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 phases. 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 misuses, 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 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, primary education 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 enrols 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 (FGMC) involves partial or total removal of, or other injuries to, female genitalia for cultural, non-medical reasons. The practice of FGMC 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 FGMC. FGMC 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 marriage

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 in or 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 practiced, 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 provide them with economic resources.

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 at least 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 showed 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. By 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 child care 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.
Attitudes, beliefs and practices that serve to exclude women are often deeply entrenched, and in many cases 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, such as education and health care – believe 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.

Institutional discrimination is harder to identify and rectify. Cultural traditions can perpetuate inequality and discrimination from generation to generation, as gender stereotypes remain accepted and unchallenged. The unequal division of household labour, such as requiring girls and women to trek many kilometres to fetch water and firewood, or the uneven allocation of household resources, such as giving women and girls less food or medical care, are examples of more subtle forms of inequality. These ingrained forms of discrimination often keep individuals, families and societies trapped in poverty and undermine economic, political and social development.

If poverty is to become history, then gender inequality must first be eliminated. Bold initiatives and unflinching determination are required to end individual and institutional gender discrimination. Attitudes, customs and values that are detrimental to women and girls must be confronted. No history, legacy, religion or cultural tradition can justify inequality and disempowerment.

The double dividend of gender equality

Despite ingrained gender inequality, the status of women has improved in the past three decades. An increased awareness of discriminatory practices and outcomes – including physical and sexual violence, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), disproportionate numbers affected by HIV/AIDS and female illiteracy, among others – has fostered greater demand for change. By promoting legal and social reforms, proponents of gender equality have begun to reshape the social and political

Gender discrimination and inequalities across regions

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.

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welfare-related goals and are more likely to use their influence and the resources they control to promote the needs of children in particular and of the family in general. Case studies conducted in the developing world indicate that women who have greater influence in household decisions can significantly improve their children’s nutritional status. Educating women also results in multiple benefits for children, improving their survival rates, nutritional status and school attendance.

Women prioritize nutrition

Throughout the developing world, one out of every four children – roughly 146 million children – under the age of five is underweight. Among developing regions, child undernutrition is most severe in South Asia and, to a lesser extent, sub-Saharan Africa. For children whose nutritional status is deficient, common childhood ailments such as diarrhoea and respiratory infections can be fatal. Undernourished children who survive the early years of childhood often have low levels of iodine, iron, protein and energy, which can contribute to chronic sickness, stunting or reduced height for age, and impaired social and cognitive development.

According to a study of three regions – Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa – conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute, a leading global research organization, an increase in hunger and nutrition, there is a clear link between regional differences in children’s nutritional status and women’s decision-making power. Where women have low status and are denied a voice in household decisions, they are more likely to be undernourished themselves and less likely to have access to resources that they can direct towards children’s nutrition. In South Asia, where between 40 per cent and 60 per cent of women are underweight, approximately 45 per cent of children were born with low birthweight in 2005 – the highest incidence of underweight births in the world.

The same study concluded that if men and women had equal influence in decision-making, the incidence of underweight children under three years old in South Asia could fall by up to 13 percentage points, resulting in 13.4 million fewer undernourished children. In sub-Saharan Africa, where one in every six women and around one third of children under the age of five are underweight, increasing gender equality would have smaller but still significant benefits for children’s nutritional status. It would reduce the vulnerability of children to violence is linked to their age and origin, disability or social status, are particularly vulnerable. States have the obligation to ensure accountability in every case of violence.


• 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.

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 girlsfar 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 goals 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 international 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.
Men play a pivotal role in promoting egalitarian decision-making. From the decisions they make about resource allocation to the care and support they give to women and children, they can help fight gender discrimination in their families and communities. The absence of fathers from the lives of their children can affect children’s emotional, physical, and intellectual development. Researchers estimate that one in three children living in the US – numbering roughly 24 million – live in homes without their biological fathers. Evidence shows that children can suffer emotionally and psychologically if they feel that they are not part of a family that conforms to what is considered ‘normal’ in their community.

A recent study examining the issue of family life from a male perspective revealed that most men aspire to be good fathers and to care for their offspring, especially if they are still married. Despite this trend, the study found that most fathers have limited access to resources and support to care for their children. As a result, many fathers feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities of parenting and struggle to provide for their families.

Grandmothers and HIV/AIDS

One of the rarely told stories from sub-Saharan Africa is that of the grandmothers who care for children orphaned by AIDS. Research in seven countries (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria and the United Republic of Tanzania) found 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 vulnera-
ble children when their own children sicken and die. Grandparents – particu-
larly grandmothers – care for around 40 per cent of all orphans in the United Republic of Tanzania, 46 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 vulnera-
ble and marginalized members of society. Unequal employment opportu-
nities 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 Orga-
nization 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 house-
holds without. Elderly women who assume responsibility for family mem-
bers 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 house-
holds 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 in which 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. The 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-orphaned – 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 19.7 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 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 50 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 rever-
sing the discriminatory social atti-
dutes 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 interna-
tional 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 legis-
lation 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 popula-
tion-based surveys. UNICEF is provid-
ing 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 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.

Neighbourhood Mother Centres reach between 50 and 600 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: 98 per cent of women said they learned how to participate and speak up, while 85 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.

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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 livestock raising, 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 disparities and emphasizing 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.

• Increasing women’s employment and income-earning opportunities: Ownership or control of household assets and income is an important determinant of household bargaining power. Ensuring that women have opportunities to earn income, acquire land, a house and other property can help to strengthen women’s bargaining power and influence in household decisions. Chapter 3 discusses in more detail initiatives that can increase women’s employment and income-earning opportunities.

• Involving men: Persuading individuals to change their attitudes and behaviour is a slow and complex process. Through simple, direct and effective strategies, such as persuading other men to contribute to domestic chores, men are partnering with women to combat gender discrimination in households and communities. By creating specific roles for men in advocacy programmes, governments and development agencies can also promote men’s involvement in child-friendly initiatives in parliament, schools and the workplace (see Chapter 5).

• Supporting women’s organizations: One of the most important and effective avenues for women’s empowerment is the dynamic of cooperation among women. Informal women’s collectives that organize around issues such as nutrition, food distribution, education and shelter help improve the standard of living for women, their families and communities. Women’s organizations can also be catalysts for change in the political arena (see Chapter 4).
women’s per capita average earned income – measured by applying women’s share of non-agricultural wages to gross domestic product – is far lower than men’s. This highlights the importance of the role played by both parents in caring for children, whether or not they work outside the home.

The asset gap
Women not only earn less than men, they also tend to own fewer assets. Smaller salaries and less control over household income constrain their ability to accumulate capital. But these are not the only reasons. Gender biases in property and inheritance laws and in other channels of acquiring assets – even state land distribution programmes – leave women and children at greater risk of poverty.

The consequences of being excluded from owning property or assets can be even more direct, particularly when a marriage breaks down or a husband dies. Widows who upon their husband’s death lose the right to their ownership of the family home or land, or divorced women who are driven from the husband’s home, are easily pushed into the margins of society, further exacerbating their health and wellbeing.

Gender biases in property and inheritance laws and in other channels of acquiring assets – even state land distribution programmes – leave women and children at greater risk of poverty.

As mothers take on paid work outside the home, children, especially girls, assume the domestic responsibilities, looking after the home and taking care of siblings – often at the expense of their education. This highlights the importance of the role played by both parents in caring for children, whether or not they work outside the home.

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 wellbeing. 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.

Although there are even fewer statistics on gender asset gaps than on wage disparities, the evidence available suggests that the pattern of discrimination is broadly similar across the developing world. A study covering five Latin American countries indicates that women own only a fraction of the land compared with men (see Figure 3.4, page 42). In other regions where data are available, women face similar inequalities. For example, in Cameroon, while 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 on children of women migrating for work

Around the world there are between 185 million and 192 million migrants living outside their country of birth, of whom roughly half are women. While women’s migration could potentially be beneficial, it also engenders new vulnerabilities for individuals and families. One such risk is separation, as migration sometimes forces parents to leave their children behind. In the Philippines, for example, an estimated 3 million to 6 million children (10 per cent to 20 per cent of all under-18s) have been left by parents working overseas.

Evidence from the Philippines, along with research on Indonesia and Thailand, suggests that, compared with non-migrants, the children of migrants might not be a particularly disadvantaged group in terms of income or access to basic services such as health care and education. This is because migration is generally an effective way for households to alleviate poverty, and because extended family help fill the gap left by absent parents. Remittances sent by parents who have migrated are often an important source of income for the families left behind.

Migration may improve women’s self-esteem and status as they are able to assume a key role as providers by sending remittances home to their families and communities. Several academic studies have found an increase in school attendance and an improvement in children’s access to health-care services in households with parents working abroad.

Although remittances sent by migrant workers can bolster household income, the migration of one or both parents can have negative effects on children, jeopardizing their development and well-being. Research from Mexico, Ecuador and the Philippines suggests that children whose parents have migrated can suffer negative psychological effects. In the Philippines, the children of migrant mothers reported feeling angry, lonely and afraid. In other countries, the risks of abuse and trafficking increase when relatives and friends gain custody of children left behind, and are particularly emphasised in studies conducted in Albania and the Republic of Moldova.

‘Involuntary migration’ also poses especially high risks to children. Refugee and internally displaced children face particular threats. They may be separated from their families, lose their homes and find themselves in poor conditions with grave risks to their health and education.

Migrant women and girls are uniquely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. With a greater likelihood of entering into low-wage employment such as domestic service, migrant women often face human rights violations. An International Labour Organization study reports that half of foreign female domestic workers interviewed said they had been victims of verbal, physical or sexual abuse. When migrants have children in foreign countries they may also face discrimination in passing their nationality on to their children, or, if they are undocumented, may be reluctant to register their children for fear of deportation.

A number of countries have made positive efforts to address migration and its effects on women and their families. In 2003, the Jordanian Government endorsed the Special United Working Contract for non-Jordanian domestic workers. The Philippines and Sri Lanka require that departing workers register with the government. Italy’s immigration law provides a number of protections for migrants and their families. However, while migration is moving up the development agenda, the significant implications for children still receive little focus and research.

Challenging attitudes towards women and work

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women guarantees women’s equality before the law and establishes specific measures to eradicate discrimination against women in all areas of their lives, including those related to education, health, employment, marriage and the family. Other forms of discrimination against women and men have been victims of verbal, physical or sexual violations – much more can be done to ensure discrimination does not exclude women from opportunities to work productively.

The workplace must be transformed to recognize the role that both parents play in child rearing, as required by article 18 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Social policies and programmes should be promoted to enable women and men to reconcile their work and family responsibilities.

The state of the world’s children 2007

Equality in employment

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, unemployment and assistance 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 at 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, employment-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.

The impact of family-friendly workplaces in industrialized countries

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family responsibilities and encourage men to take on an equal share of domestic chores and childcare. It is also important to implement policies aimed at altering stereotypical attitudes towards women at work, addressing underlying factors including sectoral and occupational segregation, and lack of education and training.

Chapter 5 addresses the concrete actions and initiatives required to help eradicate gender discrimination in employment. A brief synopsis of some of these measures is presented below.

**The vital role of education:** One of the most important strategies for ensuring that boys and girls will have equal income-earning opportunities as adults is to give them equal access to education. Several strategies have proved to be effective in increasing girls’ school enrolment in primary and secondary school, including the elimination of school fees. However, eliminating school fees is only one of several measures required to ensure gender parity in education. Governments, parents and inter-

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**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.
In most of the countries surveyed, a majority of the public agrees or strongly agrees that men make better political leaders than women. 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. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean, and over 80 per cent in Thailand think that a woman does not mean she will automatically make 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 at 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 and takes the whole 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.
Governments, in conjunction with women’s organizations and political parties, have a vital role in ensuring women’s empowerment. They do so by promoting gender-sensitivity among officials or establishing comprehensive women’s policy forums, such as women’s ministries and equal opportunity bureaus. A comprehensive study of governments’ responsiveness to violence against women between 1974 and 1994, for example, found no linear relationship between the number of women in parliament and policy initiatives aimed at reducing violence against women. Drawing on examples from 36 countries, the study revealed that governments with a high representation of women in parliament – such as Sweden, Finland and Denmark – sometimes lagged in their anti-violence policies behind such countries as Australia and Israel where the presence of women in the legislature was far weaker. The study concluded that what matters most in terms of a government’s response to the needs and interests of women is not simply the number of women in parliament. Of equal importance are institutional mechanisms, such as support from political parties for women’s rights, and the strength and coherency of women’s organizations.25

Political parties and women’s groups are central to the advancement of women’s participation in politics. Parties have a critical function in recruiting and endorsing candidates for elections and putting their weight behind specific items in parliamentary agendas.26 Women’s groups often provide the civil society impetus and expertise that are required to promote, develop and sustain the legislative initiatives and accountability mechanisms that can advance the rights of women and children (see Panel, page 59).

Women in local politics

Prioritizing investments that benefit women and girls

The participation of women in local politics can have an even more immediate and direct impact on outcomes for women and children than national legislation or policies. Although evidence about the behaviour of local politicians is limited, a number of studies from both industrialized and developing countries indicate that women in local government tend to prioritize social issues. Moreover, in one important documented case in the developing world (India), women’s increasing participation in local politics has led to a more equitable distribution of community resources, with direct benefits for women and children, especially girls.

In Norway, children’s issues, and particularly the lack of childcare spaces, are one of the most frequently cited reasons for women entering local politics. A recent study, tracking data as far back as 1975, shows that during the first year when women were around some 30 per cent of local council members, the number of children receiving benefits increased.27 The most significant finding of the study is that women in local government have the greatest policy impact early on in their careers because they bring a new set of concerns to the political agenda.28

In the United States, a 1994 analysis of more than 9,800 bills introduced in three states over a two-year period found that women legislators were twice as likely as their male counterparts to sponsor child health bills.29 Another study, which examined women’s political representation, showed that US states with a high percentage of women in the legislature are likely to be more supportive of efforts to address violence against women, increase child support, provide women with more extensive employment and unemployment benefits, and promote reproductive health care.30

In developing countries, research on the impact of women in local government is an emerging area of enquiry. The most comprehensive findings currently available come from India, where in 1998 one third of all leadership positions in village councils were reserved for women.31 An extensive research project examining the impact of the reservation policy initially surveyed 165 village councils in the state of West Bengal. The study examined the

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 advocates 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’Egalité (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 from 16 years to 18 years, and with parental consent from 16 years to 18 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.

Figure 4.4 Women in governance

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<th>World averages</th>
<th>Women in parliament</th>
<th>Women ministers</th>
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<td>30</td>
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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 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 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, where appropriate, 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.

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Women’s participation in conflict resolution processes

Across the world, women have become increasingly involved in conflict resolution processes. The Bonn talks on Afghanistan in late 2001 included 5 women out of approximately 60 delegates and advisers. During the negotiations, the women representatives fought hard for women’s rights, and their achievements included the creation of a Ministry of Women’s Affairs. In Guatemala, the participation of women in the formal peace process of 1996 led to a national health programme for women and girls – a programme to reunite families and locate missing or separated children and orphans. In the Philippines, women have held influential positions in formal peace processes and have pushed for cooperation across party and religious lines in the interests of peace. In Sierra Leone, two women were involved in the Lome peace process. Although they were not chief negotiators, a key article of the final agreement calls for special attention to be paid to victimized women and girls in formulating and implementing rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programmes. More recently, women have made a critical contribution to the Darfur peace talks (see Panel at left).

These experiences notwithstanding, in most conflicts women are either entirely excluded from peace negotiations or relegated to a ‘parallel’ track. Even establishing this type of track is a challenge that requires women to fight hard to gain even limited representation, and often brings only modest success. Examples of such parallel tracks include:

- Burundi: In 2000, women overcame the resistance of the Burundian parties and were included as informal observers in peace talks held in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania.
- Liberia: Even though the Liberian Women’s Initiative was unable to become an official participant in the regional peace talks of 1994, its leaders proved to be highly influential consultants during the process.
- Somalia: In May 2000, 92 women delegates to the Somali National Peace Conference presented themselves as a ‘sixth clan’ for peace (Somalia has several major ethnic

Women as mediators and peacekeepers

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See References, page 88.
The hope of justice for Bolivia’s women and children
by Casimira Rodriguez 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 only speak Quechua, and it was really hard to study in Spanish. After only speak Quechua, and it was really hard to study in Spanish.

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 going to lose. 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 every-thing 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 compañero (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 fulfill 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 (chil- dren) 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 Rodriguez 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.

Participation throughout the world
Though no such quotas exist for peace processes, their use is gaining increasing recognition as a potentially effective vehicle for ensuring women’s representation at the peace table.

• Party politics. Political parties remain the gatekeepers to the advancement of women in politics. Within the context of party politics, however, the sanctions for non-compliance are particularly important. While it may seem impressive for a party to commit to a 40 per cent quota for women representatives, for example, that commitment can be rendered meaningless if the candidacies of women are not actively promoted.

• Participation in peace negotiations. Over the past five years, active steps have been taken, particularly by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, to ensure that UN Member States, and other political actors adhere to resolution 1325. Nonetheless, efforts to include women in peace processes and post-conflict resolution remain confined to a handful of examples.

• Better data and research. Research on the impact of women on legislation and policy related to children remains limited, even in the industrialized countries. While UNICEF can and must play a critical role in child advocacy at all levels of government, this effort needs to be supported by better research on, and analysis of, the broader dynamic of decision-making and policy outcomes, with a particular focus on women and girls.

• Creating an environment where women can make a difference. The presence of women in politics is a necessary but not sufficient condition for their political empowerment. Women’s ministries and other women’s political forums, as well as the commitment of governments to greater participation of women in parliament, are equally important factors in advancing gender equality.
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. Partnerships at all levels are increasing. So far, FAWE has analyzed 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 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.

That is based on the principles of equality and respect for human rights. Achieving social change at the local level, in communities and households, requires concerted and deliberate action by a broad array of actors, including men and boys, husbands and fathers, voters, teachers, religious and civic leaders, the media, the private sector and, indeed, women and girls themselves. Actions taken at the local level need to be encouraged and reinforced by governments and international donors, which have a pivotal role in the design and implementation of appropriate legislation and programmes that protect and advance the rights of women and girls.

Effective partnerships are essential to accelerating progress in all of the areas cited. While across the international community partnerships are being recognized as the most effective means to bring about real and lasting change, their role in tackling gender discrimination – an issue that cuts across all aspects of development – is of especially critical importance.

Establishing effective partnerships that bring together diverse actors with different agendas, perspectives and affiliations is an objective not without problems or costs. Each of the seven recommendations will focus on the role of partnerships in tackling gender discrimination.

Some of the following actions can reap quick rewards, others may take longer. But for women and children, for this and for future generations, the time to act is now.

Education: Attacking gender discrimination at its root

As this report has shown, ensuring that girls and boys have equal educational opportunities is one of the most important and powerful steps towards combating gender discrimination and advancing children’s rights. Every girl and boy is entitled to education, regardless of their social or economic status. Enabling girls to access the intellectual and social benefits of basic education ensures that their rights are protected and fulfilled and greatly enhances the range of life choices available to them as women. Furthermore, girls’ education has profound and long-lasting benefits for families and entire communities. Women with some formal education are more likely to delay marriage and childbirth, ensure their children are immunized, be better informed about their own and their children’s nutritional requirements and adopt improved birth spacing practices. As a result, their children have higher survival rates and tend to be healthier and better nourished. Moreover, in many countries, each additional year of formal education completed by a mother translates into her children remaining in school up to one half year longer than would otherwise be the case.

Recent trends in girls’ education provide grounds for some optimism. Over the past 30 years, for example, gross primary enrollment rates for girls in low-income countries have risen from 52 per cent to over 90 per cent. But gender disparities remain, not only at the primary and secondary levels, but also in tertiary education, where a mere 5 per cent to 10 per cent of students in low-income countries are female.
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 promoted gender-responsive budgeting, which are currently being applied in over 50 countries. South Africa was among the first to implement gender-responsive budgeting in 1999. 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, Colombion, 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.

Equity and empowering women – has proved especially difficult. The UN Millennium Project has taken steps to modify its methodology in the hope of distilling more accurate estimates of the costs involved in meeting MDG 3. The initial estimates come from a detailed analysis of Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ghana, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda that has subsequently been extended to cover all low-income countries.

In the initial group of five countries studied, it was estimated that between US$37 and US$57 per capita (measured in constant 2003 US dollars) was needed annually for supplies and services in girls’ education, women’s health and other areas. The MDG 3 specific interventions represent only 6-10 per cent of the total cost of interventions required to achieve the MDGs.

Estimating costs requires outlining concrete areas where investments are needed. Many exercises estimating the cost of MDG 3 have focused solely on eliminating gender disparity in education, which, however vital, is only part of the puzzle. A more complete cost estimate focuses on the seven strategic priorities identified in the Millennium Project task force report on gender equality and achieving the Millennium Development Goals:

- Strengthen opportunities for post-primary education for girls while meeting commitments to universal primary education.
- Guarantee sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Invest in infrastructure to reduce women’s and girls’ time burdens.
- Guarantee women’s and girls’ property and inheritance rights.
- Eliminate gender inequality in employment by decreasing women’s reliance on informal employment, closing gender gaps in earnings and reducing occupational segregation.
- Increase women’s share of seats in national parliaments and local government bodies.
- Combat violence against girls and women.

How much additional financing in total is required to meet MDG 3 depends on how government resources change between now and 2015, and how much of those resources are dedicated to gender equality and women’s empowerment. According to a realistic scenario, low-income countries would need an additional US$28 billion (measured in constant 2003 US dollars) in 2006 from donor countries, rising to US$73 billion in 2015. Available estimates suggest, however, that governments currently target fewer resources to gender equality than other MDG areas.

Getting the financing right is only the first step. Money must be put to the right use, and it must be integrated within existing gov- ernment budget and plans, as well as aligned with poverty reduction strategy papers and other planning processes in which all stakeholders participate. The road to gender equality can be long and complex, but without sufficient resources the destination will be impossible to reach.

Levelling the playing field in national legislation

Legislative reform can be a powerful strategy for empowering women and girls and safeguarding their rights. Over the past year alone, women obtained the right to vote and to stand for election in Kuwait, pushed for legislation that would criminalize domestic violence in Tajikistan, called for the greater inclusion of gender concerns in peace-agreement and post-conflict processes in Somalia, and were a driving force behind the ratification of the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, which entered into force in November 2005. Nevertheless, in many countries, women still lack equal access to justice and legal protection, and in some countries, powerful legal obstacles continue to undermine their rights in key areas.

Domestic violence and gender-based violence in conflict

Violence against women and children has devastating consequences. It fills their lives with pain and terror, from which some may never recover. It knows no boundaries of...
Partnership 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 produced the jointly organized with UNICEF, which launched in 2004, covers a wide range of themes related to child protection and has been successful in discouraging the practice of FGM/C – and similar measures that accompany the breakdown of social institutions and structures in times of conflict.

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. It 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. Similarly, comprehensive mechanisms are needed to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in conflict. The increased lawlessness that accompanies the breakdown of social institutions and structures in times of conflict can contribute to a high incidence of sexual violence, exploitation and abuse. War exacerbates the violence that girls and women live with in times of peace. Many women and girls become victims of sexual slavery during conflict, forced to provide sexual services to armed forces or groups. In some cases, rape is employed as a strategic method of warfare in conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence. Much more remains to be done, however, including encouraging governments to codify rape and other forms of sexual violence as crimes in their national laws, holding states accountable for the actions of fighting forces, and increasing the numbers of women at all stages of peace-building.

Since all such acts of sexual exploitation and abuse take place within a broader context of violence, long-standing gender inequality and a lack of empowerment of women and girls, strategies to address gender-based violence must address these underlying causes.

Resolution 1325, adopted by the UN Security Council in 2000, took an important step forward by calling on “all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence.” Much more remains to be done, however, including encouraging governments to codify rape and other forms of sexual violence as crimes in their national laws, holding states accountable for the actions of fighting forces, and increasing the numbers of women at all stages of peace-building.

Property and inheritance rights

Equal land and property rights would represent a significant step towards eliminating gender discrimination at the household level. For legal reform to change the lives of women and children, national laws based on human geography, culture or wealth. Anti-violence measures often require specific legislation, as well as a strong commitment by policymakers, the judiciary and law enforcement officials, and, in some cases, the international community, to ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted and that victims receive the full support they need to rebuild their lives.

The Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children, released in August 2006, confirmed a widely held perception that domestic violence has inculcable consequences for children. Children suffer both directly, as targets of violence, and indirectly, as first-hand witnesses to the devastating impact that violence has on the family and household. Worldwide, at least 45 countries have specific legislation against domestic violence, 21 others are drafting more laws, and numerous countries have amended criminal laws to include domestic violence. But the gap between the laws on the books and their implementation often remains as wide as it is deadly, and important regional differences prevail. While more than 80 per cent of Latin American countries have specific legislation against domestic violence, this is true of less than 5 per cent of countries in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Africa and East Asia and the Pacific.

Similarly, comprehensive mechanisms are needed to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in conflict. The increased lawlessness that accompanies the breakdown of social institutions and structures in times of conflict can contribute to a high incidence of sexual violence, exploitation and abuse. War exacerbates the violence that girls and women live with in times of peace. Many women and girls become victims of sexual slavery during conflict, forced to provide sexual services to armed forces or groups. In some cases, rape is employed as a strategic method of warfare in order to humiliate, degrade and displace communities, as well as to achieve wider military objectives, including ethnic cleansing and political terror. Rape has also been perpetuated by those with a mandate to protect, including United Nations staff and peace-keeping personnel.
rights laws and principles must necessarily be upheld over male-biased customary laws and traditional practices. National legal reforms in property law and inheritance rights represent one of the most direct strategies for increasing women’s access to land and property. In the wake of land reform in Costa Rica, for example, women represented 60 per cent of land adjudicated in 1996 on joint titling, land titled jointly to couples made up 60 per cent of land adjudication, compared to 18 per cent in 1995.24

No compromise on protecting women and girls

Legislative reform is likely to require different actions in different legal contexts. The fulfilment of the rights of women and girls in one country may not be contingent upon the abolition or amendment of discriminatory legislation. In other countries, equal access to justice and legal protection may require the enactment of new laws or specific mechanisms that neutralize the power of other legal structures — such as customary laws and religious codes — which often discriminate against women.25 However, while understanding that customary law and religious codes are important, efforts at harmonizing these codes with statutory law can not be conducted at the expense of the rights and well-being of women and girls.

Quotas can encourage women’s participation in politics

Chapter 4 showed that, whether women are transforming political processes, directly representing the interests of women and children, or inspiring the next generation of girls, the political participation of women is vital for children. With Kuwait granting women the right to vote and stand for election in May 2003, there are now very few countries with elected parliaments where women do not have the right to vote and stand for public office.26 But while the legal barriers to entry into politics and government for women have been removed, women still account for only one out of every six national parliamentarians in the world.27

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 other 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.

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**Figure 5.1 The majority of countries with the most women in parliament use political quotas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Date of elections</th>
<th>% of women in parliament</th>
<th>Does the country have a quota?</th>
<th>Types of quota</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>September 2003</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>September 2002</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>February 2006</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>September 2005</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>March 2003</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>February 2005</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>January 2003</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>January 2003</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>March 2004</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>October 2005</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>December 2004</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>May 2003</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>November 2003</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>May 2003</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>April 2004</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
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* There are several types of quotas, including (1) constitutional quotas; (2) election law quotas; and (3) political party quotas for electoral candidates. For definitions, see Panel, page 78.

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' 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 delayed 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 programme 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.

Another strategy for increasing men's support for gender equality involves policies that aim to redistribute benefits to men and women more equitably. Evidence from the “Nordic experiment” illustrates how this works. In Scandinavian countries, a combination of government and non-government initiatives contributed to a dramatic increase in the availability of paternity leave for men. In Sweden, for instance, fathers now assume responsibility for 45 per cent of childcare responsibilities, thanks in large part to the growing popularity of paternal leave.

Challenging gender stereotypes and changing attitudes

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 men and women. Evidence shows that fathers are more likely to stop abusive treatment towards mothers if they have been exposed to information on how gender-based violence adversely affects their children.

Research and data on the situation of women and girls

There is broad recognition of the impact that discrimination has on the lives of women. But an overwhelming lack of sex-disaggregated statistics often results in scant or weak quantitative research on the issues that affect women and, in turn, children. This report has shown that there is sufficient data and research on women and girls to outline where their rights are violated and illustrate the negative impacts these violations can have on children. Nonetheless, much more needs to be known about many of the most important aspects of women's lives and the impact discrimination has on those around them. Research and data are sorely lacking in several key areas listed below.

• Maternal mortality: While 111 countries produced data based on registration systems and other surveys, for 62 countries no recent national data were available and estimates therefore had to be based on models.
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 dance, 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 beat-en). 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.

UNICEF has joined with other UN agencies and institutions to create a partnership dedicated to producing more comprehensive and accurate data.83

- Violence against women: Only 38 countries in the world have conducted at least one national survey on violence against women since 1995. A further 30 countries have surveys completed that cover parts of the country.84

- Enrolment, school attendance and literacy: While there are significant data disaggregated by sex on school enrolment, sex-disaggregated data on literacy and school attendance are available for only 112 and 96 countries, respectively. Efforts to compile and release sex-disaggregated data on female completion rates at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education must also be strengthened.85

- Labour force, unemployment and occupational distribution: Just over half the world’s 204 countries and territories provided sex-disaggregated data on these fundamental areas of work, with only 105 providing data on occupational segregation by sex.86

- Wage statistics: This is a vital area where discrimination affects women and their children, yet just under half (52) of the 108 countries or territories that reported wage data were also able to provide disaggregation by sex. Europe and Asia account for almost three quarters of these countries.87

- Informal employment: Even with an internationally agreed-upon definition of informal employment, only 60 countries have produced data on informal employment, and in many cases these statistics are not fully comparable.88

- Unpaid work and time use: Since 1995, 67 countries or areas have conducted time use surveys, with again the vast majority in CEE/CIS and South and East Asia. Only seven countries in Africa and three in South America have collected such data.89

- Women’s participation in national and local governments: The Inter-Parliamentary Union collects data on the number of women in parliaments and how the numbers have changed over time. Data on women’s participation in local government are relatively scarce, however, although United Cities and Local Governments has collected data in more than 70 countries.90

- Women in peace negotiations and peace-building: No systematic data are available on women participating as parties to peace negotiations. With the exception of the statistics made available by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, no systematic data are available about women involved in different dimensions of peace-building.

In some areas, collection of data is much more difficult than in others. Collecting data on violence and trafficking, for example, poses more methodological problems than data on women in national parliaments. However, the lack of data in many key areas reflects not the difficulties of data collection, but rather the significant discrepancy between the resources invested in the excellent and careful collection of data in some areas, and lack of data in others. In other words, it is not only a question of capacity but also one of political will to invest in data collection.

When statistics are a priority, even if difficult to collect, they are there. Financial statistics such as inflation, for example, are not easy to collect as they require detailed and rapidly updated economic information, yet they are available almost universally – even in the poorest countries. But many countries, particularly poorer ones, do not currently have the statistical capacity to regularly collect the most basic disaggregated statistical series, let alone in areas such as informal employment, time use and wages.

While country-led censuses and surveys are the centrepiece of statistical collection, other approaches can rapidly produce data even where statistical capacity is limited. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, a household survey programme developed by UNICEF to

Figure 5.3 In many countries sex-disaggregated data are not available for key indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Countries with data</th>
<th>Countries without data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary school enrolment</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal mortality</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational distribution</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s participation in local government</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid work and time use</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal employment</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage statistics</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School attendance</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against women</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified.

Note: ‘Countries with data’ includes only countries where data are based on censuses, surveys or other sources, not countries where data are derived from modelled estimates. ‘Data from censuses only’ includes only data from national surveys. An additional 30 countries have surveys covering part of the country.

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 lifelong 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.

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REAPING THE DOUBLE DIVIDEND OF GENDER EQUALITY