

Adolescent girls and the Post-2015 agenda

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Gender inequality remains entrenched, and continues to be a major driver of poverty. There are 600 million adolescent girls worldwide,¹ the majority of whom live in poverty, have limited access to health and education services, and experience widespread discrimination and violence.

The Post-2015 Development Framework provides the opportunity to create a universal, rights-based and people-centred development agenda that addresses structural drivers of poverty and strives to achieve sustainable development for all. For this to be achieved, adolescent girls' voices must be heard, and their needs and priorities fully integrated.

Expanded services and opportunities for adolescent girls can have positive impact on economic growth; however the realisation of girls' rights must be pursued and strengthened as a goal in and of itself. It is also important to acknowledge adolescent girls as more than the objects of a new development agenda – they are also agents of change.

This report argues that:

- Monitoring systems must ensure that data is disaggregated by sex and age, at a minimum, so that adolescent girls do not 'disappear' into aggregated statistics.
- Mechanisms should be established for adolescent girls and young women to participate actively and meaningfully in setting up, monitoring and delivery of the Post-2015 goals and targets at a global, national and local level, and for holding their governments accountable for their implementation.
- Any new development agenda must address the specific rights and needs of adolescent girls, both through a standalone goal on gender equality and women and girls' empowerment, and by including gender-sensitive targets and indicators under all other goals that seek to respond to their needs.

¹ UN Joint Statement , *Accelerating Efforts to Advance the Rights of Adolescent Girls*
http://www.unicef.org/media/files/UN_Joint_Statement_Adolescent_Girls_FINAL.pdf

Introduction

The argument for prioritising adolescent girls is first of all a human rights one. Girls whose voices have too often been silenced and ignored must be given the opportunity to redefine their roles, and speak out about their needs and priorities and have these acted upon. However, delivering a comprehensive approach that is sensitive to the specific needs and circumstances of adolescent girls is also one of the best investments that a new development agenda can make, with research showing that a more gender equal society is also one that prospers economically.²

Unfortunately, previous development agendas have often shied away from adolescent issues as it means engaging with sensitive subjects such as gendered identities, sexual health and parental control.³ In the Millennium Development Goals the particular needs of adolescent girls are not accounted for. Although many of the goals are of crucial relevance to adolescent girls, no targets focused on them as specific group, resulting in adolescent girls being hidden.

² IDS WORKING PAPER 2013 No 417, *Gender Equality and Economic Growth: Is there a Win-Win?*, <http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Wp417.pdf>

³ Levine, Lloyd, Greene, Grown, 2009, *Girls Count: A Global Investment and Action Agenda*

A. Why adolescent girls?

During adolescence, the world expands for boys but contracts for girls

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, former managing director of the World Bank and current finance minister, Nigeria.⁴

The World Health Organisation defines the period of adolescence as between the ages of 10 and 19. Plan UK breaks down adolescence into phases: 10-14 (young), 15-16 (middle) and 17-19 (older).

For girls, adolescence is a time when the rest of their life can be determined. Adolescence can bring extra constraints, extra responsibilities and limited choices where a girl's life can become defined primarily in terms of her domestic and reproductive roles.

On the other hand it can also bring expanded opportunities – if adolescent girls have access to a good quality education, delay marriage and the birth of their first child, then they can build their social and economic assets that lay the foundation for a brighter future and help to break the cycle of poverty.

Adolescent girls' environment

- Pregnancy and childbirth-related complications are leading causes of death for girls aged 15 to 19 worldwide⁵
- In sub-Saharan Africa, more women than men are living with HIV, and young women aged 15 to 24 years are eight times more likely than men to be HIV positive⁶
- 55 per cent of those out of school in conflict situations are girls⁷, and girls only account for 30 per cent of refugees enrolled in secondary school.⁸
- Women spend at least twice as much time as men on domestic work, and when all work (paid and unpaid) is taken into account, women work longer hours than men do⁹
- Women and girls often lack access to or control over resources, both within and outside of the household. For example, fewer than 20 per cent of the world's landholders are women¹⁰

⁴ Sommer, Marni, Journal of Adolescence, 33, no.4 2009, 'Where the education system and women's bodies collide: The social and health impact of girls' experiences of menstruation and schooling in Tanzania.'

⁵ WHO 2012 factsheet 364, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs364/en/>

⁶ UNAIDS 2010 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic, http://www.unaids.org/globalreport/global_report.htm

⁷ Education For All: Global Monitoring Report Policy Paper 10, July 2013, *Children still battling to go to school*

⁸ UNAIDS 2010 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic

⁹ United Nations, (2010), *The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*, Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs;

¹⁰ UN Women, <http://www.unwomen.org/how-we-work/csw/csw-56/facts-and-figures/2012>

The development impact

Numerous reports from organisations such as the OECD, UNDP, UNFPA, and the World Bank have all stressed the importance of achieving gender equality as a pre-requisite to achieving progress on all the MDGs.¹¹ Healthier families, lower infant mortality and greater labour force earnings are just a few of the proven benefits of investing in adolescent girls.¹² At a macro-economic level the effectiveness and output of tomorrow's labour force will be shaped by the investment made in adolescent girls. Studies on the impact of education show it has a particularly strong investment return.

For example, a cross-country study on the effect of education on average wages suggests that for every year of primary education a girl's earnings increase by 5 to 15 per cent¹³: a further three-country study found that access to secondary education sees returns that are 15 to 25 per cent higher for women than for men.¹⁴ This also has an effect on GDP – a World Bank study has shown that increasing the number of girls in secondary education by 1 per cent would result in a 0.3 per cent increase in GDP.¹⁵

However, whilst the economic arguments for 'investing' in adolescent girls are compelling and important, the narrow articulation of empowerment fails to recognise wider concerns around transforming gender relations and unequal power relations between the sexes. Without this added dimension, we will fail to fully realise the rights of all girls and women.

Gender based empowerment involves building girls' and women's assets (social, personal, financial and material). It requires supporting political participation, leadership, and the freedom to challenge and change social norms, all of which as well as raising women's and girls' voices at all levels, need to be given prominence (and resources) in the post-2015 agenda in order to fully achieve gender equality and women and girls empowerment.

So, in addition to an approach that improves the lives of individual women and girls, the structural inequalities that make and keep the majority of women and girls poor, and which reproduce gender inequality generation after generation, must be challenged.¹⁶

¹¹ Woodroffe J and Esplen E GADN Network Briefing 3: *Gender equality and the Post-2015 framework*

¹² Chabaan, Cunningham, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 5753, 2011, *Measuring the Economic Gain of Investing in Girls: The Girl Effect Dividend*

¹³ Psacharopoulos, G. & Patrinos, H., 2002, *Returns to investment in education: a further update*, Policy Research Working Paper Series 2881. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

¹⁴ Schultz, T.P. (2002), *Why Governments Should Invest More to Educate Girls*, World Development, 30 (2): 207-225.

¹⁵ Dollar and Gatt, 1999, *Gender Inequality, Income, and Growth: Are Good Times Good for Women?*, Gender and Development Working Paper Series No.1

¹⁶ GADN Briefing Paper, 2013: *DFID's Strategic Vision for Girls and Women: A move in the right direction?*

B. Principles for embedding adolescent girls in the post-2015 framework

A Post-2015 Sustainable Development Framework that delivers for adolescent girls must be a universal, rights-based and people-centred framework that addresses structural drivers of economic and social inequality, and strives to achieve sustainable development for all.

Building on current international human rights standards, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the new Development Framework should reflect the core values of the Millennium Declaration and the human rights principles of universality, non-discrimination, indivisibility, participation and accountability.

In addition to existing human rights standards, the commitments contained in the Beijing Platform for Action and the ICPD Programme of Action should also be a key reference for national and international efforts to achieve gender equality and realise the rights of women and girls, within the post-2015 development agenda.

Intergenerational justice is the concept of fairness or justice in relationships between children, youth, adults and seniors, particularly in terms of treatment and interactions. This concept can be embedded within the framework by ensuring emphasis on both equity and participation.

i. Equity¹⁷ and equality¹⁸

It has been widely acknowledged that the Millennium Development Goals did not incentivise action to reach the most marginalised. Despite a commitment in the Millennium Declaration to freedom, equality, tolerance and solidarity, the translation of this vision into targets and indicators meant that the focus on social justice was lost.¹⁹ Global and national-level aggregate targets masked huge, and sometimes growing, inequalities within and between countries.

Adolescent girls, who often experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on gender, age, location, disability, ethnicity and socio-economic conditions,²⁰ are particularly excluded. When equity and equality are not included, adolescent girls are often the ones that get left behind, deprived of their rights through intersecting and compounding forms of discrimination.²¹

A new framework must reach the poorest and most marginalised, and the High Level Panel report has outlined an agenda to 'leave no one behind'. One way in which to measure whether the new agenda does this is by ensuring a way of breaking down data so that the impact on adolescent girls and other marginalised groups can be measured, ensuring they are seen as a priority in their own right, and are not hidden behind averages. Disaggregated data by sex, age, location, disability and wealth quintile, at a minimum, should be used to track the progress of disadvantaged and marginalised groups across all goals, targets and indicators.

However, this is only the first step. Quantitative and qualitative data should be used to

¹⁷ Fairness of distribution of benefits and opportunities

¹⁸ Substantive equality of opportunity and result, under the rule of law

¹⁹ Kabeer (2010) IDS: *Can the MDGs provide a pathway to social justice? The challenge of intersecting inequalities* [http://www.cbm.org/article/downloads/82788/Can the MDGs provide a pathway to social justice ISD and MDG Achievement Fund.pdf](http://www.cbm.org/article/downloads/82788/Can_the_MDGs_provide_a_pathway_to_social_justice_ISD_and_MDG_Achievement_Fund.pdf)

²⁰ Plan International (2012), *The Power of Girls: Child Rights and Gender Equality in the Post-2015 framework*

²¹ *ibid*

measure progress in reducing inequalities and exclusion, and to inform the proactive development of policies and interventions that accelerate progress among the most marginalised and excluded girls and women.

ii. Engagement, participation and empowerment

Article 12 of the CRC states that children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant to their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard; within the family, the school or the community. Consultations on the new agenda have been wide reaching and numerous.

The 'My World' platform has received hundreds of thousands of votes from 194 countries, country consultations have run in 50 countries worldwide and the online 'World We Want' conversations have gathered input from around the world.²² Young people have also been invited to participate in conversations with the High Level Panel in London, Bali and Monrovia and many of their priorities have been reflected in the High Level Panel report.

However, to include the most marginalised adolescent girls this consultative process must create a safe space where girls feel able to express their opinions, and ensure that consultation goes beyond internet-based surveys and out into the communities where girls live.

Adolescent girls must be empowered to lead, deliver and monitor a new agenda at local, national and global levels. For the post-2015 framework to make real progress, we need to go beyond treating children and youth as passive beneficiaries and use their potential to be agents of change. This is especially true of adolescent girls.

This means that, during the course of the next two years of discussions, the process for bringing together the world's views into one framework needs to ensure that youth and children, including adolescent girls, are structured into the process.

Mechanisms should be established for children and young people, and particularly girls and young women, to participate actively and meaningfully in setting and monitoring goals and targets at the global, national and local level and for holding their governments accountable for their delivery. In particular, the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children must be included in a genuine participatory and consultative process.

²² MyWorld 2015 <http://www.myworld2015.org/?page=results>

C. Goals and targets that meet the needs of adolescent girls

A new development agenda must also address the rights and needs of adolescent girls, both through a specific goal on gender equality and women and girl's empowerment and by including gender-sensitive targets and indicators under all other goals.

A comprehensive development package for adolescent girls would include action on five key areas: (1) quality education; (2) freedom from violence and harmful practices; (3) comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR); (4) addressing environment, climate change and resilience; and (5) youth employment that recognises the needs and constraints on adolescent girls.

1. Quality education

Despite great progress in getting girls into school, we have not yet succeeded in fostering the transformational change that is needed for equality.²³

Michelle Bachelet, Former Executive Directive – UN Women

The Millennium Development Goals have done much to address gender imbalance at primary age and increase access to education. Yet this progress has not reached everyone, and often it is the most marginalised children that are not being reached. UNESCO estimates that 34.3 million girls between the ages of 11 and 15 do not have access to lower secondary school,²⁴ and those missing out are often from lower income countries.

Furthermore the 'spectrum of exclusion' that adolescent girls face can also provide further barriers to school attendance – for example in Central and West Africa, only eight girls complete primary school for every 10 boys.²⁵

A focus on enrolment at primary level has also meant that other crucial factors such as regular school attendance, the quality of the education and teaching, and ensuring a safe and supportive environment at schools has been left off the agenda. In some cases this has had a negative impact on teaching and learning due to factors such as increased class sizes, more repetition and multiple ages sharing a classroom and teacher. Gendered learning environments and teaching methods have also impacted on girls learning.

Enrolment plus learning – challenging stereotypes, enabling change

Quality education has the power to transform the lives of adolescent girls by expanding their opportunities and releasing their social and economic potential. Quality education has the potential to give girls greater control over their bodies, reduce their vulnerability to violence and increase their future wages. However it must go beyond a simple focus on enrolment and deliver comprehensive learning that is grounded in non-discrimination, gender equality, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Quality comprehensive and age-appropriate sexuality education is a critical component of a child's learning and preparation for adulthood. As sexual reproductive health rights

²³ Foreword, Plan International (2012), *Because I am a Girl, The State of the World's Girls 2012: Learning for Life*

²⁴ UNESCO Institute of Statistics and Global Monitoring Report Factsheet 25, June 2013, *Schooling for millions of children jeopardised by reductions in aid*

²⁵ World Bank (2012), *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*

(SRHR) education is adapted to suit the evolving capacities of the child, careful attention is needed to ensure that adolescents who leave school without completing all grades do not miss out on the vital health education provided in later years. This will mean ensuring the inclusion of girls and boys who are no longer in formal schooling, as well as those enrolled in school grades lower than their age would suggest.²⁶

It is important to note that gender bias and discrimination can also be reinforced through school rather than be challenged. An ODI report highlights how gender stereotypes in South Asia have become embedded within the content and methodology of education, and this has been named 'the hidden curriculum'.²⁷ Females are often not represented in textbooks, and teachers may reinforce gender roles by asking girls to complete tasks such as sweeping the floor or making cups of tea.²⁸

Schools can also be a place where gender exclusion interweaves with other types of exclusion such as those related to disability or ethnicity. It is estimated that three quarters of girls who don't attend school in South Asia are from ethnic minorities.²⁹ Gender stereotypes can also be reinforced through low expectations from parents and teachers on girl's achievements, low aspirations for them when they do complete school and a lack of female teachers at secondary level.

Remove the barriers to education

To ensure girls have access to a good quality education, it is also essential to address the barriers that lead to girls either never having access to education, or dropping out after enrolment.

In a recent study of seven African countries conducted by Plan, five key barriers to education were identified:

1. Direct and indirect costs associated with schooling, especially once girls move from primary to secondary – school fees, inability to buy uniforms and school equipment were all reported as barriers.
2. Sexual exploitation and violence in school. Girls interviewed in Togo, for example, named teachers as responsible for 16 per cent of classmate pregnancies.
3. Early pregnancy often leads to girls dropping out as school policy or stigma means they can't/won't return to school after giving birth.
4. Girls' household responsibilities affected their ability to learn and concentrate.
5. High levels of poverty led to poor nutrition, which affected their ability to concentrate in school.³⁰

²⁶ Watson, Hamilton Harding and Harper, ODI, 2013 *Adolescent Girls capabilities and gender justice: review of the literature for East Africa, South Asia and South-East Asia*

²⁷ Gunawardena, C. and Jayaweera, S, 2008, *Gender Mainstreaming: Does It Happen in Education in South Asia?* Kathmandu: UNICEF ROSA and UNGEI

²⁸ Heijnen-Maathuis, E., 2008, *From Parity to Equality in Girls' Education: How Are We Doing in South Asia?* Kathmandu: UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia and United Nations Girls' Education Initiative and Naryan, S., with Rao, N. and Khan, M.L.A., 2010, *Gender, Equality and Education: A Report Card on South Asia*. Mumbai, ASPBAE Secretariat and United Nations Girls' Education Initiative.

²⁹ Ibid Heijnen-Maathuis, E., 2008

³⁰ Plan International (2012), *The State of the World's Girls 2012: Learning for Life*

Education should promote gender-equitable behaviour and the empowerment of girls, equipping them to become leaders of change for social justice, as well as gaining the knowledge and skills for building resilience to future risks. This can be achieved by ensuring an education grounded in the promotion of non-discrimination, gender equality, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. A particular focus should be placed on ensuring that all girls complete at least a quality lower-secondary education.

Recommendation

The new development agenda must ensure that all girls complete at least 9 years quality education and that more adolescent girls are supported to transition to a secondary education with **opportunities for life-long learning**.

- Quality education must include learning relevant to the needs, rights and aspirations of girls.
- Education must be delivered in safe and supportive environments that are free from gender bias and promote gender equality and human rights.

2. Ending violence and harmful practices

Violence against girls and women is consistently identified as a key structural driver of poverty and persistent gender inequality. The case for addressing violence against girls and women is based on human rights but also has an economic rationale, as numerous studies have demonstrated the negative impact on GDP resulting from violence against women and girls.

Yet adolescent girls remain particularly vulnerable to violence and harmful practices, many of which can occur before the age of 15. Nearly half of all sexual assaults are committed against girls younger than 16.³¹ Adolescent girls are also particularly vulnerable to violence and harmful practices that occur outside of intimate relationships, such as communities and schools – spaces where they should feel safe. Plan estimates that at least 246 million boys and girls suffer school-related violence every year.³² ‘Courtship’ related violence such as acid throwing, dowry deaths and honour killing are also more likely to be inflicted on adolescent girls than those reaching womanhood.³³

Examples of violence and harmful practices to which adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable include:

(Child marriage

A recent UNFPA report estimated that with current prevalence rates, 142 million girls would be married by 2020.³⁴

Child marriage forces a particularly brutal transition from childhood to adulthood, bringing an end to childhood by imposing adult roles before girls are physically, psychologically and emotionally prepared.³⁵ It is a public health issue as well as a human rights one: girls who get married earlier are more likely to experience a lack of autonomy, violence, abuse and forced sexual relations, putting them at risk of STIs (including HIV) and early pregnancy.³⁶ Laws requiring spousal consent for family planning can pose strong barriers to all adolescents, but particularly to child brides.

Research has shown that ensuring girls receive a good quality education is a key way to challenge child marriage.³⁷ Girls with no education are three times as likely to get married before the age of 18 as those with secondary education.³⁸

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

UNICEF has estimated that 125 million girls and women have undergone Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)³⁹, which often occurs during adolescence as part of a social rite to mark the passage for girls into adulthood and often into marriage.

³¹ World Health Organization, 2005, *Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women: Initial Results on Prevalence, Health Outcomes, and Women's Responses*.

³² Greene, M., Robles, O., Stout, K. and Suvilaakso, T., 2013, *A girl's right to learn without fear: Working to end gender-based violence at school*, Plan International.

³³ UNICEF ROSA, 2006, *The State of the World's Children 2007, South Asian Edition. Women and Children: The Double Dividend of Gender Equality*, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia.

³⁴ UNFPA, 2012, *Marrying Too Young, End Child Marriage*

³⁵ UNFPA, 2012, *Marrying Too Young, End Child Marriage*

³⁶ Davis, A., Postles, C. and Rosa, G., 2013, *A girl's right to say no to marriage: Working to end child marriage and keep girls in school*, Plan International

³⁷ Plan UK, 2011, *Breaking Vows: Early and Forced Marriage and Girls' Education*

³⁸ UNFPA, 2012, *Marrying Too Young, End Child Marriage*

³⁹ UNICEF, 2013, *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change*

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) commits governments to take 'all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolish traditional practices prejudicial to the health of the child'. Female genital mutilation often marks a rite of passage in certain communities to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood but can have severe consequences for girls including severe bleeding, infections, problems urinating, infertility, difficulty during childbirth,⁴⁰ and in extreme cases even death.⁴¹

The General Assembly adopted a resolution to intensify efforts to eliminate the practice, and national legislation exists in the majority of countries where it is practised. Yet despite legislation, it remains nearly universal in several countries such as Somalia (98 per cent prevalence), Djibouti (93 per cent prevalence) and Guinea (96 per cent prevalence).⁴²

Violence in schools

Schools should be a safe space for girls to learn and develop, but often girls are subject to violence at school. This violence is a violation of their rights and inhibits their learning – whether preventing them from coming to school at all, or affecting their concentration and the quality of what they learn.

School-related gender-based violence can affect both boys and girls, and it is estimated that between 500 million and 1.5 billion children are affected by violence within schools annually.⁴³ But unequal gender relations mean that girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual and psychological violence, and that violence in school towards them adds to the spectrum of exclusion they already face outside the classroom.

Recommendation

The new development agenda must include a target on ending violence against women and girls

- This goal must take into account the specific needs of adolescent girls and the types of violence that they face including Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting.
- Investment must be made into supporting communities, including men and boys, to engage in dialogues about harmful practices and addressing the underlying social and economic issues that perpetuate practices like child marriage.
- Girl-friendly spaces must be created where girls can discuss issues and raise concerns, and non-judgemental services should be funded to provide the necessary support.
- This goal must also be implemented in disaster and conflict settings.

⁴⁰ UNICEF, 2013, *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Statistical Overview and exploration of the dynamics of change*

⁴¹ For example BBC World News, 19 June 2013, *Egypt girl's death puts spotlight on genital mutilation*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22975400>

⁴² UNICEF, 2013, *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Statistical Overview and exploration of the dynamics of change*

⁴³ UNICEF, 2009, *Child Protection from Violence, Exploitation, and Abuse*

3. Comprehensive health systems

The World Health Organisation estimates that nearly two thirds of premature deaths and one third of the total disease burden in adults is associated with conditions or behaviours that began in youth. These include tobacco use, a lack of physical activity, unprotected sex and exposure to violence.⁴⁴ 16 million teenage girls between 15 and 19 give birth every year, and the risk of dying while giving birth is significantly higher for adolescent girls than for older women.⁴⁵

Particularly relevant to adolescent girls is the need for access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights services and information, including in post-disaster and conflict settings. This should include access to information on, and services for: menstrual hygiene, family planning and contraception, perinatal care, and the prevention, and care and treatment for sexually-transmitted infections including HIV.

The recent High Level Panel report highlights that there are 222 million women who want to prevent pregnancy but don't have access to effective contraception; this results in 80 million unplanned pregnancies, 30 million unplanned births and 20 million unsafe abortions. Access to services to prevent this, particularly for adolescent girls, is low.⁴⁶

Recommendation

The new development agenda needs to ensure universal coverage of comprehensive health systems that deliver relevant services for all adolescent girls and boys that are free from stigma, non-judgemental, confidential and based on the right of informed consent.

- This must include a target to ensure universal sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and that all girls and boys receive quality, comprehensive, age-appropriate SRHR education, enabling them to make informed decisions about their health and fully realise their sexual and reproductive rights.
- Adolescent SRHR services should be linked with programs to end gender-based violence, and should be gender sensitive, rights based, youth friendly and available in conflict and disaster situations to all adolescents.
- These services should be accessible to the most excluded and marginalised groups, including migrants, those living with disabilities and young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons.

⁴⁴ WHO http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/adolescent_health/facts/en/index.html

⁴⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶ United Nations, 2013, *The Report of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf

4. Addressing environment, climate change, conflict and resilience

Global warming is an issue that affects everyone, but also exacerbates pre-existing inequalities. Adolescent girls are increasingly bearing the brunt of extremes of weather. Women and girls were recorded as 90 per cent of those killed by the 1991 Bangladesh cyclone and up to 80 per cent of those killed by the 2004 Tsunami. An LSE study concluded that this loss of life is directly linked to the economic and social challenges that they face.⁴⁷ The climate crisis will continue to add to the challenges that adolescent girls face unless action is taken to respond to climate risk in a way that is sensitive to the needs and priorities of adolescent girls.

Whilst international policy has increasingly recognised the links between women and climate change, the specific challenges faced by adolescent girls has received less attention. The *Future We Want* recognises, for example, that 'gender equality and the effective participation of women are important for effective action on all aspects of sustainable development' but does not mention the participation of adolescent girls or the impacts that climate change has for them.

Climate shocks often raise income pressures on vulnerable households and adolescent girls are the most vulnerable to being taken out of school to take up extra work at home. This income pressure also adds to the incidences of child marriage, with 'bride price' helping to make up the income shortfall in the household.

Roles that are traditionally seen as the domain of girls and women become more arduous in times of scarcity, such as collecting firewood or water. This means more time out of school as well as increased risk of violence, especially rape and sexual violence as girls walk long distances to find household essentials.⁴⁸

In the aftermath of disasters it is often girls, especially adolescent girls, who suffer disproportionately. Temporary shelters and facilities, such as unsafe latrines, lead to increased risk of sexual violence and abuse. After the 2004 Tsunami in Indonesia sexual violence increased and families in refugee camps turned to child marriage as a way of protecting their daughters.⁴⁹

28.5 million primary school aged boys and girls who are out of school live in conflict zones. 55 per cent of them are girls.⁵⁰ Conflict affects girls and boys chances of receiving a good-quality education in many different ways. Where government is weakened and states are fragile, it is often challenging – though not impossible – to provide schooling, particularly in remote or poor areas. In other cases, conflict causes a reduction in the supply of teachers.⁵¹

It is essential that climate change, conflict and disaster resilience strategies recognise the cost incurred by adolescent girls, and their role on the front line of response, preparedness and risk reduction.

⁴⁷ Neumayer E & Plumper T: *The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: the impact of catastrophic events on the gender gap in life expectancy, 1981-2002*: LSE,

<http://www2.lse.ac.uk/geographyAndEnvironment/whosWho/profiles/neumayer/pdf/Disastersarticle.pdf>

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Feltan Bierman, C, 2006, *Gender and Natural Disaster: Sexualized violence and the tsunami*, *Development* 46 (3)

⁵⁰ Education For All: Global Monitoring Report Policy Paper 10, July 2013, *Children still battling to go to school*

⁵¹ Save the Children, 2013, *Attacks On education: The impact of conflict and grave violations on children's futures*

Recommendation

The new development framework must address the drivers of climate change and conflict as well as recognising the need for strengthened disaster risk reduction and resilience strategies at the global, national and local levels.

- In recognition of the impact of disasters on adolescent girls, any targets in this area must also include a focus on their rights and needs.
- Adolescent girls must also be assured the opportunity to participate in local level adaptation strategies through to the creation of national and global policies and implementation plans.
- Funding and resources need to be increased to provide education, protection and SRHR services for adolescent girls as part of a comprehensive emergency response.

5. Sustainable youth employment

The High Level Panel has rightly highlighted the importance of youth employment. The current economic crisis has had a huge impact on young people. The ILO estimates that 73 million young people worldwide are looking for work and has warned of a '...“scarred” generation of young workers facing a dangerous mix of high unemployment, increased inactivity and precarious work in developed countries, as well as persistently high working poverty in the developing world'.⁵²

A recent report from the ILO on global youth employment trends for youth in 2013 also talks of a high risk of 'skills mismatch' for young people, with youth increasingly taking up jobs that they are over-qualified to do.⁵³

Any focus on youth employment must include a gendered dimension. In this 'scarred generation' of working poverty, young women are particularly vulnerable, and are over-represented in the informal sector. Young women experience greater rates of unemployment than young men in virtually every region of the world.⁵⁴

Poverty and illiteracy are forcing young women to take up work, where they can find it, in unskilled, low wage jobs with little or no social protection. Traditional gender roles mean that the gendered division of labour will often lead to low paying (women make up 60 per cent of the 572 million working poor⁵⁵ in the world⁵⁶) and low skilled employment opportunities, such as domestic workers. This work is often coupled with child care responsibilities, and adolescent girls bear a heavy burden of work within the home, taking care of young children, as well as elderly and sick relatives, collecting firewood and water, tending to livestock, preparing meals and cleaning.

Gains in educational parity have not led to similar gains in labour force participation. A World Bank report highlights a widening gap between men's and women's 'productive labour' as they make the transition from adolescence into adulthood. By age 24, women lag behind men in labour force participation in all regions. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the gap is around 26 percentage points. The gap is even larger in South Asia, where 82 per cent of men are active in the labour market, against just 28 per cent of women.⁵⁷

The transition from school to employment needs consideration. Young women need to be offered the relevant skills and opportunities to enter the labour market. Youth-employment strategies need to be both gender-sensitive and market-linked, ensuring that vocational training and employment opportunities are offered to adolescent girls and young women that also meet market demand. These programmes should combine ways to address the social barriers to young women's employment such as adolescent pregnancy, early marriage and lack of participation in the public sphere.⁵⁸ There should be a focus on ensuring that adolescent girls and young women are offered the skills and opportunities to enter the labour market.

⁵² International Labour Organisation, 2013) <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/lang--en/index.htm>

⁵³ ILO, 2013, *Global Employment Trends for Youth: A generation at risk*

⁵⁴ Fewer, Ramos, Dunning, Agali, *Economic Empowerment Strategies for Adolescent Girls*, <http://www.youtheconomicopportunities.org/sites/default/files/uploads/resource/AGALI-Economic-Empowerment-Report-2013-.pdf>

⁵⁵ People who are working but also fall below an accepted poverty line

⁵⁶ International Labor Organization, 2009, *Global Employment Trends for Women*

⁵⁷ World Bank, 2010, *Ready for Work*, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGENDER/Resources/AGI-Ready-to-Work_2010.pdf

⁵⁸ Fewer, Ramos, Dunning, Agali: *Economic Empowerment Strategies for Adolescent Girls*

Child labour, violence and exploitation

The ILO definition of the 'worst forms of child labour' includes bonded child labour, commercial sexual exploitation and child soldiers. It is estimated that there were 115 million children engaged in the worst forms of child labour in 2010.⁵⁹

Adolescent girls are often employed in sectors where sexual exploitation, violence and abuse are common. A study in Cambodia, where 70 per cent of women are functionally illiterate, found that many young women in the workplace, especially those from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds, face exploitation and discrimination.⁶⁰

Lack of economic opportunities, decent work and low educational levels also lead to girls as young as 10 becoming victims of human trafficking. There are as many as 2.5 million trafficked persons, and the majority of these are female. Girls end up working in the commercial sex industry, as domestic workers and in garment factories.⁶¹

Recommendation

The new development framework must ensure that well-functioning labour markets that provide decent work for young people, and particularly for young women, are created.

- This must go hand in hand with the prevention of child labour, particularly the 'worst forms of child labour'.
- Youth-employment strategies need to be both gender-sensitive and market-linked, ensuring that vocational training and employment opportunities are offered to adolescent girls and young women that also meet market demand, as well as addressing the social barriers to young women's employment.

⁵⁹ ILO, 2010, *Accelerating action against child labour*

⁶⁰ Levine, Lloyd, Greene, Grown, 2009, *Girls Count: A Global Investment and Action Agenda*

⁶¹ *ibid*

D. Conclusions and recommendations

Many of the strategies suggested in this paper are interlinked and have multiple benefits for adolescent girls, for communities and families and ultimately for the alleviation of extreme poverty worldwide. To address the 'spectrum of exclusion' the post-2015 agenda must recognise the inter-linked nature of these challenges, ensuring a holistic development package that tackles root causes as well as the consequences of gender inequality.

A new development agenda must promote the concept of 'intergenerational justice', a focus on gender equality and more meaningful participation of adolescent girls to ensure they are able to act as agents of change. Ensuring real participation, at local, national and global level, will empower adolescent girls to become the subjects of a new development agenda, driving change as well as benefiting from it.

Ensuring that the five key areas of education, ending violence and harmful practices, comprehensive health systems, resilience to climate change conflict and disasters, and young women's employment are addressed will tackle some of the key challenges that adolescent girls face. Education is shown to expand options, reduce the likelihood of violence and harmful practices such as child marriage and adolescent pregnancy – but education must be transformative and redefine gender roles.

Addressing the gender dynamics of youth employment also means confronting the violence that adolescent girls are exposed to in the workplace. Eliminating violence and harmful practices means that adolescent girls are more likely to be healthy, avoid adolescent pregnancy and participate in education and later a productive workforce.

Crucially, responding to these challenges through a multi-sectoral and empowering approach will demonstrate a serious commitment from the international community to realise the human rights of adolescent girls. But it also makes sense – numerous reports and research support the claim that investment in adolescent girls is good for wider society, growth and economic prosperity.

The new development agenda offers the opportunity to galvanize international momentum towards a transformation in development practice that makes the most of the transformative possibilities of and respects adolescent girls. It must recognise and respond to the spectrum of exclusion that adolescent girls face, whilst investing in and empowering them to harness their unique potential.

Building on the information in this paper, Plan believes that to deliver for adolescent girls a new agenda must:

1. Ensure the post-2015 agenda addresses adolescent girls and embeds a concept of 'inter-generational justice'

A new framework must include a goal on and targets that measure gender equality and women and girls empowerment. Monitoring systems must ensure that data is disaggregated by sex and age, at a minimum, so that adolescent girls do not 'disappear' into aggregated statistics. Where possible, composite indicators should be developed to track and address intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalisation, either at the national or international level.

Access to information and meaningful accountability are inextricably linked, and more frequent, efficient and better quality data, which is transparently available and accessible, needs to be a high global priority. This is not only important for development planning, but

also to support accountability mechanisms and to measure progress against eliminating inequalities and the exclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups. Data should also be disaggregated by location, wealth quintile and disability.

2. Empower and consult adolescent girls as agents of change for the post-2015 agenda

Article 12 of the CRC states that '*children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant to their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard—within the family, the school or the community*'. Participation is not only a right in and of itself, but is required for the effective realisation of other rights and should be a cross-cutting theme of the post-2015 framework.

All girls and boys, including the most marginalised and excluded, such as those living with disabilities, should be supported to participate meaningfully at all levels of policy, system and programme development, implementation and monitoring. This should extend to the design of national level development targets, plans and accountability mechanisms that derive from the new framework.

Adolescent girls are a particularly underutilised resource in mobilising change. To ensure that a new development agenda harnesses their potential it must create safe and accessible spaces to listen to their voices and invest in empowering them to implement, monitor and lead a new development agenda and sensitize decision makers on the value of adolescent girls' participation.

3. Ensure a comprehensive development package that addresses the most pressing needs and concerns of adolescent girls

At the heart of this development package must be access to a quality post-primary education that enables girls to fulfil their capabilities. As a minimum this would ensure completion of quality primary and lower-secondary education for all children. This education should also promote gender-equality and the empowerment of girls. This can be achieved by ensuring an education that is grounded in and promotes non-discrimination, gender equality, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Whilst violence against adolescent girls continues at its current levels, it remains a fundamental barrier to both the fulfilment of their human rights and development goals. A new development agenda must address the implementation gap between agreed standards and the reality of girls' lives where they are subject to practices such as child marriage, and often unsafe in their communities and homes.

Comprehensive, confidential and non-judgemental health services must address the spectrum of health needs that adolescent girls have. Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services are essential but other health issues, such as comprehensive services for mental health, must be included.

Strategies to address youth unemployment must create well-functioning labour markets that take account of the gendered barriers and constraints that affect adolescent girls in the marketplace.

Acronyms

OECD	Organisation for Cooperation and Development in Europe
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CEDAW	Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination Against Women
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
LSE	London School of Economics
ILO	International Labour Organisation

Additional resources

- Plan International, *Briefing paper on gender equality and women and girls' empowerment in the post-2015 agenda*
- Plan International, *Briefing paper on child rights in the post-2015 agenda*
- Plan International, *Briefing paper on education in the post-2015 agenda*
- Plan International, *Briefing paper on child protection in the post-2015 agenda*
- Plan International, *Briefing paper on decent jobs for youth in the post-2015 agenda*
- Plan International, *Briefing paper on resilience in the post-2015 development agenda*

About Plan

Plan is a global children's charity. We work with children in the world's poorest countries to help them build a better future. A future you would want for all children, your family and friends. For 75 years we've been taking action and standing up for every child's right to fulfil their potential by: giving children a healthy start in life, including access to safe drinking water, securing the education of girls and boys, working with communities to prepare for and survive disasters, inspiring children to take a lead in decisions that affect their lives and enabling families to earn a living and plan for their children's future.

We do what's needed, where it's needed most. We do what you would do. With your support children, families and entire communities have the power to move themselves from a life of poverty to a future with opportunity.

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