

# Gender discrimination across the life cycle

## Foeticide and infanticide

Gender discrimination begins early. Modern diagnostic tools for pregnancy have made it possible to determine a child’s sex in the earliest phase. Where there is a clear economic or cultural preference for sons, the misuse of these techniques can facilitate female foeticide. Although there is no conclusive evidence to confirm such illegal misuse, birth histories and census data reveal an unusually high proportion of male births and male children under five in Asia, notably in China and India, suggesting sex-selective foeticide and infanticide in the world’s two most populous countries – despite initiatives to eradicate these practices in both countries.

## The middle years

A principal focus of the middle years of childhood and adolescence is ensuring access to, and completion of, quality primary and secondary education. With a few exceptions, it is mostly girls who suffer from educational disadvantage.

## Primary education

For every 100 boys out of school, there are 115 girls in the same situation. Though the gender gap has been closing steadily over the past few decades, nearly 1 of every 5 girls who enrolls in primary school in developing countries does not complete a primary education. Missing out on a primary education deprives a girl of the opportunity to develop to her full potential. Research has shown that educated women are less likely to die in childbirth and are more likely to send their children to school. Evidence indicates that the under-five mortality rate falls by about half for mothers with primary school education.

## Secondary education

Recent UNICEF estimates indicate that an average of only 43 per cent of girls of the appropriate age in the developing world attend secondary school. There are multiple reasons for this: There may simply be no secondary school for girls to attend – many developing countries and donors have traditionally focused on offering universal primary education and neglected to allocate the resources to increase enrolment and attendance in secondary education. A girl’s parents may conclude that they cannot afford secondary education or may take the traditional view that marriage should be the limit of her ambitions.

Secondary education has multiple benefits for women and children. It is singularly effective in delaying the age at which a young woman first gives birth and it can enhance freedom of movement and maternal health. It also strengthens women’s bargaining power within households (*see Chapter 2*), and is a crucial factor in providing opportunities for women’s economic and political participation (*see Chapters 3 and 4*).

## Adolescence

Among the greatest threats to adolescent development are abuse, exploitation and violence, and the lack of vital knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS.

## Female genital mutilation/cutting

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) involves partial or total removal of, or other injuries to, female genitalia for cultural, non-medical reasons. The practice of FGM/C mainly occurs in countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East

and North Africa and some parts of South-East Asia. It is estimated that more than 130 million women and girls alive today have been subjected to FGM/C. FGM/C can have grave health consequences, including the failure to heal, increased susceptibility to HIV infection, childbirth complications, inflammatory diseases and urinary incontinence. Severe bleeding and infection can lead to death.

## Child marriage and premature parenthood

Child or early marriage refers to marriages and unions where one or both partners are under the age of 18. Globally, 36 per cent of women aged 20–24 were married or in union before they reached their 18th birthday, most commonly in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Child marriage is a long-standing tradition in areas where it is practised, making protest sometimes barely possible. Parents may consent to child marriages out of economic necessity, or because they believe marriage will protect girls from sexual assault and pregnancy outside marriage, extend girls’ child-bearing years or ensure obedience to their husband’s household.

Premature pregnancy and motherhood are an inevitable consequence of child marriage. An estimated 14 million adolescents between 15 and 19 give birth each year. Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than women in their twenties. If a mother is under 18, her baby’s chance of dying in the first year of life is 60 per cent greater than that of a baby born to a mother older than 19. Even if the child survives, he or she is more likely to suffer from low birth-weight, undernutrition and late physical and cognitive development.

## Sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking

The younger girls are when they first have sex, the more likely it is that intercourse has been imposed on them. According to a World Health Organization study, 150 million girls and 73 million boys under the age of 18 experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of physical and sexual violence in 2002. The absence of a minimum age for sexual consent and marriage exposes children to partner violence in some countries.

An estimated 1.8 million children are involved in commercial sex work. Many are forced into it, whether they are sold into sexual slavery by desperately poor families or abducted and trafficked into brothels or other exploitative environments. Children exploited in the commercial sex industry are subjected to neglect, sexual violence and physical and psychological abuse.

## Sexual and reproductive health

Because unprotected sex carries the risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection, including HIV, knowledge of sexual and reproductive health is essential for the safety of young people. Information alone cannot provide protection, but it is certainly a first step. Nonetheless, adolescents around the world continue to have limited knowledge of reproductive health issues and the risks they face.

## HIV/AIDS

By 2005, nearly half of the 39 million people living with HIV were women. In parts of Africa and the Caribbean, young women (aged 15–24) are up to six times more likely to be infected than young men their age. Women

are at greater risk of contracting HIV than men. One important explanation is physiological – women are at least twice as likely as men to become infected with HIV during sex. The other crucial, and largely reversible, factor is social – gender discrimination denies women the negotiating power they need to reduce their risk of infection. High rates of illiteracy among women prevent them from knowing about the risks of HIV infection and possible protection strategies. A survey of 24 sub-Saharan African countries reveals that two thirds or more of young women lack comprehensive knowledge of HIV transmission.

The dramatic increase in infection among women heightens the risk of infection among children. Infants become infected through their mothers during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding. In 2005, more than 2 million children aged 14 years or younger were living with HIV.

## Motherhood and old age

Two key periods in many women’s lives when the pernicious effects of both poverty and inequality can combine are motherhood and old age.

## Maternal mortality

It is estimated that each year more than half a million women – roughly one woman every minute – die as a result of pregnancy complications and childbirth. Some 99 per cent of all maternal deaths occur in developing countries, with over 90 per cent of those in Africa and Asia. Two thirds of maternal deaths in 2000 occurred in 13 of the world’s poorest countries. The same year, India alone accounted for one quarter of all maternal deaths. One out of every 16 sub-Saharan

African women will die as a result of pregnancy or childbirth, compared to just 1 out of every 4,000 in industrialized countries. Moreover, motherless newborns are between 3 and 10 times more likely to die than newborns whose mothers survive.

Many of these women’s lives could be saved if they had access to basic health care services, including skilled attendants at all births and emergency obstetric care for women who develop complications.

## Women in old age

Elderly women may face double discrimination on the basis of both gender and age. Women tend to live longer than men, may lack control of family resources and can face discrimination from inheritance and property laws. Many older women are plunged into poverty at a time of life when they are very vulnerable. Only a few developing countries have safety nets for older people in the form of non-contributory or means-tested pensions.

Grandmothers in particular possess a great deal of knowledge and experience related to all aspects of maternal and child health and care. In many families, they are a mainstay of childcare for working parents. Experience has shown that children’s rights are advanced when programmes that seek to benefit children and families also include elderly women.

*See References, page 88.*

## Gender discrimination and inequalities across regions

Attitudes, beliefs and practices that serve to exclude women are often deeply entrenched, and in many instances closely associated with cultural, social and religious norms. Surveys, opinion polls and case studies provide a good indication of the prevalence of gender discrimination in many countries.

A Gallup Poll conducted in five Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador and Mexico) found that half of the respondents believed society favours men over women. In Brazil, only 20 per cent of respondents, both men and women, believe that society treats both sexes equally, while more than half of respondents in that country, and in neighbouring Argentina, consider that women and men do not enjoy equal job opportunities. Although these results are drawn from a small sample, they may well be indicative of a broader recognition of gender discrimination in society.

Examining social attitudes on specific issues, such as access to education and income-generating opportunities for women, reveals even more clearly the extent of gender discrimination and how it compares across countries. The World Values Survey reveals that an alarmingly large number of men – who, as this report will show, often hold power in the household allocation of resources for vital services such as education and health care – believe that university education is more important for a boy than for a girl (*see Figure 1.2, page 6*).

Around two thirds of male respondents in Bangladesh indicate that university education for boys should be

prioritized over that of girls – an opinion echoed by around one third or more of male respondents from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mexico and Uganda, among others. In some countries, men's opinions on this particular issue were less discriminatory, with only 1 out of every 10 male respondents in China and less than 1 out of every 13 male respondents in the United States holding the same view.

These views on education are largely mirrored in attitudes to women's work and participation in politics. More than 80 per cent of men in seven countries surveyed in the Middle East and North Africa believe that when jobs are scarce, men have more right to work than women, and that they make better political leaders than women. In other regions, the proportion of men holding these views is lower, but still significant.

The survey revealed that women's views can also be equally discriminatory towards their own sex, if not quite as extreme. A surprisingly large number of women respondents from the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that men make better political leaders than women – including over half of women respondents from Bangladesh, China, Islamic Republic of Iran and Uganda, over one third from Albania and Mexico, and one out of every five from the United States. This underlines the fact that discriminatory attitudes towards women and girls are not simply held by men, but also reflect norms and perceptions that may be shared by the entire society. Research has shown that when women set aside these norms and the pressure to conform is relaxed, their choices and values are very different.

While such opinion polls and surveys offer a window into the views of societies, they cannot show the true extent of gender discrimination. Quantifiable indicators are needed in order to gain a clearer picture of the inequalities and inequities produced by gender discrimination against women and girls. But as many national and international surveys and censuses are often not disaggregated by sex, such indicators are relatively scarce. Nonetheless, the data available point to a clear conclusion: gender inequalities remain stubbornly entrenched in all regions of the world.

An attempt to capture gender discrimination in a single indicator is the United Nations Development Programme Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which assesses gender equality in key areas of economic and political participation in decision-making. The measure includes estimated earned income (a crucial determinant of a family member's influence on household decisions), the percentage of women working in senior positions and the percentage of women in parliament. Gender empowerment as measured by GEM is lowest in countries in the Middle East and North Africa and South Asia, and highest in industrialized countries, although there is wide variation across regions.

While poorer countries tend to have lower levels of gender empowerment, there is no clear evidence that gender inequalities automatically diminish at higher levels of income. Accordingly, low income need not be a barrier to higher levels of gender empowerment.

*See References, page 88.*

## Domestic violence against children

Every year, as many as 275 million children worldwide become caught in the crossfire of domestic violence and suffer the full consequences of a turbulent home life. Violence against children involves physical and psychological abuse and injury, neglect or negligent treatment, exploitation and sexual abuse. The perpetrators may include parents and other close family members.

Children who survive abuse often suffer long-term physical and psychological damage that impairs their ability to learn and socialize, and makes it difficult for them to perform well in school and develop close and positive friendships. Children who grow up in a violent home are more likely to suffer abuse compared to children who have a peaceful home life. Studies from some of the largest countries in the developing world, including China, Colombia, Egypt, India, Mexico, the Philippines and South Africa, indicate a strong correlation between violence against women and violence against children.

The behavioural and psychological consequences of growing up in a violent home can be just as devastating for children who are not directly abused themselves. Children who are exposed to violence often suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as bed-wetting or nightmares, and are at greater risk than their peers of suffering from allergies, asthma, gastrointestinal problems, depression and anxiety. Primary-school-age children who are exposed to domestic violence may have more trouble with schoolwork and show poor concentration and focus. They are also more likely to attempt suicide and abuse drugs and alcohol.

The incidence of sexual violence in domestic settings is well known. Recent studies indicate high levels of sexual violence in childhood – up to 21 per cent according to a multi-country study conducted by the World Health Organization – with girls far more likely to be abused than boys. Sexual and gender-based violence is prevalent in schools and colleges, with much of the violence directed towards girls.

Working in someone’s home can also entail the risk of violence. Child domestic workers – often girls under 16 – have indicated severe abuse at the hands of their employers, including physical punishment, sexual harassment and humiliation. Unlike other forms of domestic violence, much of the humiliation and physical punishment is perpetrated by women, although girls in particular are also vulnerable to sexual violence from men living in the household.

The consequences of domestic violence can span generations. The effects of violent behaviour tend to stay with children long after they leave the childhood home. Boys who are exposed to their parents’ domestic violence are twice as likely to become abusive men as are the sons of non-violent parents. Furthermore, girls who witness their mothers being abused are more likely to accept violence in a marriage than girls who come from non-violent homes.

Although they often lack the means to protect themselves, abused women

often provide protection for children who are exposed to domestic violence. But without the legal or economic resources to prosecute abusive spouses, countless women and children remain trapped in harmful situations. Government-led efforts to create protective policies for victims of domestic violence require a parallel effort to change social attitudes that condone such violence.

Shattering the silence that surrounds domestic violence is key to ending violent behaviour in the home. The Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children represents a crucial step towards unmasking the issue of violence against children, including abuses perpetrated in the household. The report’s six guiding principles – quoted at right – are clear, none more so than the first: **No violence against children is justifiable**. Its recommendations are comprehensive, with overarching precepts complemented by specific measures to combat violence against children in the home and family, in schools and other educational settings, in care and justice systems,

in the workplace and community. These measures also include advising governments to establish an ombudsperson or commission for children’s rights in accordance with the ‘Paris Principles’. The report advocates for the establishment of a Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Violence against Children to advocate at the interna-

tional level, in conjunction with UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the creation of a UN inter-agency group on violence against children, with representation from NGOs and children themselves.

*See References, page 88.*

### The guiding principles of the Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children

- No violence against children is justifiable. Children should never receive less protection than adults.
- All violence against children is preventable. States must invest in evidence-based policies and programmes to address factors that give rise to violence against children.
- States have the primary responsibility to uphold children’s rights to protection and access to services, and to support families’ capacity to provide children with care in a safe environment.
- States have the obligation to ensure accountability in every case of violence.
- The vulnerability of children to violence is linked to their age and evolving capacity. Some children, because of gender, race, ethnic origin, disability or social status, are particularly vulnerable.
- Children have the right to express their views, and to have these views taken into account in the implementation of policies and programmes.

## Grandmothers and HIV/AIDS

One of the rarely told stories from sub-Saharan Africa is that of the grandparents who care for children orphaned by AIDS. Research in seven countries (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria and the United Republic of Tanzania) with recent data reveals the enormous burden that orphaning is exerting on the extended family in general and grandparents – often grandmothers – in particular. By the end of 2005, 12 million children across sub-Saharan Africa had been orphaned by AIDS.

Children who have lost their fathers (paternal orphans) usually stay with their mothers; over 50 per cent of children in each of the seven countries assessed did so. However, fewer than half of the children who lost their mothers (maternal orphans) continued to live with their fathers. Women are therefore more likely to take care of orphaned children, irrespective of whether they have lost their mothers, fathers or both parents.

The strain of caring for orphans is telling on female-headed households, which have among the highest dependency ratios. Many of these households are headed by elderly women, often grandmothers, who step in to raise orphans and vulnerable children when their own children sicken and die. Grandparents – particularly grandmothers – care for around 40 per cent of all orphans in the United

Republic of Tanzania, 45 per cent in Uganda, more than 50 per cent in Kenya and around 60 per cent in Namibia and Zimbabwe.

In many poor countries, elderly women are among the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society. Unequal employment opportunities and discriminatory inheritance and property laws force many women to continue working well into old age. Following the deaths of husbands, many elderly women subsist on low wages earned in physically arduous jobs in the informal sector. For instance, in Uganda, a study by the UN Food and Agricultural Organization found that widows were working two to four hours more each day to make up for reduced income following their husbands' deaths.

HIV/AIDS is straining elderly people already struggling to make ends meet. Evidence shows that poverty rates in households with elderly people are up to 29 per cent higher than in households without. Elderly women who assume responsibility for family members affected by HIV/AIDS are often forced to work longer hours and sell personal possessions and household assets in order to pay for medicines, health care and funeral costs. Household studies conducted in Côte d'Ivoire found that families where one member was living with HIV/AIDS had roughly double the health spending

but only half the income of households in a control group where no one was living with HIV/AIDS. Funerals can absorb a large share of income; in four provinces in South Africa, a study showed that households with an AIDS-related death in the previous year spent an average of one third of their annual income on funerals.

The financial burden of caring for orphans can threaten household food security. A study in Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, found that orphans are more likely to go to bed hungry than non-orphans. In Malawi, moderate to severe hunger is also more prevalent among households with more than one orphan. The latter study has suggested that although extended family members may be able to care for one orphan, the demands of caring for any additional orphans undermine their food security and, by extension, the nutritional well-being of all children in the household.

Against the odds, grandparents and single mothers make enormous efforts to send children to school. Research from 10 sub-Saharan African countries has found a strong positive correlation between school enrolment and biological ties between the child and the head of household. But the financial strain may prove too great if the household has to accommodate more than one orphan. While there is no conclusive evidence to suggest

that orphaning per se increases the risk of children missing school, research from Uganda suggests that double-orphans – children who have lost both parents – are most likely to miss out on an education.

### A deepening crisis for orphans and caregivers

UNICEF predicts that the number of children who have lost one or both parents due to AIDS will rise to 15.7 million by 2010. At that point, around 12 per cent of all children in sub-Saharan African countries will be orphans due to all causes, with one quarter of these orphaned by AIDS. Disaggregated data provide an even bleaker panorama: Roughly one in every five children aged 12–17, and one in every six children aged 6–11 were orphans in 2005. At the same time, the number of widows is rising. HelpAge International estimates that the highest growth rate of any age group will be among those aged 80 and over, most of whom are women.

Programmes designed to provide cash and other forms of assistance to elderly household heads can help ease the burden of caring for young orphans. In Zambia, a pilot cash transfer scheme for older people caring for orphans has resulted in improved school attendance rates among children. In South Africa, girls living in households with older women in receipt of a pension have

been found to be 3–4 centimetres taller than girls in households with older women who do not receive a pension. Despite these successes, these programmes represent a short-term solution at best.

Addressing the crisis facing orphans and elderly women in sub-Saharan Africa, and elsewhere, requires a long-term strategy aimed at reversing the discriminatory social attitudes and customs that keep women and children mired in poverty. Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and in other regions, are developing national plans to address these challenges based on the five core principles of *The Framework for the Protection, Care and Support of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Living in a World with HIV and AIDS*. This framework, endorsed by international agencies and non-governmental organization partners in 2004, is based on five key principles:

- Strengthen the capacity of families to protect and care for orphans and vulnerable children by prolonging the lives of parents and providing economic, psychosocial and other support.
- Mobilize and support community-based responses.
- Ensure access for orphans and vulnerable children to essential

services, including health care and birth registration.

- Ensure that governments protect the most vulnerable children through improved policy and legislation and by channelling resources to families and communities.
- Raise awareness at all levels through advocacy and social mobilization to create a supportive environment for children and families affected by HIV and AIDS.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, initiatives are transforming the five principles into action. These include abolishing school fees in Kenya and Uganda; community-level interventions to support households in Malawi, Rwanda, Swaziland and the United Republic of Tanzania; and improved data collection through large population-based surveys. UNICEF is providing support and advocacy through the Global Campaign on Children and AIDS – *Unite for Children. Unite against AIDS*. Despite these efforts, however, coverage remains limited in all areas. With research revealing the disproportionate burden on female-headed households, there is an urgent need to provide them with assistance as part of broader actions to support orphans and vulnerable children and their families.

*See References, page 88.*

# Mother Centres in Central and Eastern Europe and the Gambia

## **Mothers in Central and Eastern Europe are leading the way in empowering women in their communities.**

Mother Centres provide women with a vehicle for forging social networks and organizing community activities that support women in their roles as mothers and caregivers. Initiated in Germany in the 1980s, the Mother Centres movement has spread to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Georgia and the Russian Federation.

Mother Centres arose in response to a perceived lack of support for mothers in their communities. In many Central and Eastern European countries, the tradition of community networks was dismantled under socialist rule. Since the transition of the early 1990s, high unemployment, poverty, political instability and a decrease in public childcare and support services have compounded the sense of social isolation experienced by many mothers and children. Mother Centres offer women and families an opportunity to access practical resources and social support. The centres help address the financial needs of families through services such as second-hand shops, meals, toy libraries, sewing and language classes, and job retraining programmes.

Neighbourhood Mother Centres reach between 50 and 500 families and have helped transform the lives of thousands of women in the region. Interviews with those involved testify to the positive impact that the centres are having on women and families: 58 per cent of women said they learned

how to participate and speak up, while 55 per cent felt that their confidence had increased since joining the centres. A survey of men who participated in some of the events revealed that 67 per cent had a positive view towards family responsibilities.

By empowering women to enhance their quality of life, Mother Centres are helping to revitalize neighbourhoods and fostering a new sense of hope among women and families. In 46 per cent of cases, Mother Centres are represented in municipal councils. The success of the movement has inspired other women to replicate the model, and there are now 750 centres worldwide. This dramatic growth illustrates the powerful impact that women can have when they mobilize. It demonstrates women's tremendous capacity to lead the way in empowering themselves and those around them.

## **The Gambia**

### **A similar initiative is operating in the Gambia, where women are banding together to promote girls' education at the community level.**

In the Gambia, Mothers Clubs provide a unique platform for women to raise financial and moral support for girls' education. Through advocacy and fund-raising campaigns, women are expanding the educational opportunities available to girls and asserting the right to have their voices heard in their communities.

Mothers Clubs operate in some of the Gambia's most impoverished regions, where most families eke out a living from subsistence farming, and few can support the cost of educating all

of their children. Although primary education is free in the Gambia, other hidden expenses, such as uniforms, writing materials and school lunches, can make education costs prohibitive. Owing to a range of economic, social and cultural factors, most parents prioritize boys' education; girls account for only 19 per cent of students in primary school in some poor communities.

Women are among the most vocal advocates of gender parity in schools. Advocacy campaigns organized by women promote access to education for girls, and focus attention on the retention and performance of girls in schools. UNICEF and the Forum for African Women Educationalists are supporting women in their roles as community advocates. UNICEF has provided the Mothers Clubs with seed money for income-generating activities, including gardening, making batik, tie-dye, soap and pomade manufacturing, poultry farming and crop cultivation, and has provided milling machines that give families an additional source of food and income and release women and girls from the burden of daily milling. Income generated from these entrepreneurial initiatives is used to pay for school fees, uniforms and shoes for girls in the community. Mothers Clubs have also invested their profits in providing interest-free loans to other disadvantaged women so that they can initiate their own income-generating activities.

Since the programme's inception, women have established 65 Mothers Clubs in three regions of the Gambia. The movement is having a visible impact on girls' education. Girls'

enrolment rates increased on average by 34 per cent, and the incidence of girls withdrawing from school due to early marriage has diminished sharply.

Mothers Clubs are creating new opportunities for women, in addition to girls. By providing women with the skills and resources needed to generate their own sources of income, Mothers Clubs are helping to empower women in their communities. Moreover, by persuasively arguing the case for girls' education, women are challenging gender discrimination and highlighting the importance of women's involvement in community decision-making processes, an achievement that will benefit current and future generations of women and girls.

*See References, page 88.*

## Do girls risk missing out on school when women work?

Although increasing numbers of women are entering the workforce, their expanded participation is not always matched by an improvement in children's welfare. The need for substitute caregivers while mothers are at work places many children – most often girls – at risk of being kept out of or dropping out of school in order to care for younger siblings or perform household work, or both. The universally recognized rights of children to play, to receive an education and to be cared for by both parents are at risk, with negative implications for their well-being and future economic status. Evidence of these trends is consistent across many developing countries.

A recent survey in Nepal shows that eldest daughters tend to be at greatest risk of being withdrawn from school to help their working mothers take care of younger siblings and to assume household responsibilities. Evidence from the United Republic of Tanzania indicates that a lack of childcare facilities forces parents to take their children to work or pass on childcare responsibilities to their elder siblings. Increasing female employment in Peru has resulted in children, particularly girls, dedicating more time to household activities. Similarly, in countries in South-East Asia, as more mothers work outside the home, the

increased need for childcare is met by older children, aunts and grandmothers, who often become the primary caregivers of young children in rural areas.

*See References, page 88.*

# The impact of family-friendly workplaces in industrialized countries

Following the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing the following year, the ensuing decade saw the launch of many family-related initiatives focusing on gender equality and work-family reconciliation. The rationale for this increasing interest was the recognition that dual-working parents require special support and that, in the absence of such support, gender equality in the workplace cannot be achieved. In several industrialized countries, state and private support for working families, in particular for working women with young children, are composed of a broad range of initiatives. These include flexible working hours, telecommuting or working at home, parental leave, medical care for sick children and childcare provisions. In the absence of childcare provisions, part-time work may also help reconcile work and family life.

Some companies have begun implementing family-friendly initiatives. In Australia, in addition to flexible working hours, 35 per cent of labour agreements in large firms and 8 per cent in small firms include at least one family-friendly policy. BMW, the German automobile manufacturer, allocates funds for the family-related needs of its employees, such as purchase of baby carriages, children's clothing or hearing aids for elderly relatives. The company also provides facilities and financial support for childcare.

Family-friendly initiatives can be beneficial to both businesses and employees. Research conducted in Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom shows that companies that have introduced family-friendly measures experience significant reductions in staff turnover, recruitment and training costs and absenteeism, and have increased the likelihood that mothers return to work after maternity leave. It is estimated that companies can generate a return of around 8 per cent by adopting family-friendly policies. AMP, a leading Australian wealth-management corporation, estimates that making its workplace more family-friendly has achieved as much as a 400 per cent return on investment, mainly through increasing staff return after maternity leave. However, further research shows that family-friendly policies are more likely to offer parental leave or childcare subsidies, or both, to highly paid employees rather than those with lower salaries. Such policies are particularly needed by low-wage working mothers who struggle with poor working conditions, low compensation and a lack of childcare facilities.

Family-friendly provisions are by no means uniform across industrialized countries. While in some countries parents may take up to three years of leave with some financial compensation, in others paid leave is restricted to the periods immediately before and after childbirth. In Scandinavian countries, employ-

ment-protected leave with relatively high compensation rates is an integral part of a family-friendly policy model. In Sweden, for example, working families are allowed 12 months of paid parental leave, to be divided between parents as they desire, provided that only one parent is on leave at any given time. Aided by the right to reduce their working hours until children go to school, almost half the mothers in dual-earner families in Sweden work less than 35 hours per week. Yet, while some countries encourage fathers to take temporary leave to care for their newborns, most countries continue to accept a traditional gender division of labour in which women stay at home, out of the labour force.

The lack of systematic reporting hampers measurement of the effectiveness of family-friendly policies (i.e., how well they achieve a balance between work and family life). While seemingly positive, two challenges remain even in the presence of family-friendly workplaces. First, working mothers continue to be the primary caregivers for their children, experience career interruptions and suffer from the double burden of working within and outside the household throughout their lives. Second, the family-friendly policy model frequently excludes low-skilled and low-wage workers, working mothers in particular, and typically benefits higher-paid workers.

*See References, page 88.*

## Child labour: Are girls affected differently from boys?

Gender is a crucial determinant of whether a child engages in labour. While child labour is an infringement of the rights of all children – boys and girls alike – girls often start working at an earlier age than boys, especially in the rural areas where most working children are found. Girls also tend to do more work in the home than boys. As a result of adherence to traditional gender roles, many girls are denied their right to an education or may suffer the triple burden of housework, schoolwork and work outside the home, paid or unpaid.

In the Dominican Republic, for example, girls are expected to care for their siblings as well as complete household tasks. As a result, almost twice as many girls as boys perform domestic chores. In Egypt, girls are expected to do the majority of work in the home. Parents are often reluctant to send their girl children to school because educating them is not viewed as a good investment as they will soon marry and leave home.

Paid domestic service is often seen as a particularly suitable form of employment for girls. Research indicates that worldwide, domestic service is the main economic activity for

girls younger than 16, with more girls employed in this sector than in any other form of work. The majority of the children engaged in domestic service – over 90 per cent according to studies conducted in the 1990s – are girls. This is particularly true in Latin America. In Guatemala, for example, while twice as many boys as girls are engaged in child labour, more than 90 per cent of child domestic workers are girls. In some countries, the situation is reversed; in Nepal, for example, the majority of child domestic workers are boys.

In many countries in East and South-East Asia, parents send their daughters to work in domestic service because they see it as good preparation for marriage. In India, young girls will often accompany their mothers as they undertake domestic work and, at ages eight or nine, be hired as domestic workers themselves. In Ghana, where girls are traditionally seen as homemakers, many mothers encourage their daughters to start working as domestics.

Domestic work is among the least regulated of all occupations. Working in the privacy of individual homes,

child and adult domestic workers are often invisible to the outside world and thus particularly vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse. Domestic labour becomes even more hazardous when children are trafficked into another town or country to take up service, especially when they do not speak the local language. There is a close correlation between gender and the reasons for trafficking, with girls being trafficked mainly for domestic service and commercial sexual exploitation.

The different experiences of girls and boys make it important to integrate gender concerns into child labour research, advocacy, programmes and policies. Research that reflects gender disparities will provide a more solid basis for actions aimed at reducing child labour. Gender-sensitive programmes and policies that combat and prevent child labour are essential to fulfilling the rights of boys and girls, including the right to an education, a healthy childhood, protection from violence, abuse and exploitation, and rest and recreation.

*See References, page 88.*

# Women and politics: Realities and myths

Should one expect the involvement of women parliamentarians to lead to different policy outcomes? The reasons one can assume women might act from a different perspective than their male counterparts are practical rather than theoretical.

## An alternative perspective

In an extensive survey of 187 women parliamentarians from 65 countries conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 1999, the respondents consistently portrayed women as having different priorities from men. Four out of every five respondents believed that women held conceptually different ideas about society and politics. More than 90 per cent agreed that women's greater participation would bring about change, and almost 9 out of every 10 considered that women's participation in the political process significantly changed political outcomes.

## Three reasons women politicians are likely to approach politics differently

**Women's motivation for entering politics is often different from that of men.** In the IPU survey, 40 per cent of the respondents stated that they had entered politics as a result of their interests in social work and 34 per cent through non-governmental organizations, as opposed to the more 'conventional' path of party politics often embraced by men. This finding accurately reflects a well-established tendency among women to engage in civil society as a way of promoting projects that support household survival, and to focus their energies at the local level.

## Women are often exposed to different patterns of socialization and

**have different life experiences than men** and are likely to bring their experience and expertise to bear on their political decisions. While important changes have been taking place over the past few decades, in most countries, women still bear the main caregiving responsibilities for their families, including children and the elderly.

**Women are more likely to see themselves as representatives of women.** A study of legislators in the United States, for example, found that women feel a special responsibility to represent other women and consider themselves more capable of representing their interests. In Northern Ireland, for example, almost one third of women who vote thought a woman would better represent their interests.

## Why are there still so few women in politics?

Given their potential contribution to the political process, an obvious question arises: Why then are there still so few women participating in politics? The answer is multifaceted and differs across countries, societies and communities. But several common threads are outlined below.

**Women are unlikely to run for political office.** While exact numbers are difficult to come by, existing studies indicate that women are less likely than men to run for office. In the United States, for example, men are at least 50 per cent more likely to have investigated how to place their name on the ballot, or to have discussed running with potential donors, party or community leaders, family members or friends.

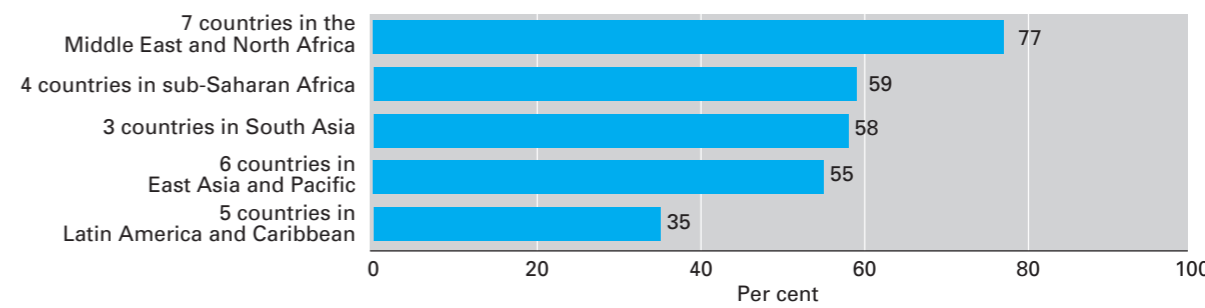
- **Double burden of public and private responsibilities:** As the preceding chapters have shown, women's work burdens are generally much heavier than men's, leaving less time and energy for involvement in political life. In the United States, evidence shows that as women's responsibilities for household tasks and caregiving decrease, their interest in running for office increases.

- **A culture of exclusion:** In many countries, both political and financial networks are controlled by men. Cultural practices that serve to nurture and consolidate bonds of male solidarity within these networks, such as drinking, smoking or golfing, are key stepping stones on the path to political office. A study in Thailand found that men typically dominate recruitment committees and tend to bypass women candidates, both in order to retain a structure they are familiar with and because they are more likely to know the male candidates personally.

- **Higher participation in education:** Those women who run for office successfully, especially in developing countries, tend to be educated to tertiary level at least. Out of the 187 women from 65 countries surveyed by the IPU in 1999, 73 per cent held an undergraduate degree and 14 per cent also held graduate degrees. The lack of women educated to tertiary levels in many countries can therefore act as a barrier to their participation in politics and government.

**Women face an uphill struggle to win over public opinion.** There are very few statistics about how many women run but fail to get elected.

**Figure 4.2** In most of the countries surveyed, a majority of the public agrees or strongly agrees that men make better political leaders than women



UNICEF calculations are based on data derived from the World Values Survey, Round 4 (1991-2004). Data for each country and territory in the regional aggregates are for the latest year available in the period specified. The following countries and territories are included in the regional aggregates cited: **Middle East and North Africa:** Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia. **Latin America and Caribbean:** Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Chile, Mexico, Peru. **South Asia:** Bangladesh, India, Pakistan. **East Asia and Pacific:** China, Indonesia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Viet Nam. **Sub-Saharan Africa:** Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania. Notes on the methodology employed can be found in the References section, page 88. **Source:** World Values Survey, <www.worldvaluessurvey.org>, accessed June 2006.

Voter perceptions, however, can offer an instructive indication. On average, more than half the people surveyed in East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa agreed or strongly agreed that men make better political leaders than women, with three quarters sharing that view in the Middle East and North Africa. However, in other parts of the world, the evidence is more positive. Far fewer respondents share this view in Latin America and the Caribbean, and over 80 per cent in Thailand think that a woman could be a good prime minister.

**Women leave politics.** There is little data available on whether women leave office more than men due to voter hostility or outright violence sometimes directed against women who are in office (or try to run for office). Women *pradhans* (leaders) in West Bengal, India, for example, revealed that even though women delivered an amount of public goods to their villages that was equal to or higher than that of their male counterparts, villagers were not only less satisfied with their leadership but

also blamed them for the inadequate quality of services outside of their jurisdiction. Perhaps unsurprisingly, about half of the *pradhans* said they would not run again. In Afghanistan, women candidates in the 2005 election were subject to violence and, in some instances, death threats.

## Myths about women in politics

Myths about women in politics, both positive and negative, abound. Because such myths rely on unrealistic assumptions about women and politics, they can easily perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination. Two such myths are discussed below.

**Myth 1: Every woman will make a difference for women and for children.** Just because a legislator is a woman does not mean she will automatically promote legislation that advances the interests of women and children. Women in politics are individuals who can fall anywhere on a wide spectrum of personality and ideology. Women legislators are accountable to constituencies that represent a wide variety of backgrounds and interests, and may

often find themselves divided by ideological, regional, class or other differences. Furthermore, they are members of political parties and sometimes have to follow party discipline at the expense of their own policy preferences. Nonetheless, evidence strongly suggests that, on the whole, women parliamentarians are more likely than their male counterparts to use their political leverage to effect change in support of children, women and families.

**Myth 2: Women are unsuited to the 'hard' jobs.** A 2005 IPU tally of ministerial portfolios held by women counted 858 women ministers in 183 countries. The distribution of portfolios, however, is striking. While almost a third of all ministerial jobs held by women fell in the area of family, children, youth and social affairs or women's affairs and education, women accounted for only 13 ministers of defence and 9 ministers of the economy worldwide (or 1.5 per cent and 1 per cent, respectively).

See References, page 88.

## Women's groups: A force for political change

There are at least two ways in which women's groups can be an important force for political change. First, these groups often provide support to women who have been elected to political office. Second, they conduct their own advocacy efforts on behalf of women, children and families.

Across the world, women's groups and networks are providing examples of how grass-roots mobilization can advance human rights, especially for the most vulnerable.

**Afghanistan:** Women's groups have provided significant support in mobilizing women to participate in the presidential and parliamentary elections and in monitoring the electoral process. They have also organized workshops for women refugees in order to expand their awareness of their rights.

**Australia:** Women's groups, along with other groups in civil society, played an important role as advo-

cates for the rights of children in immigration detention. They have lobbied for changes in domestic law and social policy and for improved services to enhance the ability of refugee families to rebuild their lives.

**Morocco:** In 2004, the advocacy and awareness-raising efforts of women's rights activists associated with the organization Printemps de l'Égalité (Spring of Equality) helped persuade government leaders to support a landmark family law that is meant to address women's inequality, protect children's rights and safeguard men's dignity.

**Mozambique:** A campaign against child marriage by several local women's groups contributed to the passage of a new family law in 2004 that raised the legal age of marriage without parental consent from 16 years to 18 years, and with parental consent from 14 years to 16 years.

**Rwanda:** In 2002, women parliamentarians and community leaders collaborated during the drafting of a national convention to support women's educational opportunities, small business loans provided by rural banks and the creation of a commission to lobby on behalf of vulnerable young people.

**Tajikistan:** The Tajikistan League of Women Lawyers drafted a national law on violence, which is currently pending approval by the president. The drafting of the law was a difficult task, but the League organized 32 workshops across the country for more than 1,100 participants, and eventually succeeded in obtaining the cooperation of local authorities, law enforcement and judicial bodies, ministries and other national institutions.

*See References, page 88.*

# Women and the Darfur Peace Agreement

In 2005, a Gender Experts Support Team, composed of 20 women members and backed by the governments of Canada, Norway and Sweden and by the UN Development Fund for Women was invited to participate in the seventh and decisive round of the Darfur Peace Agreement negotiations. The team gathered women from a variety of tribal and ethnic backgrounds in Darfur to create a unified platform of women's priorities and gender issues. The outcome document, 'Women's Priorities in the Peace Process and Reconstruction in Darfur', contains a number of key provisions related to women and children, including:

- Specific protections for women and children in conflict situations.
- Priority treatment for women and children in assessments related to compensation/reparations for damages and destruction caused by the war.
- An appeal to the government to pay particular attention to the education of women and children as a means of ensuring security.
- Provision of secondary education in the camps for refugees and internally displaced persons.
- A call to the international community to focus on the education needs of refugee girls.
- The creation of an institution to provide legal support, psychological counselling and other relevant services to women and children.

During the three short weeks that women were allowed to participate in the talks, they were able to negotiate for the inclusion of an impressive number of their priorities in the final agreement. The accord includes language that is gender-sensitive and, among other priorities, calls for the participation of women in decision-making bodies and in peace-building.

*See References, page 88.*

## Women as mediators and peacekeepers

An increased presence of women among peace negotiators and peacekeeping forces, among other critical actors, would greatly enhance women's contributions to conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation. As a District Officer from the Ituri Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo explained in a report to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), "Local women [and girls] have difficulty in talking freely to uniformed men, such as male military observers, especially about sensitive issues such as sexual violence and abuse.... In many cases, especially where there is endemic violence, local women [and girls] prefer to speak to a woman peacekeeper because they fear further violence, including from male peacekeepers."

The UN is fully aware of this fact. While the number of women among the uniformed personnel (military and police forces) deployed by DPKO remains miniscule – at 4 per cent and 1 per cent, respectively – active steps taken by the department in recent years have increased the number of civilian positions held by women. These steps reflect a growing recognition that the presence of women among peacekeeping forces is critical to the success of their missions, and can reduce the possibility

that peacekeepers engage in acts of sexual exploitation and abuse against the very populations they are mandated to protect, especially young girls. Among the key findings of an investigation initiated by the UN Secretary-General into such cases was the recognition that "the presence of more women in a mission, especially at senior levels, will help to promote an environment that discourages sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly of the local population."

At the behest of the UN General Assembly, as well as the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, in June 2006 the UN Secretary-General issued a comprehensive strategy for assistance to victims of sexual abuse by UN personnel. This policy, which UNICEF helped formulate, proposes a comprehensive approach to victim support, including basic health, psychosocial, legal and administrative assistance for all victims and, in exceptional cases, financial assistance. Building on this policy, UNICEF, DPKO, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme are organizing a high-level meeting to further address sexual exploitation and abuse in a comprehensive manner.

In addition to peacekeepers, mediators who represent the international community can act as 'tipping points' to help women secure representation in peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction. A recent assessment of women's participation in peace processes as 'track one' mediators – those involved in official negotiations through formal channels rather than unofficial contacts ('track two' mediators) – found that women remain largely excluded from conflict mediation and resolution processes. At the United Nations, women hold only 6.5 per cent of senior peace-related positions, while the European Union counts no women at all among its current and former high-level mediators. Similarly, despite Africa's deserved reputation of having strong female role models, women are entirely absent from the driving seat of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. In conflicts where pre-agreement peace processes are ongoing, stalled or forthcoming, and where the United Nations or the European Union is not taking the lead role, only Uganda stands out for the presence of a lone female mediator.

*See References, page 88.*

# The hope of justice for Bolivia's women and children

by Casimira Rodríguez Romero, Minister of Justice, Bolivia

## Learning to survive

I remember that when I was six, my family was regularly hungry because of a drought. We didn't have enough to eat even twice a day, so my siblings and I were sent to another community where my grandparents grew some crops and had some goats and cows. All the same, my mom always wanted her kids, both boys and girls, to learn to read and write, so that's why she sent us to the mining town of Quioma in Mizque. There they rented a room for us.

When I got ready for school, I didn't have anyone to comb out my long braids. My brothers tried to brush them every day, but it was a disaster. The miners' kids at the school weren't used to being around indigenous girls like me. I'd never fought with anybody before, but they pulled my braids, treated me badly, and that's when I started to live with violence and discrimination. I could only speak Quechua, and it was really hard to study in Spanish. After school every day, my siblings and I went out and gathered firewood and

swapped things with the local women. They gave us sugar, noodles and bread. We missed our folks terribly, but we learned to fight, earn money and survive.

## From exploitation to discrimination

At age 13, I went to live in the city of Cochabamba. With promises of earning some money, I took a job working for a merchant family for two years. The exploitation was terrible: I worked 18 hours a day looking after 15 people. I was under a lot of psychological pressure, out of touch with my family and working without pay. Eventually, even my new clothes wore out. And since I was always helping the boss's kids with their homework, I started to really want to go to school again, but it was impossible.

Luckily, my mom turned up again and I went back to my hometown. From there, I went back to Cochabamba and worked for another family. I got paid there. They were always good about paying on time

and giving me an extra month's pay at Christmas and other bonuses. But there was still a lot of discrimination: They gave me day-old bread to eat and food that had gone bad. My boss was a bit more humane, but when he died, I stayed on with his wife and she was like an evil stepmother: To her, I wasn't even a person. I worked for them as a housemaid for nine years, but it was so hard.

## Consciousness and organization

A fighting spirit awoke in me when some other friends and I founded the Cochabamba Home Worker's Union in 1987. When we saw all the inequalities in the law, we realized that we only had half of our rights. We held meetings with domestic workers in La Paz, with women who were real fighters and with mining union leaders. We held national meetings and started to consolidate our group. For the next six years, we worked on the draft law, although lots of details were taken out. The first draft was pretty protectionist, but the process took on more of a

rights focus. We were able to turn our fears into courage and make the authorities listen to us. At first, our friends and even our own brothers and sisters didn't want to have anything to do with us, saying we were city folk now. But we took heart and started to hold demonstrations in order to open doors. Convinced that what we were doing was right, we started to break down the walls of discrimination – and, by insisting so much, we managed to gather support and seats on the councils of rural women's organizations. We made alliances with our peasant brothers, workers, miners, coca-leaf growers, indigenous groups and other sectors. It was a very interesting process that truly bore fruit.

## The male world of politics

Along the way, we started to get support from Evo Morales's movement; as leaders, we started meeting here and there, coordinating national activities and international events. When they offered me the post of Minister of Justice, I didn't know what to do – I had to make a quick

decision! You have your (personal) plans, your family...but I put it all aside. We're going through a historic process that I just couldn't say no to. There was no way to talk it over with my colleagues. If I said no, they would have never let me live it down. So I accepted, knowing it would be hard, but it was all about recognizing that this was the next step in everything we'd been doing so far.

At first I was very worried – soon I'd be entering a very different world. In our organizations, we always just worked around other women. The world of politics is a man's world and full of professionals with different types of education and experiences; I entered into this realm very carefully. When you are a leader, you have the freedom to say what you like, but now I have to be careful about what I say, and at the same time I have to leave something behind for other women and our *compañeros* (comrades).

There's still a long way to go. In this post, I want to meet the expectations

of my brothers and sisters who have different kinds of problems. I want to fulfil the people's hopes for justice.

The boys and girls of Bolivia are living in difficult circumstances. There are huge inequalities. There are still lots of children who are going through what I did as a girl – not being able to go to school, not having safe food to eat. Our *wawas* (children) are the first ones to suffer from abuse, violence and rape. I would like to see a day when Bolivia's *wawas* can grow up enjoying the love of their parents without going hungry. It is a huge challenge. We have to make an effort to make everyone's dream of having a good life come true.

***Casimira Rodríguez Romero, the current Minister of Justice in Bolivia, was born in a Quechua community in the valley of Mizque, Cochabamba. She is the fourth of 10 brothers and sisters. Her life was marked by poverty and discrimination, and her presence in Bolivia's cabinet represents the historically marginalized indigenous woman.***

## Partnerships for girls' education

Gender parity in primary and secondary education is a central tenet of the Millennium agenda, and partnerships at all levels are increasingly recognized as the conduit to reaching this objective. The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), launched in 2001, is a partnership between UN agencies and a broad spectrum of partners dedicated to achieving gender equality in education. UNGEI facilitates the coordination of girls' education strategies and interventions at the country level through partnerships with governments, donor countries, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, communities and families.

Other partnerships are also working towards the same objective. In 1999, four international civil society organizations – Oxfam International, ActionAid International, Education International, and the Global March against Child Labour – established the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) to work towards elimination of gender disparities in education

by 2015. Based on research in nine African and Asian countries, a report issued by the GCE entitled *A Fair Chance* identifies key actions to eliminate gender disparities in education.

The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), based in Kenya, is a non-governmental organization made up of cabinet ministers and other high-level educators from sub-Saharan African. Since 1993, FAWE has worked with governments, donors, non-governmental organizations, universities, communities and others to promote gender equity in education. Partners focus on influencing policy, increasing public awareness, practical interventions and mainstreaming best practices. The partnership's achievements include the publication of the *ABC of Gender Responsive Education Policies: Guidelines for analysis and planning*, which details the process for evaluating gender responsiveness in national education action plans and provides guidance on gender mainstreaming. So far, FAWE has

analysed and influenced action plans in 17 countries.

Reaching girls in rural areas of sub-Saharan African is the focus of the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), which currently operates programmes in Ghana, Zambia and Zimbabwe. CAMFED reports having enabled more than 56,000 girls to remain in primary school, with 98 per cent graduating to secondary schools, by working with a wide range of partners, including parents, local authorities and patriarchal chiefs. CAMFED's community approach includes establishing district committees to raise and distribute resources, building community confidence through dialogue and addressing threats to girls' health and safety. The 'virtuous cycle of girls' education' means that the young women who benefit from these interventions subsequently support them by contributing their insights and perspectives to local authorities and children in their communities.

*See References, page 88.*

# Monitoring governments' commitments to women's empowerment through gender-responsive budgets

Budgets reflect the social and economic priorities of governments. A government budget that can be broken down according to its impact on women and men is considered 'gender-responsive'. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) defines gender-responsive budgeting as "the analysis of actual government expenditures and revenue on women and girls as compared to men and boys."

According to a report by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the aim of gender budgets is fourfold:

- Improve the allocation of resources to women.
- Support gender mainstreaming in macroeconomics.
- Strengthen civil society's participation in economic policymaking, and
- Track public expenditure against gender and development commitments and contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

Gender-responsive budget analysis can provide a clear picture of the ways in which the distribution, use and generation of public resources affect women and men differently. It is an immensely useful tool not only to highlight the links between social investment and the realization of women's rights, but also to hold governments accountable for their commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment.

UNIFEM has strongly promoted gender-responsive budgets, which

are currently being applied in over 50 countries. South Africa was among the first to implement gender-responsive budgeting in 1995. Rwanda's budget currently prioritizes gender equality, and all of the country's sectoral budgets are prepared with the participation of that country's Ministry of Gender.

In Latin America, UNIFEM has supported gender-responsive budget initiatives in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru. Such analyses have become codified in the formal budgeting process in Chile, where gender is one of six mandatory areas on which government ministries must report. Other interventions in the region have also included gender-based budget analyses at national, provincial and municipal levels, technical support to budget planning institutions, and advocacy initiatives with civil society and public sector organizations.

In India, female parliamentarians have taken a leading role in raising gender-based budgeting initiatives at the parliamentary level. Some states have gone even further by legislating for people's audits of local planning and spending, and enacting measures to ensure women's participation in these processes. For the 2005/6 fiscal year, 18 departments were directed to submit budgets showing resource allocations and expenditures benefiting women.

In Morocco, the 2006 budget contained an annex on gender equity priorities. This unprecedented

development followed four years of collaboration between UNICEF and the Ministry of Finance in Morocco. The annex assesses the implications that the national budget has for gender equality and outlines specific gender targets. Key ministries, including education, finance, health, agriculture and rural development, participated in the preparation of the annex.

Gender-responsive budgets are proving to be effective in focusing attention on where financial resources are required to promote gender equality and empower women. Along with child budgets, which are also gaining increasing recognition as effective advocacy and policy instruments, they are practical tools to show whether sufficient resources are being dedicated to realize the rights of women and children.

*See References, page 88.*

# Partnering to promote child rights and gender equality in political agendas

Partnerships between parliamentarians and advocates for women and children are also helping to focus greater attention on gender equality and protection against harm, exploitation, abuse and violence. One such partnership is the collaboration between Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UNICEF, which dates back over a decade and a half beginning with IPU's support for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. More recently, IPU jointly organized with UNICEF the Parliamentary Forum on Children during the UN Special Session on Children in May 2002. Since then, a strong partnership has developed between the two organizations, especially in the area of child protection and the promotion of gender equality. Some of the key joint actions have included:

- **Child protection handbook for parliamentarians:** *Child Protection: A Handbook for Parliamentarians*, launched in 2004, covers a wide range of themes related to child protection, including trafficking of children, violence against children, female genital mutilation/cutting, the sexual exploitation of children,

children and war, and juvenile justice. The handbook serves as a catalyst for action, providing concrete examples of ways to build a protective environment for children and parliamentarians' responses to the challenges of child protection.

- **Child trafficking handbook:** This jointly produced handbook by IPU and UNICEF was launched in 2005 at the IPU Assembly. *Combating Child Trafficking* served as a tool for a regional parliamentary seminar, 'Developing a Protective Framework for Children: The role of parliaments', in February 2006. The seminar, held in Hanoi at the invitation of the Vietnamese National Assembly, included parliamentarians from 13 countries.

- **High-level panels on gender equality and child protection:** In recent years, the two organizations have held a series of panels at the annual IPU assemblies to focus attention on gender equality and child protection. The first panel, which addressed the issue of commercial sexual exploitation, took place at the 2004 IPU Assembly in Mexico. The following year, the panel

addressed the issue of violence against women and children in situations of armed conflict. In 2006, the panel – which also featured the collaboration of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) – examined the impact of HIV/AIDS on children.

- **Regional forums:** On the recommendation of the IPU Task Force of Parliamentarians against female genital mutilation, the African Parliamentary Union, UNICEF and IPU organized a regional conference in Dakar, in December 2005 on parliamentary action to put an end to FGM/C. The conference brought together members of Parliament from 21 countries. It aimed at strengthening their action by familiarizing them with the experience of TOSTAN – a non-governmental organization based in Senegal whose Community Empowerment Programme has been successful in discouraging the practice of FGM/C – and similar successful initiatives to combat protection abuses against children.

*See References, page 88.*

## Quotas: One size does not fit all

Quotas have proved effective in increasing the participation of women in politics in countries across the world. The mechanisms by which they apply vary widely and have differing effects in each country. As a means to understanding the concept of quotas, the following definitions and associated terms are presented, as classified by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, an inter-governmental organization whose mandate is to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

- **Gender quota systems** aim to ensure that women constitute at least a 'critical minority' of 20, 30 or 40 per cent of legislators, or a true gender balance of 50 per cent. In some countries quotas are applied as a temporary measure, that is to say, until the barriers to women's entry into politics are removed. Most countries with quotas, however, have not limited their use over time.
- **Legal quotas** regulate the proceedings of all political parties in a country and may also prescribe sanctions in case of non-compliance. Legal

quotas can be mandated in a country's constitution (as in Burkina Faso, Nepal, the Philippines and Uganda) or by law, usually electoral (as in many parts of Latin America and, for example, in Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Sudan).

- **Voluntary party quotas** are decided by one or more political parties in a country. In some countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Germany, Italy, Norway and Sweden, several political parties have some type of quota. In many others, only one or two parties have opted to use quotas. If the leading party in a country uses a quota, such as the African National Congress in South Africa, this can have a significant impact on the overall rate of female representation. Most of the world's political parties, however, do not employ any kind of quota at all.

### Quotas can target different parts of the selection and nomination process

- The first stage involves finding aspirants, or those willing to be

considered for nomination, either by a primary or by the nominations committee and other parts of the party organization. Gender quotas at this stage are rules that demand that a certain number or percentage of women or either sex be represented in the pool of potential candidates. This has been used in countries with plurality-majority electoral systems, like the controversial 'women's short lists' in the United Kingdom.

- At the nomination stage, quotas are applied to the nomination of candidates to be placed on the party ballot. This implies that a rule (legal or voluntary) requires that, for instance 20, 30, 40 or even 50 per cent of the candidates must be women.
- At the electoral stage, quotas are applied as 'reserved seats', where a certain percentage or number among those elected must be women. Increasingly, gender quotas are being introduced using reserved seat systems.

*See References, page 88.*

## Women's participation in community-based initiatives across the developing world

Across the developing world, studies show that women's participation in community initiatives can have long-lasting benefits for women and children. Women who are empowered to take action, whether through programmes led by governments, non-governmental organizations or those driven by the community, often have a positive influence on the lives of other women.

**Bangladesh.** One example is the Food for Education (FFE) programme in Bangladesh, which focused on female-headed households. Lessons learned from the FFE programme, which ran from 1993 to 2002, were applied in a follow-up project by the World Bank. About 40 per cent of the 5.2 million students enrolled in schools with FFE received food grains, primarily wheat. The programme successfully increased primary school enrolment, promoted school attendance and reduced drop-out rates. While boys' school enrolment increased by nearly 30 per cent, the increase for girls was even more remarkable, at over 40 per cent. In addition, there is some evidence that the programme also enabled girls to stay in school longer, thus delaying marriage and improving their income-earning potential.

**Guatemala.** Families with working mothers in need of childcare were

the focus of Programa de Hogares Comunitarios, in Guatemala. Under this government-sponsored initiative, a group of parents was given the opportunity to designate a woman from their community as their childcare provider. The success of the programme, which began in 1991, was reinforced by the positive outcomes for the children, who consumed, on average, 20 per cent more energy, proteins and iron and 50 per cent more vitamin A than children in the control group. Programme evaluations also revealed that mothers involved were more likely to receive work-related social and medical benefits than other non-participating working mothers.

**Indonesia.** Non-governmental organizations are actively involved in the campaign for women's rights in Indonesia. Since 1986, the Centre for the Development of Women's Resources has been a leader in the movement to end violence against women. The centre trains community-based groups on women's issues, including survival strategies and skills for building support networks to cope with violence against women. The groups are then equipped with modules to conduct succession training until the information reaches village level.

According to the Asian Development Bank, the organization's campaign and training has increased the number of women requesting legal assistance from the Indonesia Women's Association for Justice, another leading non-governmental organization.

**Uzbekistan.** In Uzbekistan, the women of Angren City Municipality have given young disabled children and their mothers a new source of hope. Developed by women in the community who wanted to improve the social services available to the families of disabled children, the Sunday School Programme provides an educational environment for children who are excluded from traditional classrooms.

Women play a crucial role in the school's success, organizing the programmes and encouraging mothers, many of whom rarely participate in social events outside of the household, to enrol their children. By providing a safe and supportive environment in which disabled children and their parents can learn and socialize, the programme caters to the emotional and practical needs of families.

*See References, page 88.*

## Program H: Challenging gender stereotypes and changing attitudes in Brazil and other countries

Advocacy initiatives designed to educate men and women on the benefits of gender equality and joint decision-making can help nurture a more cooperative relationship between them.

A Brazilian non-governmental organization, Instituto Promundo, is implementing one such gender-sensitive programme, with positive results for women, men and children. Program H (the H refers to *homens*, or men in Portuguese) encourages young men to respect their partners, to avoid using violence against women, and to take precautions to avoid HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Through a creative blend of radio announcements, billboards and dances, Promundo challenges traditional male attitudes by promoting the idea that it is 'cool and hip' to be a more gender-equitable man.

Evaluations of the group meetings, where young men discuss the consequences of high-risk lifestyle choices, show that men who complete the programme are less likely to support traditional gender norms (for example, the belief that childcare is a woman's job and that there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten). The number of young male participants (aged 15 to 28) who supported the statement that "a

woman's most important role is to take care of the home and cook" declined from 41 per cent in the pretest to 29 per cent after completion of the programme.

The success of the Program H initiative in Brazil has inspired similar programmes in other countries in the region, as well as in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the United States. In India, for example, where programmes modelled on the Program H approach have been adopted, preliminary findings suggest that men's attitudes towards women have changed.

*See References, page 88.*

## Partnering to provide improved estimates of maternal mortality

Each year, over 500,000 women die as a result of pregnancy-related causes, and many others suffer life-long health complications. Reducing maternal mortality is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals, but it is also among the most difficult to monitor owing to difficulties in measuring maternal mortality. In some cases, measurement is complicated by a lack of data; maternal deaths often go unrecorded in countries that lack reliable civil registration of births and deaths, or where the cause of death is not adequately classified or reported. Even in those countries with robust civil registration systems, maternal deaths are often

misclassified or attributed to other causes – particularly if the pregnancy status of the woman is not known or recorded.

UNICEF is collaborating with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to improve the information base on maternal mortality. Building on more than a decade of inter-agency collaboration and cooperation, UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA are pooling their expertise to pioneer a new approach to estimating the number of women dying from causes related to or aggravated by pregnancy. The methodology developed for the project will correct

existing data discrepancies and generate estimates for countries that currently lack data.

The group's joint work will also enhance data collection and dissemination by compiling and reviewing country concerns to ensure widespread acceptance of final estimates on maternal mortality, obtaining the most recently reported national data from their country and regional offices and organizing interregional consultations to discuss underlying statistical issues.

*See References, page 88.*