

# A POST-2015 WORLD FIT FOR CHILDREN

## ISSUE BRIEF: Gender Equality and Girls' and Women's Empowerment



### **Why gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment is a critical component of the Post-2015 Development Agenda**

To achieve the future we want, a world truly free from fear and want, it is essential to address one of the most fundamental inequalities that exists in all societies – gender inequality. Abundant evidence indicates that gender is amongst the strongest determinants of disparities in child well-being and rights. Advancing gender equality is therefore critical to realizing global development goals across all areas of the Post-2015 Agenda, from reducing poverty to promoting the health, education, protection and well-being of girls and boys and future generations.

### **Gender inequality affects both girls and boys, but in many cases girls are disproportionately disadvantaged**

Inequalities faced by girls can begin right at birth. In some countries, often due to son preference and discrimination against girls, girls are deprived of access to health care or proper nutrition, leading to higher mortality for girls. As girls move into adolescence, gender disparities widen. For example, child marriage affects girls far more than boys. Globally, around 1 in 3, or approximately 70 million young women aged 20-24 in developing countries were married before the age of 18, with one third of them marrying under age 15.<sup>1</sup>

In two-thirds of the countries in which there is gender disparity in lower secondary education, it is at the expense of girls.<sup>2</sup> Absence of private toilets, lack of access to sanitary pads and hygiene-related stigma when girls begin menstruating impact their education including disproportionately higher absenteeism rates among girls and deteriorating educational performance, thus decreasing their chances of entering and completing secondary school. Disadvantages in terms of education also translate into lack of access to skills and limited opportunities in the labour market for young women.

Furthermore, while violence affects both girls and boys, girls more often tend to be victims of sexual violence. Recent household surveys reveal that approximately 27-28% of females and 9-18% males have experienced sexual violence before age 18.<sup>3</sup> In addition, girls are more likely to be newly infected with HIV: in 2012, there were an estimated 300,000 adolescents (aged 15-19) newly infected with HIV, of which 65 per cent were girls.<sup>4</sup> These are areas in which targeted action is needed to address the particular issues girls face and the gender gaps between girls and boys.

### **Suggested Targets**

- Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations
- Eliminate all forms of violence against all women, girls and boys in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

- By 2030, increase by x% the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
- By 2030, ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development
- Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all
- By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases, and other communicable diseases



### Women's rights impact children's rights

Around 800 women die each day due to the health risks related to child birth and pregnancy.<sup>5</sup> In developing countries, more than one third of all girls aged 15 to 19 suffer from anaemia, which causes particular harm in pregnancy.<sup>6</sup> Preventing maternal deaths and disability not only impacts the lives of mothers-to-be, but the survival of their children. Improving maternal health and nutrition, providing quality reproductive health services and supporting women in the care of their children are pivotal to protecting the rights of women and

children. In addition to supporting all gender-equality related targets from the OWG report, the following are of particular importance to children:

### Suggested Targets

- By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births
- By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving by 2025 the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under five years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and older persons
- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

### Lack of access to safe water and sanitation affects whole households and communities, but with particular impacts on the lives of girls and women

Globally, more than 1 billion people still practice open defecation<sup>7</sup> and lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation continues to be a critical issue for households and communities around the world. For girls, this can mean less time for their education, as water hauling responsibilities often fall on them. Not having a safe place for their sanitation and hygiene needs also puts girls at greater risk of violence. Ensuring universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene and ending open defecation are critical to fulfilling girls' and women's rights, as well as those of their families and communities.

### Suggested Targets

- By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations

### For more information

Please see UNICEF's webpage on Children and the Post-2015 Development Agenda: <http://www.unicef.org/post2015/>

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *The State of the World's Children 2014 in Numbers: Every Child Counts*, UNICEF, January 2014.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/14: Teaching and Learning: Achieving quality for all – Gender Summary*, UNESCO, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF and Collaborating Centre for Operational Research and Evaluation (CCORE) (2013)

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF analysis of UNAIDS 2012 HIV and AIDS estimates.

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization, *Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990 to 2013. Estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, The World Bank and the United Nations Population Division*, WHO, 2014

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *Progress for Children: A report card on adolescents (No.10)*, UNICEF, April 2012.

<sup>7</sup> World Health Organization, *Progress on Sanitation and Drinking-Water 2013 Update*, WHO and UNICEF, 2013.