation, and left to go hungry. We, as members of the European Parliament, are not prepared to let this continue unchallenged, unnoticed or unheard. To be a girl is not a crime. We should spread this message all over the world and fight against violence in all forms. Let's step up from the vicious cycle of ignoring the rights of the most vulnerable part of our society. We are determined to help break the silence, which is why we are proud to celebrate the first ever International Day of the Girl Child on 11 October. We see this as an excellent opportunity to acknowledge girls and inform society worldwide about their right to live a life of dignity.

The celebration of this day is the result of the passion and commitment of many individuals and organisations, including girls' themselves. At EU level, we worked closely with civil society – particularly Plan, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, and the European Parliamentary Forum – and last year our fellow deputies demonstrated their solidarity by adopting our Written Declaration just days before the United Nations General Assembly officially designated 11 October as the International Day of the Girl Child. The European Parliament is rightly proud of its role as a bastion of freedom, democracy and human rights, and we have sent a strong signal that we stand united behind this cause.

Photo: Plan/Finbarr O'Reilly



Girls' education could boost sub-Saharan Africa's agricultural output by up to 25%

Girls around the world deserve this day; they, and the contribution they are capable of making to the wellbeing of their communities and countries, deserve to be celebrated. They deserve to be heard, and to be recognised as the drivers of change they are and will become. Forgetting about girls means failing both them and ourselves. That is not what international development is about.

Instead, the EU must invest in girls' future, because we know this investment will be paid back – with interest. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, it's estimated that as many as 1.8 million children's lives could have been saved last year if their mothers had received a secondary education, while

the region's agricultural output could be boosted by as much as 25% through girls' education.

We should also condemn inequalities between girls and boys, whether at school, in common activities, care services, sports and in building relationships. The EU is a significant global player and must, by its own action, raise awareness of children's rights.

Let's not forget that times are also tough for our own citizens, and we have a responsibility to ensure their money is used wisely. We have an obligation to ensure the value of every cent is maximised. There is no better investment than in a better future for all. That future starts with girls.

girls' rights gazette

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Photo: European Union 2012



Andris Piebalgs: Every development programme must contain the "female factor"

Better education for girls; better future for the world

ANDRIS PIEBALGS

European Commissioner for Development

As I travel around the world to see the European Commission's work in developing and partner countries I see time and time again how important women and girls are in helping their local communities to progress. Girls really can be the agents of change, but too often they are held back by poverty.

The statistics speak for themselves and are a terrifying reminder of how much more needs to be done. Some 75 per cent of those living in Africa with HIV are female. One in three girls worldwide is denied an education; instead often having to work or help to feed and look after their families, from an early age.

Yet it's also clear that investing in girls, particularly in education, makes a huge difference to both the girl and her community. It's amazing to hear, for example, that when a girl in the developing world receives seven or more years of education, she marries four years later and has fewer children. When women and girls earn a living, they reinvest 90 per cent of it into their families, as compared to only 30 to 40 per cent for a man. Women who spend more years in education have better maternal health, fewer and healthier children and greater job prospects.

It's clear then that women and girls are inextricably linked to growth. In our recent policy proposal, an 'Agenda for Change', I outlined growth as one of our key priorities, and one which we will be highlighting at this year's European Development Days, which takes place once again in Brussels on 16-17 October.

That's why we focus on women and girls in everything we do. Whether it is agriculture, energy, trade or health; each and every one of our programmes has to take women and girls into account. Moreover, development is first and foremost about developing people's potential to have a decent life. Therefore at least 20 per cent of EU aid will go directly to human development. This, combined with the "female factor" in every development programme, will result in millions of girls receiving the help they need and escaping poverty.

As one of the world's largest donors, the Commission has already played a crucial role in improving the lives of women and girls. Since 2004, for example, thanks to EU support more than 85,000 new female students have been enrolled in secondary education, more than four million births have been attended by health personnel and 10.8 million consultations on reproductive health have been carried out.

I'd also like to tell you about one recent programme which really stood out for me, and which clearly shows how our work with girls is making a difference.

An innovative project which we worked on in partnership with UNICEF has helped thousands of families, communities and countries to change attitudes and end harmful practices like female genital mutilation/cutting in Africa. As a result of education and awareness raising, girls in thousands of communities in Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Senegal and Sudan are no longer subjected to this practice.

In Senegal, in particular, where 28 per cent of women aged 15-49 have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, astonishing progress has been made. In just under a decade, over 5,300 communities have abandoned the practice, bringing the country close to becoming the first in the world to declare total abandonment, expected by 2015.

Projects like this are a powerful example of the difference we can make to girls' lives when we work together with our partners. On this, the first ever International Girls' Day, let's take the opportunity to look at how we can really give girls the tools that they need to become the future of development.

Equity key to realising the future we want for all

KAREN SCHROH

Head of Plan EU Office

Discussions on the future development framework are well underway at local, regional and international levels. Often, before we know where we should go, we must look at from where we have come. That means assessing the successes and shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon argues that the MDGs "have given policymakers a unifying framework for global development ... a clear agenda with measurable goals and targets ... and a common, inspiring vision". He is largely right. But with mostly quantitative indicators of success, they risk excluding the most marginalised and hard to reach. With quantitative targets, it is easiest to pick the low hanging fruit.

Headline statistics can therefore mask more worrying trends. The MDG 2 target, for example, is to ensure "children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling". While fantastic progress has been made in getting children into school, universal primary education would be a "hollow achievement" if the focus was simply on enrolment. Instead, we must look at completion rates, quality of education received and transition to secondary schooling. And it is here that we see that we still have some way to go.

In 2010, there were still 122 million people between 15 and 24 years of age – 74 million women and 48 million men – who were unable to read and write a short, simple statement about their everyday life. Whatever enrolment rates tell us, leaving school without basic reading and



Photo: Plan/Alf Berg

The post-2015 development framework must be more inclusive, sustainable and people-centred if it is to benefit the poorest and most marginalised

writing skills does not amount to a quality educational experience. When it comes to making the vital transition to secondary education, where children acquire a range of skills they need to succeed in life, gender parity remains elusive.

As we look to 2015 and beyond, we have a responsibility to ensure that the poorest and most marginalised also benefit. This means a development framework which is more inclusive, sustainable and people-centered. It means taking an equity approach, which includes gender equality indicators that are both qualitative and quantitative. When it comes to education, for example, the agenda must be broadened from simply looking at access to primary education. It must encompass the quality of the education received and the transition to – and completion of – lower secondary education.

The impact of education for girls goes beyond gender equality; it has positive impact on health, on population, on economic development, on civic engagement and more. The completion of nine years of education for girls can be considered a key measure of progress towards the transformational change needed to reduce global poverty.

Once the framework is in place, there must be sufficient money available to ensure "the world we want" becomes a reality. EU member states and the European Parliament are currently negotiating the EU's long-term budget which runs from 2014-2020 and the outcome of these discussions will be a good indicator of whether Europe takes its responsibility seriously when it comes to promoting inclusive, sustainable, and equitable development.

European Week of Action for Girls

Girls' rights are not often the centre of attention. But the European Week of Action for Girls, which takes place from 8-12 October, aims to change that. This week of events and activities is a moment to focus on the particular challenges and opportunities that come with being a girl. The highlight of the Week of Action is the first ever International Day of the Girl Child, which will be celebrated in Brussels and in national capitals around the world on 11 October. This is a chance to think about how far we have come in terms of gender equality, and remind ourselves how far we still have to go.

Girls' rights are human rights. That means they apply to all girls, everywhere, and nobody can take them away. The reality, however, is somewhat different. Around the world, girls rights are abused with impunity. Girls, who are one of the most vulnerable groups on the planet, face multiple challenges in accessing their rights. The European Week of Action for Girls will confront these challenges, providing the EU with recommendations on what needs to be done to overcome them.

The European Week of Action for Girls is organised by Plan EU Office under the patronage of the President of the European Parliament and in partnership with United Nations Brussels, supported by partner civil society organisations.

Follow the debate on Twitter [#WeekOfAction](#). For more information, go to www.plan-eu.org.



"I want to see a world where we shouldn't have a campaign on girls' education anymore. A world in which it is a given that girls should go to school. No ifs, no buts."

2011 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE CO-LAUREATE LEYMAH GBOWEE

International Day of the Girl Child

Every day should be the Day of the Girl

Photo: The Council of the European Union



Catherine Ashton: "Ensuring girls feel respected and valued in society is the first step to breaking down discriminatory barriers"

CATHERINE ASHTON

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice President of the European Commission

I am frequently reminded that everything I do as EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

affects the lives of girls. I see this every time I meet people struggling against daunting odds to give their families a decent life in Gaza or Haiti or Somalia, or remote villages in China or India. I am shocked but not surprised by statistics that show that women make up two thirds of the world's poor and children

make up one third of the world's population. Yet it is a sad reality that the discrimination that girls often face does not receive the attention it deserves.

I have made a strong commitment to both children's rights and gender equality, and I am proud to help celebrate the first ever International Day of the Girl

Child. We know the power that can be unleashed by investing in girls. Every extra year a girl spends at schools is likely to improve her health and result in smaller families, greater income for her family, and an economic boost felt by her community and her nation.

We are getting close to achieving gender parity in primary schools, but far too many girls then drop out rather than go to secondary school. We need to concentrate on what is holding girls back. That is why I strongly support UN Women. I want it to be properly supported and funded. I was delighted to sign an agreement with Michelle Bachelet to allow greater EU-UN Women cooperation.

The European External Action Service, which I head, is also pursuing specific initiatives to fight the harmful traditional practices that are barriers to girls, such as early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation. Indeed, I have long fought to end the scandal of early and forced marriages. As a UK government minister before joining the EU, I secured a new law banning forced marriages in Britain – including banning people from taking British girls abroad to enter into forced marriages. I was delighted to support Plan's campaign at last year's Commonwealth Summit, which agreed to push this important issue higher up the Commonwealth's agenda.

One in three girls in the developing world is married by the age of 18. One in seven marries before they reach 15. Married young girls are often taken out of school, and are at a higher risk of HIV infection, early pregnancy and disease. In some countries – such as Niger, Chad, Mali, and Bangladesh – the rate of early and forced marriage is 60 per cent or even more. It is terrible statistic that one thousand girls die

every day, mostly in the poor world, in child birth. What should be one of the happiest days of their lives is for many the most dangerous. Even if a teenager survives childbirth, her children are less likely to be healthy and go to school, continuing the cycle of poverty for generations to come.

The solution lies in addressing the root causes of poverty and social fragility, as well as introducing new laws against early marriage, and programmes that encourage families to choose education for their girls over marriage. This is not an overnight project, but a longer-term commitment to change what in some cases are long-established practices. It is important work.

Following the momentous events of the 'Arab Awakening', I have made sure that the active involvement of women in North African societies at every level is central to the EU's policy in that region. The EU now works in Egypt, Libya and, jointly with UN Women, in Tunisia, to advance the rights of girls and women. We are funding programmes in nine countries, specifically to implement gender commitments such as combatting one of the great, hidden scourges of so many countries, rich and poor: domestic violence against women. A €45m programme on gender equality was approved last year in Morocco for women and men to influence development programmes and policies equally.

Ensuring that girls feel respected and valued in society is the first step to breaking down discriminatory barriers; and in building more prosperous societies for men and women alike. I hope that the International Day of the Girl Child will be an opportunity, not only to highlight the challenges faced by girls around the world, but also a moment to celebrate their accomplishments and their potential.

What about girls with disabilities?

Photo: CBM/argum/Einberger



Caroline, from Kibera, who attends the Kambui School for the Deaf, Kenya

LUISA FENU

International Disability and Development Consortium

In 2011, the World Health Organisation and the World Bank published the World Report on Disability, which states that one billion people worldwide have some form of disability. About 50 per cent of these are assumed to be women and girls with disabilities. Girls and women with disabilities face many barriers, particularly in developing countries. The cycle of poverty and impairment often leads to further marginalisation, as scarce resources are usually not spent on a family member with a

disability.

Frequently invisible and thus subject to violence and abuse, women with disabilities are also more prone to experience violence and abuse when out and about. Access to education can be hampered by a lack of accessible transportation and school buildings, but also threats of violence and abuse en route to school. The protection of women and girls with disabilities was a major theme discussed at the Treaty negotiations, which led to the creation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Women and girls with disabilities are referenced throughout the CRPD, with Article six specifically focusing on girls and women's rights. The CRPD was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006 and is now ratified by 119 countries, many of which are developing countries.

The EU institutions therefore have a major role to play in fighting against the violation of girls' and women's rights and ensuring their protection and inclusion. The EU's conclusion of the CRPD in 2011 and the adoption of the EU Disability Strategy should ensure that relevant EU legislation pays particular attention to the rights and needs of women and girls, both in Europe and beyond. The EU should also ensure it promotes the rights and needs of women and girls with disabilities in bilateral and multilateral dialogues with partner countries to guarantee their full participation, inclusion, and empowerment.

Standing together, today and tomorrow

MICHELLE BACHELET

UN Women Executive Director

All of us at UN Women are so excited about this first International Day of the Girl Child. We are excited because girls have rights that need to be respected. Girls demand equal rights, equal opportunity and equal participation. We all are born equal.

Yet today too many girls suffer sexual abuse and violence. Some 32 million girls are not in primary school. Too many girls are married while they are still children. And too many adolescent girls are denied their right to sexual and reproductive health information and services.

Girls around the world want their voices to be heard and they want their rights to be promoted and protected. Research shows that investing in girls is one of the best investments to reduce poverty, improve health and education standards and advance equality. We need to learn from girls and support their courage and creativity. When girls cannot reach their potential, this is a loss to all of us. As long as girls continue to face violence and discrimination, as long as girls are married against



Photo: UN Women/Karim Selmaoui

UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet visits High School in Rabat, Morocco

their will as child brides, as long as girls are deprived of their voice and their choices, as long as girls are robbed of their hopes and dreams, denied their potential, UN Women will stand beside them. We will stand beside girls to support their rights.

We will work with governments and all our partners to enact laws, to adopt policies and to design programmes that

protect girls' rights and advance their education, health and well-being. Programmes that should be there for girls to live their dreams for their future. We embrace girls as equal partners. Let us work together to advance gender equality. Equality is smart. Equality makes for healthy families and communities and makes nations stronger. Let us work for a world where every girl and woman can live free of fear, violence and discrimination.

Today and every day, let's make lasting progress so that girls today, tomorrow, and for generations to come, can live the future they want.

When girls cannot reach their potential, this is a loss to all of us

Learning for life: From poverty to opportunity

DEEPALI SOOD

Because I am a Girl
Global Campaign Director

Globally, one in three girls is denied an education by the daily realities of poverty, discrimination and violence. Too often, poverty forces families to choose which of their children to keep in school. When faced with this impossible choice, girls are the ones who miss out, because they are valued less than boys. Many girls instead become child brides – married off due to tradition, or because they will be one less mouth to feed, when in reality it will leave them more vulnerable to violence, isolation and early pregnancy when their young bodies just aren't ready.

Achieving girls' rights and a more gender equal society benefits everyone

But even if girls are lucky enough to make it into the classroom, their challenges don't end there. When girls reach puberty, many will face an increased threat of abuse and violence, including sex for grades and sexual harassment. One young girl from Sierra Leone explains, "My mathematics teacher asked me to fall in love with him, but I found it difficult



Photo: Plan

Plan's *Because I am a Girl* campaign on girls' education will be launched worldwide on 11 October 2012

for me to do that. This became a problem between us. Any small mistake or bad thing I did I was almost always punished. This was one of the reasons I hated school and dropped out."

Not only is this unjust, it's also a huge waste of potential with serious global consequences, because ensuring a quality education for girls is one of the single best investments we can make to help end poverty. We believe educating

girls is the right thing and the smart thing to do. We know from research that if girls receive at least nine years of quality education they themselves become agents of change: they marry later; they are able to bring up their children healthier; they will become economic actors; they will have higher self-esteem and take part in the political process in their countries.

The *Because I am a Girl* global

campaign is Plan's commitment to supporting millions of girls to get the education, skills and support they need to secure their rights and unleash their incredible potential. We are inspired by girls like Gloria, a young woman from South Sudan, a female mechanic whose training was supported by Plan. She says, "Sometimes when I go home wearing overalls, everyone starts laughing at me. They shout 'Women should

not be wearing overalls! It's a man's work.' But I stay strong because I know I am doing the right thing, I am very happy and very proud: what a man can do, a woman can also do."

My personal vision for the campaign is that it will be an engine of attitude-change, so that all around the world girls will be valued as much as boys. Coming from a patriarchal Indian background, I felt the different social values attached to girls and boys and when I became a mother, having daughters was still seen as a disappointment. My dream is that when my daughters grow up and have children of their own, they won't have to face the same struggles I did. I know *Because I am a Girl* will be the first step to achieving that dream.

We need to build on the momentum created through the *Because I am a Girl* campaign and through important events such as the first International day of the Girl Child, as we cannot allow girls to be forgotten at a time when development priorities for the next generation are being decided.

I hope both policymakers and individuals across the EU will join our campaign and help to make sure that by their children's generation, girls everywhere will be able to realise their full potential in societies that respect girls' rights and dignity. Supporting girls' education is one of the single best investments we can make to help end poverty. It will save lives and transform futures. Rich and poor, men and women, girls and boys – achieving girls' rights and a more gender equal society benefits everyone.

'Blatant' gender disparities in transition from primary to secondary

IRINA BOKOVA

Director General of UNESCO

Education for girls and women is a basic human right and a breakthrough strategy for sustainable development. This is why UNESCO is promoting education and gender equality through formal schooling as well as alternative, non-formal learning opportunities. As the lead agency of the Education for All (EFA) movement, UNESCO has placed gender equality at the heart of all its work.

The stakes are high. Girls and women have far fewer opportunities to access and complete education than their male counterparts. This is a cause and also a result of multiple, often overlapping reasons including poverty, geographical isolation, early marriages and pregnancies, gender-based violence and other discriminatory socio-cultural practices and attitudes. The progress and retention of girls in school is affected also by negative gender stereotypes and discrimination in education laws, policies, learning content, and teaching practices along with unsuitable and unsafe learning environments and school-related gender-based violence.

UNESCO acts at multiple levels to tackle these challenges. Our position is that gender equality is a basic human right to, within, and through education – a right to education, in terms of equal access to learning opportunities, a right within



Photo: Patrick Lages/UNESCO

UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova with aspiring scientists from a French high school on the occasion of World Teachers' Day 2011

To succeed, we need to act quickly, with focus and across the board

education, in terms of gender-sensitive content, teaching practices, environment and treatment, and a right through education, in terms of learning outcomes, life and work opportunities.

Advocacy is our first task, and this draws on a unique evidence base – including the flagship EFA Global Monitoring Report, which contains extensive gender analysis and new statistical tools, and also the

newly launched World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education.

On this basis, we seek to integrate provisions for gender equality in national education, legal and policy frameworks, plans and strategies. We collaborate with governments to train education policymakers, planners, managers and teachers to better accommodate and educate girls through gender-sensitive content and quality

teaching and learning approaches. Beyond formal schooling, UNESCO focuses on creating learning opportunities for girls and women who have never enrolled or have dropped out of school – through literacy, vocational courses or informal learning and through collaboration with civil society and the private sector.

In 2011, UNESCO launched a Global Partnership for Girls and Women's Education to sharpen its action. We are partnering here with the private sector, including Procter and Gamble, the Packard Foundation, GEMS Education, and the Barefoot College, to take forward innovative projects to promote girls' secondary education and women's literacy. We are working with the Packard Foundation, for instance, in remote rural districts of Ethiopia and Tanzania to lower drop-out rates during the transitional period between the ages of 13 and 16 – when girls pass from primary to secondary education and the risk of dropping out is higher.

Gender disparities are most blatant during the transition from primary to secondary education and in the gender ratio among illiterate adults. We must target both points to reach those left behind while maintaining gains achieved at other levels of education. To succeed, we need to act quickly, with focus and across the board. Most of all, we need to act together – to support governments, societies and families in making education a reality for all girls and women.

Health

EU must ensure girls realise their human right to health

ELISA BALDINI

Action for Global Health



Photo: Action for Global Health/Thomas Williams

Quality education improves both maternal and child health

Health is a human right and all human rights should apply to people everywhere. However, this is not a reality for vulnerable groups, like women and children. For young girls being both a child and a female can prove to be a double disadvantage. Girls face particular health challenges. During early childhood, the neglect of young girls' health care and nutrition leads to high girl-child mortality. Later in life, girls may be forced into marriage, which often results in early pregnancy, and prevented from going to school. Not receiving an education makes girls more vulnerable to physical and sexual violence and to sexually transmitted infections, as they are not empowered to know their rights and in many cases are unable to provide for themselves. In 2009, girls accounted for nearly two-thirds of new HIV infections among young people aged 15 to 24 globally.

In addition, girls who give birth before the age of 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their twenties as their bodies are not fully developed, which means they are also at particular risk of getting obstetric fistula when giving birth. The probability of complications during childbirth increases when a girl has undergone female genital mutilation (FGM). All of these factors lead to high infant and childhood mortality.

These specific health challenges require dedicated attention. Despite this, girls are often at the end of the healthcare queue. Universal health coverage (UHC), which is free at the point of use for those who cannot afford to pay, would be a critical step to overcoming this barrier. To meet the special needs of girls, it is crucial that

UHC includes access to youth-friendly services, especially in the HIV/Aids and sexual and reproductive health and rights sectors due to their sensitive nature. At the same time, investing in quality education is also crucial: education and good health are intimately connected. When girls are educated, they are more likely to be healthy and survive into adulthood; conversely, when girls are healthy, they are more likely to be educated. Educated girls are less likely to marry or have children early, and would be more prepared to face their role as a mother, as well as of being empowered members of society.

Addressing the causes of girls' discrimination as well as their specific health needs would be a wise investment; preventing and treating sexually-transmitted infections, treating the consequences of and preventing FGM,

ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services, promoting the completion of nine years of education and therefore delaying marriage and childbirth would reduce social stigma and help young women remain in good health, care for their children, be able to provide for themselves and contribute to society as a whole.

The EU has a key role in ensuring that girls and women realise their human right to healthcare. Not only should the EU ensure that there is adequate financing for health and basic education in the 2014-2020 budget and in the 11th European Development Fund, it should also be a key player in ensuring that the cross-cutting issue of girls' health, the right to health for all and universal health coverage, are part of the future development framework beyond 2015.

Abandoning harmful traditional practices

GRETCHEN KAIL AND
NAFISSATOU DIOP

United Nations Population Fund



Photo: Plan/Jenny Matthews

A UNFPA/UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting encourages communities to abandon this harmful practice and aims to see it end within a generation

In a celebration at the end of 2011, a huge crowd gathered in the Kolda region of southeastern Senegal to formally announce the decision of 69 communities to stop the longstanding tradition of female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C). As part of a public declaration renouncing the practice, mothers in the region said, "We have been cut and have cut our daughters, but our granddaughters... will never know the pain of excision." In Senegal, genital cutting is typically performed on girls between the ages of two and five. The collective nature of the declaration among intermarrying communities in Kolda means that uncut girls, and their families, will no longer face social ostracism, or find themselves unmarriageable.

Studies have shown the negative impact of the practice on maternal and neonatal outcomes. Compared with women who have not been cut, those who have undergone genital cutting run a significantly greater risk of requiring a Caesarean section, an episiotomy and an extended stay in hospital, and also of suffering postpartum haemorrhage. Death rates among babies during and immediately after birth are also higher for those born to mothers who have undergone FGM/C. It is estimated that an additional one to two babies per 100 deliveries die as a result.

For decades, reformers have been trying to end this harmful practice, with limited success. But now, change

is happening, partly sparked by new understandings of the dynamics of social norms. Over the last 10 years, some 8,000 communities in sub-Saharan Africa have publicly come out against the practice, usually following protracted community discussions touching on health and human rights issues. Engaging the entire community - including traditional and religious leaders, young girls themselves, women and men - in the discussions can lead to a lasting change in attitudes - and actions. Traditional and religious leaders, in particular, have the ability to influence decisions within families and to build

consensus within communities. Media campaigns and national legislation reinforce the understanding that FGM/C is a violation of bodily integrity, and thus a violation of human rights.

Introducing national legislation that prohibits the practice of FGM/C is important, particularly when a process of societal changes is already under way and citizens are sensitised to the issues. But it alone is rarely effective. Legislation should therefore take into account the degree of social acceptance of the practice and should be part of a broader initiative that empowers practicing communities to abandon FGM/C.



Photo: Plan/Claudia Lorena Amú

The EU must show leadership in promoting girls' sexual and reproductive health

Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights benefits everyone

FIONA SALTER AND
ELENA D'URZO

IPPF and IPPFEN

There is consensus that girls are central to development. Yet, girls continue to bear the brunt of poverty and ill-health, including maternal mortality, unsafe abortion and HIV. Issues relating to girls' sexuality and their sexual and reproductive rights remain largely neglected.

Some 14 million girls between 15 and 19 give birth each year. For them, complications of pregnancy and childbirth are a leading cause of death. Some 82 million girls in developing countries will be married before their 18th birthday. This will disrupt their education, even though women with more years of schooling have better maternal health, fewer and healthier children and greater economic opportunities.

Biologically, girls' health can be more vulnerable than men's. Of particular concern are the dramatic increases in HIV infection among young women, who now make up 60 per cent of the 15 to 24 year olds living with HIV. Girls are also exposed to various forms of violence from harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and the growing problem of sex trafficking to early and forced marriage.

Disparities in the way girls and boys are raised and treated are at the root of sexual and reproductive ill-health (SRH) and development challenges. For boys, adolescence can mean new freedoms and greater participation in community life. Girls, however, may face the opposite: restrictions in their access to choices, education, services and support. Traditional gender roles give girls little say about their own hopes and dreams. Yet we know it

is possible to take effective practical action that enables girls to tackle gender inequality and ill-health and to fulfil their potential.

The initiative Girls Decide and the project I love being a girl, both from the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), are a step toward this. The first one aims to ensure that girls have access, as a human right imperative, to life-saving SRH services and information. The latter, recently winner of a World Summit Youth Award, promotes a positive approach to the sexuality of young women through online tools. IPPF also invests in services and programmes targeting girls. CIES, IPPF's member association in Bolivia, offers medical, psychological and social care, while ensuring confidential and quality SRH services to young people. In 2011, over 101,270 consultations were undertaken.

Sustained leadership is required to ensure that girls are recognised rights-holders. European policymakers can help transform lives of girls by supporting evidence-based research that reflect realities of girls' sexual and reproductive lives; investing in youth-friendly services and programmes and guaranteeing access to comprehensive sexuality education; creating supportive legal and policy frameworks and social norms.

The benefits of investing in girls are transformational - for their own lives and for their families, communities, societies. Empowering girls so they can make healthy choices not only boosts economic growth but are also essential to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Let's give them greater choice and control over decisions that affect their sexual and reproductive lives and help break the cycle of poverty and inequality for the next generation.

"The Millennium Development Goals have given policy-makers a unifying framework for global development ... a clear agenda with measurable goals and targets ... and a common, inspiring vision. As we look beyond 2015 we must do the same. We need an agenda that is concrete, action-oriented and focused on poverty eradication, inclusive economic and social development, environmental sustainability and peace and security for all."

UN SECRETARY GENERAL BAN KI-MOON

Georgieva: We live in 'an increasingly fragile world'

LOUISE HAGENDIJK

Plan EU Office

Living in "an increasingly fragile world", EU humanitarian aid Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva is "obsessed" with averting crises before they arise. "I have one single minded objective, and it is to make humanitarian action more effective as early as possible," she told Karen Schroh, Head of Plan EU Office, in an exclusive interview. "We must move to action early, prevent suffering rather than reduce it... My obsession is with preparedness, prevention, disaster risk reduction."

This, she says, depends on much greater coordination between humanitarian aid and development actors, tackling both the immediate emergency and the structural causes of vulnerability. "If we combine our muscle, we can have real impact.

Humanitarian aid can be an instrument for longer term resilience," explained Georgieva, who is a former World Bank Director for Sustainable Development. "Building our strength together, we can do much more."

Last year, the European Commission spent €1.1bn on humanitarian interventions, reaching 150 million people. With calls for belt tightening becoming ever louder, big EU budgets are often difficult to justify to taxpayers. But when it comes to getting European citizens on side, Georgieva is, in many ways, in a more fortunate position than her development cooperation counterpart, Andris Piebalgs.

A recent Eurobarometer survey showed the vast majority of citizens, at 88%, believe it is important the EU funds humanitarian activities – a significant



Photo: European Union 2012

EU Humanitarian Aid Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva is "obsessed" with preventing disasters before they arise

increase since 2010. "The results are not only very good, they are surprising in the context of hardship at home," she mused. "When there is crisis, it generates a tremendous outburst of support from Europe." Commenting on the results, she said, "We do not take such generosity for granted. It is our duty to do our utmost to deliver aid and protection in a compassionate, professional and efficient way."

The challenge will be to maintain this support for spending on prevention, rather than response. As Georgieva explained, it is unfortunately easier to raise money for humanitarian action when a situation has already reached crisis point. "People just

don't want to see children dying," she argued.

"Traditional" development organisations such as Plan are ideally suited to support Georgieva realise her long term vision. Our work is grounded on the needs of the communities we work with, and our staff have built up expertise and relationships over an extended period of time. And, crucially, we remain accountable to these communities once the immediate emergency response has passed.

This is not lost on the Commissioner, who acknowledges the important role local partners play in delivering essential humanitarian assistance. "The area of

the world which suffers from disasters is vast," she said. "The NGOs and grassroots organisations are the ones that are there. When something happens, the best way to help people is to use this outreach, and this is what our partners are for us. They are the delivery mechanism in terrible circumstances." Often working in high-risk conditions, she added, "It is incredibly important to nurture relationships, and this is what NGOs are best at doing."

In any emergency, children – girls in particular – are among the most vulnerable, and the role NGOs play in identifying those most in need is critical to donors such as the European Commission. "We are always driven by a good assessment of needs – who are the most vulnerable, where are they," said Georgieva. "For this, we rely on our partners, like Plan or Unicef, to be able to direct assistance to these people." Girls, in particular, face multiple risks when a disaster occurs. Citing a 2008 policy paper produced by the Commission which looks at children as victims of conflict and natural disaster, she argued that "small things" can be done to improve the situation for girls, such as ensuring there is lighting and security in the bathroom area of camps.

The response to every disaster is different and, often, fraught with difficulty. Better coordination among all involved, and learning lessons from the mistakes of the past, are two of the most important elements in ensuring humanitarian action is effective and efficient, not only reacting to a crisis but acting early to prevent an emergency occurring in the first place. Kristalina Georgieva, for one, is determined to take on and rise to the challenge.

"Education makes the difference between the capacity to be independent, to hold your life in your hands and make decisions for yourself, and not having it. My message to the women in Congo, in the Sahel, everywhere is: send your girls to school. This is the best you can do for their future."

KRISTALINA GEORGIEVA, EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, HUMANITARIAN AID AND CRISIS RESPONSE

Girls in emergencies: Making the choice

Photo: Plan



Parts of Cameroon have been devastated by the worst flooding in a generation

KATIETONG

Plan International Specialist on Adolescent Girls in Emergencies

Within the aid sector, 2012 has seen an increased focus on the specific effects emergencies on adolescent girls. From the Coalition for Adolescent Girls releasing a May report entitled "Missing the Emergency: Shifting the paradigm for relief to adolescent girls" to the UK's Department for International Development and the Nike Foundation commissioning research into the most effective approaches to targeting adolescent girls in emergencies, to the next international Disaster Risk Reduction Day focusing on "Women and girls: the [in]visible force of resilience". So why the interest, all of a sudden?

Well, there have been various coalescing factors. Over recent years there has been an increased focus on gender targeted programming in humanitarian responses, and of course the creation of UN Women in 2010 focusing specifically

on gender empowerment in development. Reviews of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2010/2011 – two thirds of way through – revealed MDG five (maternal mortality) was the MDG with the least progress, an issue affecting younger women and girls. This was magnified by the birth of the seven billionth person on the planet last year, with the highest youth population of all time. The increased focus on gender and youth has led to an increasing conviction that girls can be extraordinary agents of change and key to breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty. However, we also know that during emergencies adolescent girls face even greater risk of sexual violence and abuse, of being forced into an early marriage, and of being denied access to education.

It is not just academic. As I write this article, I am in the Far North of Cameroon, an area recently devastated by the worst flooding seen for a generation. A culturally conservative area, even in 'normal' times many girls are subject to early

forced marriage at the ages of 11 or 12. Thousands of people have been displaced by the flooding – those I visited were living in squalid conditions camped around a primary school that cannot be used for education as long as it is used for shelter. The camp is too crowded, with latrines overused and everything constantly damp due to the continued rains. There haven't been any child marriages in the one month since these families have been displaced, but as the older women tell me, this is only due to the fact that no men have come to ask for their daughters. Yet. The women are clear that if men come – when they come – then they will have no choice but to send their young daughters for marriage. Poverty, exacerbated by the disaster, dictates their lack of choice.

Whilst poverty may dictate a lack of choice for the parents of adolescent girls in desperate situations, we, the international community, do have a choice. Programme interventions targeted at adolescent girls in emergencies can keep them safe, and in school, whilst also harnessing the small window of opportunity presented by emergencies to encourage community discussion around the rights and potential of adolescent girls. Programme interventions can include targeted school feeding, to encourage parents to keep girls in schools, social protection programmes in the form of conditional cash transfers to do the same, and community advocacy programming targeting institutional, socio-cultural and individual levels. Poverty dictates a lack of choice for parents of adolescent girls – particularly in emergencies – but we have a choice. A choice to invest in girls, and invest in the future.

"The food crisis caused families to put all their money into their bellies. What I mean is that girls had to drop out from school to reduce family overheads, therefore we need help to make these girls financially independent"

TANIYAMBONI, NURSE, DOSSO REGION, NIGER

Photo: Plan

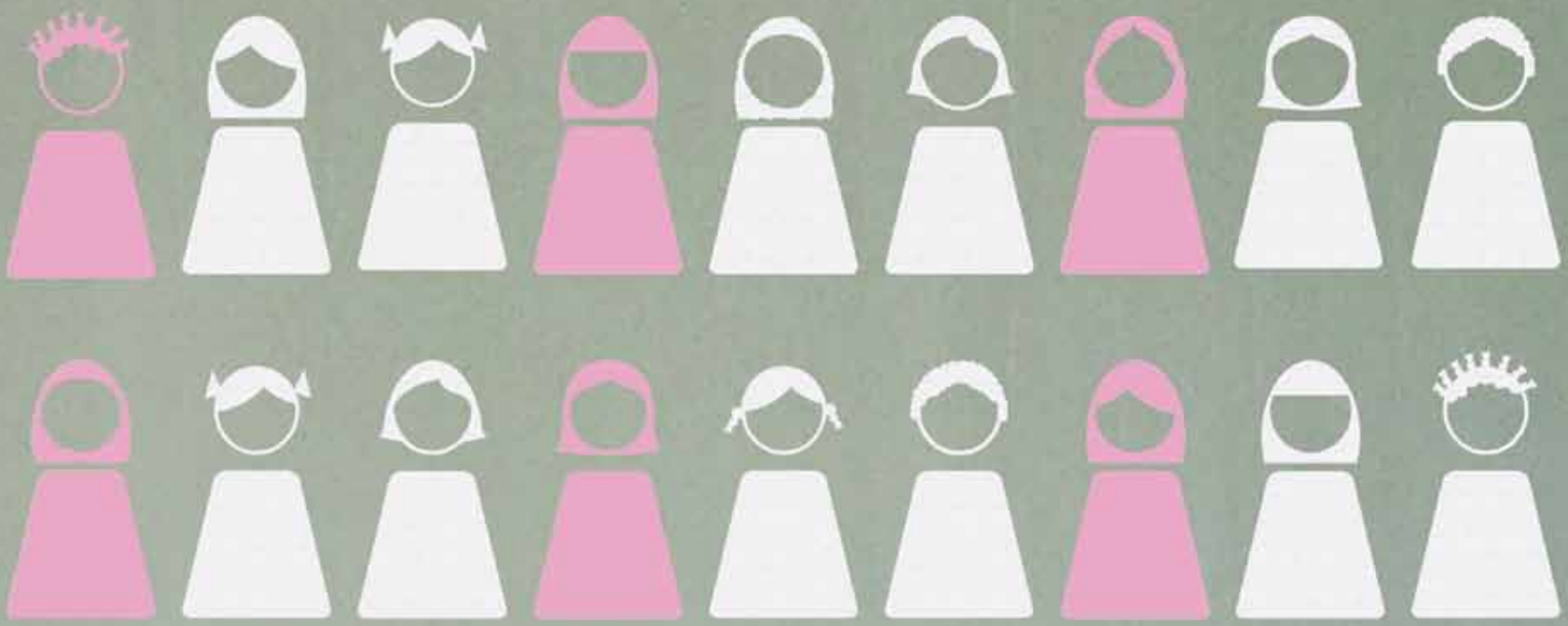


Filanya lives in Niger's Dosso region. Her house was among more than 120 destroyed by recent floods, and people have been forced to set up camp in her school. "So many people have nowhere to go so they are living in my school. I am very worried because I have to go back to school in a month's time and I cannot because people are there," she says. "But if people are assisted to rebuild their houses, they will surely come out and we will be able to go back to school."



BECAUSE I am a Girl

1 in 3 girls is denied an education



EVERY GIRL HAS THE RIGHT TO AN EDUCATION,

but as many as 1 in 3 girls around the world are denied this right by the daily realities of poverty, violence and discrimination.

Supporting girls' education is one of the single best investments we can make to help end poverty, because a girl who makes it through both high quality primary and secondary education is....

...less likely to **experience violence** or marry and have children **whilst she is still a child**

...more likely to be **literate, healthy** and **survive into adulthood**, as are her children

...more likely to **reinvest** her income back into **her family, community** and **country**

...more likely to **understand her rights** and be **a force for change**

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