



**GIRLS
SPEAK**

**A NEW VOICE
IN GLOBAL
DEVELOPMENT**

**A GIRLS COUNT REPORT ON
ADOLESCENT GIRLS**

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**INTERNATIONAL CENTER
FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN**

Cover Photo

The Binti Pamoja (Daughters United) Center is a program of Carolina for Kibera in the Nairobi slum of Kibera, Kenya. The program creates and provides a safe space for adolescent girls to develop girls' leadership, communication skills and self confidence.

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TAKING ACTION FOR GIRLS: ELEVATING THEIR VOICES

Girls Speak: A New Voice in Global Development shows that girls' insights in development increase impact and effectiveness. These five actions will help make the unheard heard.

Listen to girls and learn about their aspirations, and engage them in decision-making processes

Shift the paradigm from working for adolescent girls to working with them as partners. Listen to girls' unique insights into their lives and work alongside them to achieve their goals. Cultivate girls' voices and engage them in developing, executing and evaluating programs and services.

Engage families, teachers and traditional leaders as girl champions

Build a network of community-based local girl champions that prepare the terrain for long-term, sustainable change. Create an enabling environment that facilitates girls' socioeconomic development, participation and self-expression.

Provide safe and inclusive community spaces where girls can develop and raise their voices

Designate safe space areas and times when girls can meet, talk, play and learn, away from community and family pressure. Educate local officials and institutions about girls' rights and hold them accountable for when girls are excluded from public spaces—from sports fields to community centers to police stations.

Give girls public platforms to amplify their voices

Include girls' voices at institutions, in media, at events and in campaigns. Provide girls with a platform to voice their opinions, and work with them to strengthen and amplify their voices.

Change social norms that stifle girls' voices

Deliver true long-term change by addressing the most powerful silencer of girls: harmful social and gender norms that govern all aspects of a girl's life, from family to education, health care and livelihood. Commit to change those discriminatory norms in all interventions, across all sectors, through innovative solutions and collaboration.

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The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) works to empower women, advance gender equality and fight poverty in the developing world. To accomplish this, ICRW works with partners in the public and private sectors and civil society to conduct empirical research, build capacity and advocate for evidence-based practical ways to change policies and programs. Learn more about ICRW and its work at www.icrw.org.



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A girl dumps waste water amid piles of garbage in the massive Shivaji Nagar slum in Mumbai, India. Living conditions in the slum are extremely poor, and girls have few opportunities to rise above the poverty that defines such a landscape.



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A girl in Kenya finishes her household chores while others relax. Investments in infrastructure and technology can reduce the chore burden on girls, giving them more time for school, reading and play.

GIRLS SPEAK FOREWORD

If you want to change the world, invest in an adolescent girl.

An adolescent girl stands at the doorway of adulthood. In that moment, much is decided. If she stays in school, remains healthy, and gains real skills, she will marry later, have fewer and healthier children, and earn an income that she'll invest back into her family.

But if she follows the path laid down by poverty, she'll leave school and enter marriage. As a girl mother, an unskilled worker, and an uneducated citizen, she'll miss out on the opportunity to reach her full human potential. And each individual tragedy, multiplied by millions of girls, will contribute to a much larger downward spiral for her nation.

Investing in girls is the right thing to do on moral, ethical, and human rights grounds. Perhaps no other segment of society globally faces as much exploitation and injustice, and we owe girls our support as integral, yet overlooked, members of the human family.

Investing in girls is also the smart thing to do. If the 600 million adolescent girls in the developing world today follow the path of school drop-out, early marriage and early childbirth, and vulnerability to sexual violence and HIV/AIDS, then cycles of poverty will only continue.

Yet today, only a tiny fraction of international aid dollars is spent—and spent effectively—on needs specific to adolescent girls. That underinvestment is the reality the Coalition for Adolescent Girls (www.coalitionforadolescentgirls.org) is trying to change.

Launched by the United Nations Foundation and the Nike Foundation in 2005, the Coalition's goal is to offer fresh perspectives, diverse resources, and concrete policy and program solutions to the challenges facing adolescent girls in developing countries. Our

first step? Uncover adolescent girl-specific data and insights to drive meaningful action.

In 2008, *Girls Count: A Global Investment and Action Agenda* did just that. Authored by Ruth Levine from the Center for Global Development, Cynthia B. Lloyd of the Population Council, Margaret Greene of the International Center for Research on Women, and Caren Grown of American University, *Girls Count* laid out the case for investing in girls and outlined actions that policymakers, donors, the private sector, and development professionals can and should take to improve the prospects for girls' wellbeing in the developing world.

Today, we are pleased that *Girls Count* has gone into its second printing. More importantly, the authors have continued beyond that groundbreaking work to explore girls' lives further. Together, the results comprise the new *Girls Count* series:

- In *New Lessons: The Power of Educating Adolescent Girls*, Cynthia B. Lloyd and Juliet Young demonstrate that education for girls during adolescence can be transformative, and they identify a broad array of promising educational approaches which should be evaluated for their impact.
- In *Girls Speak: A New Voice in Global Development*, Margaret Greene, Laura Cardinal, and Eve Goldstein-Siegel reveal that adolescent girls in poverty are acutely aware of the obstacles they face, but are full of ambitious, powerful ideas about how to overcome them.
- In *Start with a Girl: A New Agenda for Global Health*, Miriam Temin and Ruth Levine describe the positive multiplier effect of including adolescent girls in global health programs and policies—and the risks if they continue to be left out.
- Through *Girls Discovered: Global Maps of Adolescent Girls*, Alyson Warhurst, Eva Molyneux,

and Rebecca Jackson at Maplecroft join the ranks of *Girls Count* authors by using their unique quantitative analysis of girl-specific data to literally put girls on the global map.

Each report takes us deeper into the lives of adolescent girls and contains an action agenda outlining how the global community can count girls, invest in girls, and advocate for girls. Taken together, the *Girls Count* series presents a powerful platform for action. Please visit coalitionforadolescentgirls.org for more information.

The girl effect is the missing and transformative force needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, with the unique power to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. It is about the lives of 600 million adolescent girls, and the millions more lives that are affected by them. Girls do indeed count.



Maria Eitel
President
The Nike Foundation
October 2009



Kathy Bushkin Calvin
CEO
The United Nations
Foundation
October 2009



GIRLS SPEAK ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the adolescent girls whose voices speak from these pages. We thank the United Nations Foundation and the Nike Foundation for their support of this research and their ongoing commitment to adolescent girls around the world. Many organizations and people contributed to this work through their generosity with their data and ideas. The Guttmacher Institute's rich interviews with girls in sub-Saharan Africa were fundamental to our analysis. Harriet Birungi's research on HIV-positive girls in Uganda was also important. We thank Lauren Weeth for directing us to data she had been involved in collecting on schooling in Morocco. Priya Patil's assistance with the quantitative data and discussions of how best to present the ideas they contained was valuable and timely. Alison Gold contributed to some of the early thinking on the paper, and Karin Ringheim reviewed recent literature on girls and provided the basis for the direction we would take. Anju Malhotra provided useful comments on several iterations of the paper. Anjala Kanesathasan drew on her knowledge of programs to provide input on the assertions and arguments of the paper. Sandy Won provided superb editorial input at the right moment, and she and Sandra Bunch provided important guidance on the paper's central messages.

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Through a grant from the Global Fund for Children, Nucleo Socio-Cultural Caixa de Surpresas in Rio de Janeiro promotes the potential of adolescents through the creative arts.



GIRLS SPEAK EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adolescent girls in poor countries play pivotal – but often overlooked – roles in their families and communities. Each day they cook, clean, fetch water, do agricultural work, and care for children and the elderly, which frees up time for other family members to work and earn money. But providing these services comes at huge costs to the girls themselves – and to their families and eventually to future generations – because denying opportunities to girls prevents them from reaching their full potential.

We know much more about those costs now than we did 10 or 20 years ago: Many girls have no say in major life decisions. Family and community norms often harm their well-being and their transitions to adulthood. Girls marry and have children at young ages, often against their will. Violence is commonplace, impairing their health and schooling. Economic opportunities outside the household are rare.

With a clearer view of the issues, the global community is now grappling with solutions. These are not easy to identify because few development approaches focus on girls. Policies and programs are imported from best practices elsewhere, without regard to the particular circumstances or environments that shape girls' lives. Many of these programs are unsuccessful as a result.

Addressing adolescent girls' challenges requires a fundamentally different starting point: Girls themselves. Not women, not youth, but girls. And integral to that is listening to girls and paying real attention to what they have to say.

Today, we know very little about how girls see their lives and what they want for themselves and their futures. *Girls Speak: A New Voice in Global Development* draws together girls' voices and makes them accessible to policymakers and program managers.

So what difference does listening to girls make?

First, it should assure policymakers and program managers that adolescent girls have the self-determination required to begin better lives. The circumstances may vary, but every girl shares a basic dream: "I want to see progress in my life," says an 18-year-old girl from rural Ghana.¹ "Every human being prays for good things, and I am no exception." Girls want to be educated, productive, self-reliant, and healthy members of their societies. Girls also want to be free from abuse and sexual violence, free to choose who and when to marry, and free to decide when to have children.

Second, it reveals that girls confirm the growing body of research about what leads to long-term change for themselves and their families: health, education, economic choice, and delayed marriage and child-bearing. Girls are not only determined – they have clear ideas about what needs to change in their lives for them to succeed.

Third, a girl's-eye view of her barriers can point the way to the highest-priority interventions. Girls' opinions reinforce a forbidding reality: they cannot change their lives on their own. Families, teachers, mentors and community attitudes are central to unleashing girls' potential. As a Moroccan schoolgirl states, "Though we are girls, we have dreams and hobbies, and we want to achieve goals, but we don't find help that can lead us to fulfill these dreams."² Girls as a group express the idea that in order to change their lives, we must find ways to open the minds of those around them.

Finally, listening to girls and working alongside them to achieve their goals adds moral authority. Girls provide sharp insights into how to improve their own circumstances.

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Marleen in Nairobi has learned important life skills to help her take charge of when to marry, have children and avoid gender-based violence and exploitation.







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Photo Credit: Brent Stirton/Getty Images

It is time for girls to speak out—and for development organizations to cultivate and listen to their ideas. “We the children are experts on being 8, 12, or 17 years old in the societies of today,” says Heidi Grande, a 17-year-old Norwegian girl speaking at a United Nations consultation with children.³ “To consult us would make your work more effective and give better results for children.”

Beyond listening, development organizations must respond. *Girls Speak* is a call to understand girls’ perspectives, needs and priorities and to work with girls to provide them with the means to reach their goals.

What girls are saying

We want an education. A 20-year-old Bangladeshi garment worker noted regretfully that, “I stopped studying after class five because my father was religious and did not believe in girls’ education. Now I know the value of education. No one can take it away from you; it is your very own.”⁴ Education is fundamental to productive participation in society. It offers more opportunities to expand horizons, whether through book-learning, interactions with teachers, or group activities with peers.

But girls face many constraints. Some do not have the financial means, and family members often stand in the way of their educational aspirations. As a result, many have to stay home, jeopardizing their futures. As one Nepali girl put it, “We could have learned many things if we were given the chance to study...We could teach others as well.”⁶ Girls want their parents and teachers to encourage them to go to school and to get jobs after they finish.

Girls say: Teach our families and communities how important education is and help them find ways to support our educational attainment.

We want to stay healthy. “All girls and boys must have equal access to a full range of health information and services,” stated a young person at a consultation with youth from violence-affected countries. Girls face an array of health challenges that range from food insecurity and poor nutrition to poor reproductive health. Gender discrimination causes many of their problems. In many societies boys and men eat first, leaving the remains for girls. Girls face

I stopped studying after class five because my father was religious and did not believe in girls’ education. Now I know the value of education. No one can take it away from you; it is your very own.

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Mukta from Bangladesh was taken out of school to be married at age 16. Unfortunately, Mukta’s situation is not unique; 64% of surveyed women ages 20-24 in Bangladesh reported being married before the legal age of 18.

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Juthika, 15, not only attends school, but tutors boys in her village in Bangladesh and helps pay for her siblings’ education. When girls learn, whole communities benefit.

I just want to get a job of my own, and help my parents who looked after me when I was young.

great physical demands, often having to travel long distances to collect and carry fuel and water home. The water they collect may be contaminated, and in collecting it they may be exposed to disease. Girls routinely lack access to the most basic health information – even relating to the significance and management of their menstrual periods – and their access to health services of any kind is negligible.

Violence remains a problem among married and unmarried adolescent girls throughout the developing world. They want access to sexual and reproductive health services. At greater risk of becoming infected by HIV than males, they want to know about the potential negative consequences of HIV and AIDS, how to prevent it, and how to protect themselves from sexual violence.

Girls say: Teach our families and societies to provide us with a fair share of food and access to health care and information that reflects the realities of our lives.

We want to choose when to marry and when to have children. A 13-year-old Venezuelan girl clearly stated her goals: “I don’t want to get married and have children, at least not anytime soon...I want to work and study. I don’t want to be like another girl I know who is 13 years old and already pregnant.”⁷ Traditional gender norms around marriage and childbearing often preclude achieving other things girls want to do. Some want to get married, just later in life; that way they can get an education and work. They also want to be careful about having children too early. Unwanted and mistimed pregnancies frequently put an end to their aspirations for education and an economic livelihood.

Girls say: Give us the choice to put off marriage and childbearing until we decide we are ready.

We want to be empowered economically. “I just want to get a job of my own, and help my parents who looked after me when I was young,” explained a 14-year-old girl who was in school in urban Uganda.⁸ Economic independence frees girls from relying on others and allows them to be productive, financially secure and contributing members of society. But too often they are burdened with household chores, at a cost of opportunities to build their lives. Families rely on the immediate benefits of girls’ ad hoc economic

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Young Muslim girls play amid the narrow alleys of the Shivaj Nagar slum in Mumbai, India.







Parents give priority to boys rather than girls. Though we are girls, we have dreams and hobbies, and we want to achieve goals, but we don't find help that can lead us to fulfill these dreams. I hope that there will be some assistance and support from NGOs, either material or moral.

contributions and in so doing fail to provide the inputs required for meaningful livelihood development. New organizational collaborations are needed to overcome girls' heavy commitment to household work. Infrastructure is needed; where it is not available, clever ways must be designed to overcome its absence.

Girls say: Help our families get beyond thinking only about our domestic contributions and start thinking about our economic contributions outside the home.

How to respond

By listening to girls' voices, policymakers and program managers can help bridge the gaps between girls' aspirations and their actual experiences. This report builds on girls' recommendations in ways that make them more accessible to policymakers and programmers. The recommendations arising from what girls have to say—organized in a 5-point action plan—call for families, communities and development efforts that create an environment where girls can thrive. Girls have a fundamental right to be heard, valued and respected. They must have the skills and opportunities to fulfill their potential and contribute fully to their societies – for their own benefit, and for the benefit of their families and communities.

Taking Action for Girls: Elevating Their Voices

1. Listen to girls and learn about their aspirations, and engage them in decision-making processes. Shift the paradigm from working for adolescent girls to working with them as partners. Listen to girls' unique insights into their lives and work alongside them to achieve their goals. Cultivate girls' voices and engage them in developing, executing and evaluating programs and services.
2. Engage families, teachers and traditional leaders as girl champions. Build a network of community-based local girl champions that prepare the terrain for long-term, sustainable change. Create an enabling environment that facilitates girls' socioeconomic development, participation and self-expression.

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Girls in Bangladesh gather in a community center to make friends, learn new skills and overcome the exclusion and isolation girls often face.

3. Provide safe and inclusive community spaces where girls can develop and raise their voices.

Designate safe space areas and times when girls can meet, talk, play and learn, away from community and family pressure. Educate local officials about girls' rights and hold them accountable when girls are excluded from public spaces—from sports fields to community centers to police stations.

4. Give girls public platforms to amplify their voices.

Include girls' voices at institutions, in media, at events and in campaigns. Provide girls a platform to voice their opinions, and work with them to strengthen and amplify their voices.

5. Change social norms that stifle girls' voices.

Deliver true long-term change by addressing the most powerful silencer of girls: harmful social and gender norms that govern all aspects of a girl's life, from family to education, health care and livelihood. Commit to change those discriminatory norms in all interventions, across all sectors, through innovative solutions and collaboration.



GIRLS SPEAK INTRODUCTION

Empowering adolescent girls in the developing world can transform families, communities and countries. Targeted investments in policies and programs that meet girls' needs can help break a cycle of neglect and intergenerational poverty. Yet if we fail to cultivate and listen to what girls have to say, the impact of these efforts will be limited.

Girls Speak: A New Voice in Global Development is part of a series of reports on investing in adolescent girls in the developing world. This report examines qualitative data on what girls say about their aspirations across different settings and contexts. From a girl's perspective, policies and programs need to address the harmful social norms that constrain her role and opportunities in society, and provide a greater vision for her life. In their own words, girls are saying that the context and environment that shapes their lives—how they live and what they aspire to—must be addressed.

Adolescent girls say that their families and communities are deeply involved in all aspects of their lives, often in ways that constrain decision-making and limit options. They also confirm the growing body of research: education is critical to improving girls' social and economic status; they are married too early and have children too young; they want and need information and skills to be healthy and economically independent.

This report offers a girl-generated set of ideas. Learning about girls' aspirations reinforces what is already known about the overwhelming odds that girls face in achieving what they want. Girls' voices provide moral authority to the policies and programs targeted to girls. Their voices should shape a global agenda that increases their visibility and leads to their greater and more equitable participation in economic and social development.

Girls are ready for big changes. An 18-year-old girl in rural Ghana put it simply, "Every human being prays

Every human being prays for good things, and I am no exception. I want to see progress in my life.

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Girls' voices should help shape the global development agenda. These young people in Cambodia are part of the largest generation of adolescents in history.

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for good things, and I am no exception. I want to see progress in my life.”⁹⁹ As the report summarizes, this generation of girls can be heard saying in a million ways that they need help. If girls could express their own interests, they would ask for the things outlined in the boxes in the following sections. It is time for the development community, local and national policymakers, and civil society to change the way adolescent girls are viewed and to create spaces for girls to broaden and achieve their aspirations.

Methodology

This analysis reviews published and unpublished surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, anthropological studies, peer-reviewed articles, and programmatic reports on girls ages 10–19 in the developing world. It also extracts from an extensive review of available sources the voices of girls on their hopes for the future and the influences and barriers that affect the development and fulfillment of their aspirations. The data are in-depth qualitative interviews and focus groups with girls, boys, and parents collected by ICRW and other research organizations in numerous countries over the past several years. The data sources and methodology are outlined in Appendix I.

Although population-based, age-disaggregated quantitative survey data would be very useful for understanding girls’ aspirations on a global scale, the Demographic and Health Surveys, for example, exclude girls under age 15 and have small sample sizes in the youngest groups. Consequently, these data fail to capture an important phase of early sexual initiation, unintended pregnancy, and marriage in many settings. The topics covered in these surveys tend to be limited. Most girl surveys focus on knowledge, attitudes, and practices, particularly regarding health. Girls’ voices provide a more integrated perspective—a perspective that takes into account all of the relevant factors in their environment—on their needs, knowledge, and experiences.

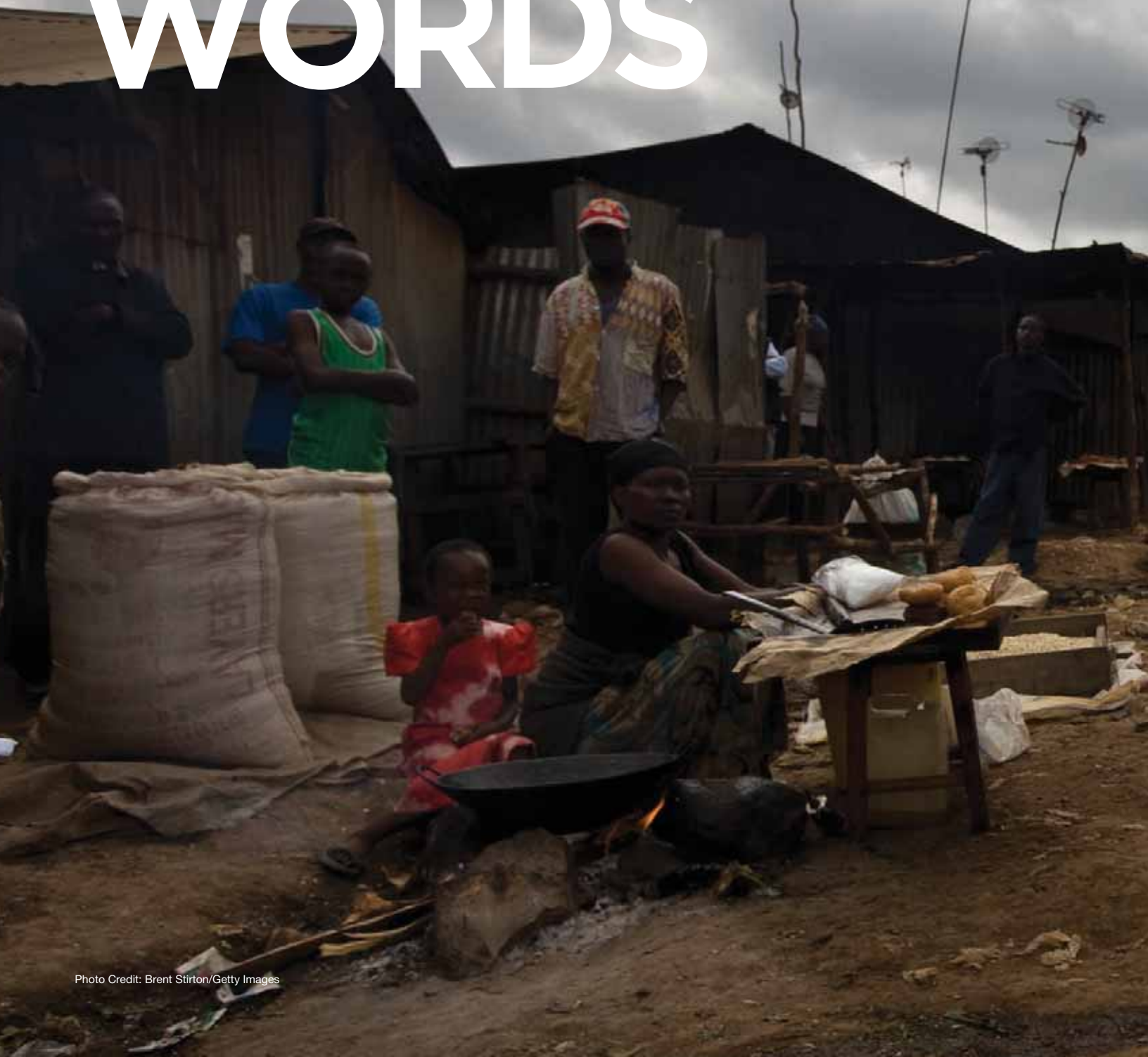
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A girl in Afghanistan, where young women face significant obstacles in education, jobs and human rights.



Photo Credit: UN Photo/Luke Powell

IN THEIR OWN WORDS





Girls' aspirations coalesce around common themes. Below, the authors outline six of the most prevalent, including the desire to be healthy and educated—with viable livelihoods and career opportunities, financial security and independence—and to marry and have children at the appropriate time.

Underlying all the themes is one universal: a shared inability to make decisions about their own lives even though they know what they need.¹¹

We want to delay marriage and childbirth so we can continue our education.

Research shows that education and marriage are often mutually incompatible life stages for girls in many parts of the world. Their transition from schooling to marriage is one of the most critical in their lives, and often determines future life prospects. A family's decision to continue schooling for a girl often means a delayed marriage. Similarly, a decision to marry a girl early usually means an end to her formal education.

Education is fundamental to improving a girl's life and broadening her view of what she can achieve, which has been well-documented in research. Education increases a girl's income-generating opportunities and improves her health and her future family's health. Several studies have shown that an extra year of schooling for a girl leads to better nutrition and more education for her children. Girls themselves recognize that education is fundamental to productive participation in society and their future prospects. In Azrou, Morocco, girls described their hopes for their education and careers:

"We are a group of hoppers and a group of friends. Rabia hopes to become a veterinarian; Sena hopes to become a police officer; Intissar hopes to become a science teacher; Fatima hopes to become a teacher

of earth and life sciences; Meriem hopes to become a psychologist; and Farud hopes to become a science teacher as well. And I hope to be a scientific engineer. Education is imperative to achieve our dreams and inform ourselves."¹²

In sub-Saharan Africa, education is cited as "most dear" to girls¹³ and seen as key to independence. In rural Burkina Faso, Ghana, Malawi, South Africa, and Uganda, adolescent girls stated their greatest wish was the ability to finish their education.^{14 15 16} An 18-year-old girl in rural Malawi explained, "If only I can get educated I will surely be the president."¹⁷

In many developing countries, families face many barriers to getting their girls in school and keeping them there. Parents do not send their daughters to school for a number of reasons: they cannot afford the school fees and uniforms, they think that the distance to school is too long and unsafe for girls, or they choose to send to school a son who can support them instead of a daughter who will be married off to live with her in-laws. Many poor families may marry off their daughters because the girls are seen as economic burdens to their households. In some cases, the family might receive a dowry or bride wealth from her marriage.¹⁸ Decisions about a girl's education and marriage are usually linked and often made without a girl's input and sometimes without her knowledge.

Regional surveys of youth found that in East Asia and the Pacific, 40 percent of adolescent girls felt that their opinions were not taken into consideration enough or at all when household decisions were made on their behalf. When asked about community-level decisions that directly affect them or their adolescent peers, the number increased to 50 percent of girls.¹⁹ In Europe and Central Asia, 38 percent of girls felt their opinions were not considered in the home.²⁰ While there is enormous regional variation, girls' sense that they cannot fully shape their own fates is common.

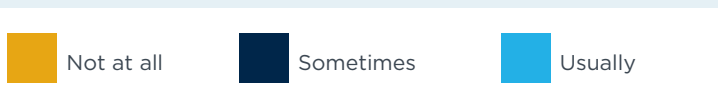
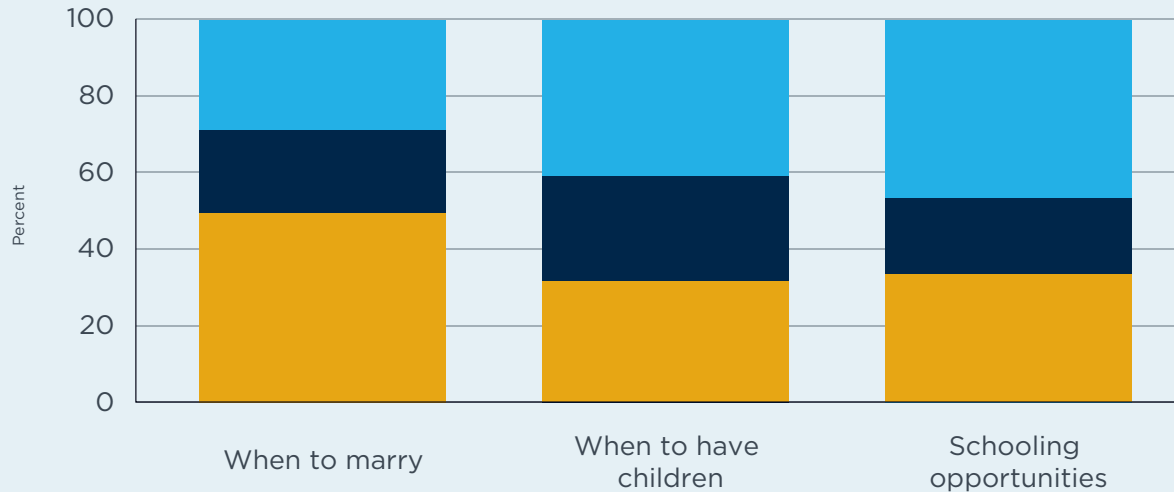
Data from India show that more than half of girls have little or no say in life-changing events, including when to marry, when to have children, or whether to pursue schooling (Figure 1.1).²¹ A girl's ability to "have a say" in life events can increase with age, but some life choices, such as marriage and schooling, are decided for them early on.

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In Kenya, Beatrice holds her sister outside their home. Although Beatrice is wearing a school uniform, she had to drop out of school due to lack of school fees — a dangerous situation for an adolescent girl living in Kibera, Nairobi.

FIGURE 1.1

Many girls in India have limited say in life events

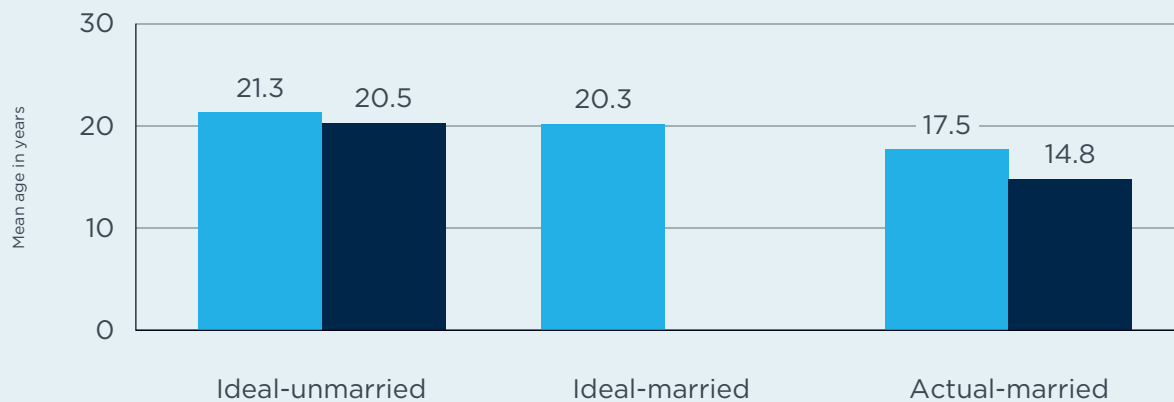


Data from Bihar and Jharkhand, India

Source: ICRW. 2008. Catalyzing Change: Improving Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health through DISHA, An Integrated Program in India. Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women.

FIGURE 1.2

Girls' ideal and actual ages of marriage in Nepal and Bangladesh



Sources: ICRW, 2005, Nepal Project, unpublished data; Steele, F., S. Amin, and R. T. Naved. 1998. "The Impact of an Integrated Micro-credit Program on Women's Empowerment and Fertility in Rural Bangladesh." London School of Economics.

TABLE 1.0

Marriage interferes directly with aspirations for schooling (data from Bangladesh)

	UNMARRIED	MARRIED
Age (mean)	13.1	15.9
% currently enrolled in school	81.8	16.8
% agree with: "A girl should be allowed to study as much as she wants"	95.6	95.3
% unmarried girls who would like to continue education after marriage	73.7	
% married girls who did continue education after marriage		29.7

Source: Steele, F., S. Amin, and R. T. Naved. 1998. "The Impact of an Integrated Micro-credit Program on Women's Empowerment and Fertility in Rural Bangladesh." London School of Economics.

Girls recognize that self-determination is not enough to pursue their education. In sub-Saharan Africa, girls consistently mentioned lack of money—for which they rely on their families or on their own wits—as their main barrier to achieving their educational goals. An 18-year-old girl in rural Malawi stated that, "If I don't have the money, I definitely won't continue with my education and [will have an] early marriage."²² Girls interviewed in Morocco described how parents' decisions around marriage for their daughters can directly conflict with girls' educational and career aspirations. One Moroccan school girl expressed her view:

"I want to say that every girl hopes to finish her education and to be something in the future, but there

are some who don't have the financial means to finish their studies, or else their fathers don't allow them to finish—like we were saying before—so that they will get married or go and work."²³

A 20-year-old Bangladeshi garment worker noted regretfully that, "I stopped studying after class five because my father was religious and did not believe in girls' education. Now I know the value of education. No one can take it away from you; it is your very own."²⁴

A study in Bangladesh found that a majority of girls recognize the importance of education and believe that girls should be allowed to obtain as much schooling as they want.²⁵ Nearly 74 percent of girls, who on average were married at age 16, say they would like to continue their schooling after they marry; only 30 percent of married girls are actually attending school (Table 1.0). It should be noted, however, that even this figure of 30 percent is well above comparable data from other settings in South Asia. It is generally rare for girls in the region to be able to continue their studies after marriage.

In regions where parents decide the age at which their daughters will wed, girls rarely aspire to marry before the typical age at marriage. Indeed, girls may envision marriage occurring considerably later in life than their parents have planned.^{26 27} Research in two Indian states, where girls marry on average at age 16, indicates that girls ages 15–24 preferred to marry after age 18.²⁸ A 17-year-old girl in Maharashtra, India, described her views of age at marriage, "If my parents would decide my marriage earlier then I would tell them that I am too young to get married now.... I will try to make them understand that they shouldn't make any hurry about deciding my marriage."²⁹ A Nepal study found an even greater discrepancy between girls' desires and the cultural norm. Where the average girl was married by age 17, girls said they preferred to marry at age 21.

Data from Nepal and Bangladesh show a significant gap between girls' ideal age at marriage and their actual ages at marriage. Figure 1.2 illustrates that the ideal age at marriage is the same among married and unmarried girls in both Nepal and Bangladesh, but married girls had wed almost three years before this ideal age.³²

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Binti Pamoja's program in Nairobi has enabled Leonida to gain economic independence and chart a better path in life.







Girls Say:

Teach families and communities how important schooling is and how much it means to girls. Help families and communities—especially men and boys—to find concrete ways to delay marriage and support girls' educational attainment.

In Upper Egypt, the Ishraq program initiated a process of social change in the community by engaging parents and boys in support of greater life opportunities for girls. An evaluation of the program found that parents who participated in Ishraq were dramatically less likely to agree that a girl should be beaten if she disobeys her brother than parents who did not participate, and early marriage rates also declined.

In Pakistan, boy scouts in partnership with UNICEF started a program called “Brothers Join Meena,” which promotes education and better health for girls. Boy scouts escort girls to school, talk to adults in the community about the importance of educating girls, and immunize children against polio.

Teachers are another important source of encouragement for girls, and teachers who have high expectations of girls influence them in a positive direction. In Gansu, for example, one of the poorest provinces in China, teacher expectations that a girl will do well in school are associated with the girl's own higher aspirations for education several years later. A teacher's early support and optimism about a child's ability to perform is seen to raise the mother's aspirations and influence the parent to plan for more schooling for her child.

Sources: Brady, M, Assaad, R., Ibrahim, BV, Salem, A, Salem, R. Zibani, N. 2007. Providing new opportunities to adolescent girls in socially conservative settings; The Ishraq program in rural Upper Egypt. New York: The Population Council.

The World Organization of the Scout Movement. 2006. “Boy Scouts in Pakistan support girls' education.” World Scout Bureau: Geneva, Switzerland.

Hannum, E and J. Adams. 2006. “Girls in Gansu, China: Expectations and aspirations for secondary schooling,” in M. Lewis and M. Lockheed, (Eds). Exclusion, Gender and Education: Case Studies from the developing world. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

Girls want to marry and have children, but they prefer to be married later, have some say over the match, and have more control over the number and timing of the children they bear.

Few girls envisioned having husbands or children within five years, according to qualitative interviews with adolescent girls with a mean age of 16 in four sub-Saharan countries.³³ Instead, they talked about continued schooling, professional accomplishments, and the wish to own land and become self-sufficient. Girls did not mention a desire to have a family until a longer time frame—beyond five years—was specified. A qualitative study among indigenous adolescent girls in Guatemala showed that school enrollment and attendance increased girls' desired age of marriage. One indigenous girl in high school in Guatemala said, “I would like to get married when I am 25 or 27... because I have my goals, as I told you already, to graduate [from high school] and also graduate from the university.”³⁴ A South African girl explained, “I want to get married but first I want to enjoy my youth. I prefer to be in my 30s with my first child.”³⁵

Girls know what we know—staying in school and getting married later will help them improve their life options. Nevertheless, girls continue to have little say over the timing of marriage and the duration of their schooling. In order to help girls stay in school and delay marriage, programs must engage family members, community leaders, and other influential people in girls' lives to emphasize the importance of schooling for girls and the risks of early marriage.

As parental and teacher encouragement increases, so do girls' aspirations for educational and occupational attainment.³⁶ Girls recognize the role their parents play both in the development and achievement of their aspirations. As a Moroccan high school girl put it, “The thing that helps us to realize our dreams is encouragement of the family.”³⁷

We want nutritious food and access to basic health services.

There is a need to address the health problems of low-income communities in all regions of the world, but girls require special attention because of their particularly vulnerable situations. Their basic needs for food, health information, and health resources

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Mahmuda, age 17, gave birth to a baby boy 10 months after being married in Bangladesh. Today, she struggles to pay for healthcare for her sick child. Girls who marry early often pass disadvantage to their children, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

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A girl in Haiti receives a check-up and treatment. Countries torn by conflict or natural disasters have a particularly hard time reaching girls via traditional health care systems.









often go unmet. Programs for girls need to go beyond reproductive health, just one important area of their wellbeing. In South Asia, research shows that girls and women experience gender discrimination that leads to poor health outcomes from the time they are conceived to the time they are adults. In this region, son preference and gender inequality can lead to sex-selective abortion, fewer immunizations and visits to health clinics for girls, anemia and malnutrition among adolescent girls, early marriage and childbearing, and poor access to reproductive health services.³⁸

Hunger and basic health are a source of concern for many adolescent girls; beyond the importance of these issues for all young people, they especially affect girls and determine their capacity for child-bearing, which often occurs early. More than one in five girls ages 12–19 surveyed in Uganda said they were “very worried” about having enough food.³⁹ A 17-year-old girl in Malawi responded to a question about what she held most dear to her life by saying, “Food, because it helps us to have a healthy life.”⁴⁰ Girls recognize that maintaining their health is an important component of achieving their goals. In sub-Saharan Africa, when asked what she wanted for the future, a 19-year-old girl who was out of school in rural Uganda replied, “I want to be healthy with a good job.”⁴¹

Health care services, when available, are difficult for young people to access. Family and community members, and even health care staff themselves, often prevent young people from obtaining these services or fail to protect their privacy and confidentiality, which in turn deters young people from using these services. Youth from 17 conflict-affected countries discussed the challenges to their health, including their lack of access to health facilities and the unfriendliness of these services to young people:

“We want hospitals or health clinics to be rebuilt or established in all our communities. We want medicines and medical staff to be available at these hospitals and clinics. The services must be friendly to us and free of cost. All girls and boys must have equal access to a full range of health information and services. Please make sure that services include a complete reproductive health package and support to those of us who have survived rape and exploitation.”⁴²

All girls and boys must have equal access to a full range of health information and services.

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Jhonuka, a Bangladeshi girl, buys contraceptives near her home.

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A girl in Bangladesh tends crops as part of a BRAC economic opportunity program. Globally, girls and women make up 70 percent of poor farmers and play a critical role in the food security of their families.





I don't want to get married and have children, at least not anytime soon.... I want to work and study. I don't want to be like another girl I know who is 13 years old and already pregnant.

We want to have control over our sexual health, including when we have children.

All over the world, adolescent girls are more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and physical and sexual violence than their male peers. Poverty, hunger, and a lack of economic alternatives lead many adolescent girls to take significant risks. Sexual relationships between adolescent girls and older partners are a common source of money for food, school fees, and other necessities for poor girls in many settings, according to a growing body of research.⁴³ While girls appear to have considerable negotiating power over whether to form or continue such alliances, they have little control over sexual practices within partnerships, including whether condoms are used.⁴⁴

In Uganda, where so many adolescents spoke of being hungry, more than 75 percent of surveyed girls who were sexually active said they had received money or gifts in exchange for sex.⁴⁵

Young people are often denied access to sexual and reproductive health services in particular, regardless of their experiences, which may include victimization by social and sexual violence. Girls' access to the resources and skills they need to delay pregnancy is extremely limited. Many unmarried girls seek to terminate unwanted pregnancies when faced with the social stigma and prospects of raising children alone. Abortion is an expression of a girl's intense desire to delay childbearing. A girl in the Democratic Republic of the Congo explains her dilemma:

"We do not have access to contraception. We are stigmatized if we have a child before marriage. We do not have the right to abortion. What a dilemma! How can we not die if we are exposed to risky abortions? How can we not resort to abortion if a child before marriage is a sacrilege? How can we avoid having children when there are no contraceptive services? We wish to affirm that one of the best weapons in the fight against risky abortions among the young is to respect our rights, starting with the right to information."⁴⁶

More than 95 percent of abortions in Africa and Latin America are performed under unsafe

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Nucleo Socio-Cultural Caixa de Surpresas in Bangú, Rio de Janeiro, works with adolescent girls to increase their knowledge of their rights and promote gender equity.

circumstances.⁴⁷ In sub-Saharan Africa, where maternal mortality reaches its highest levels, 60 percent of all unsafe abortions occur among women ages 25 or younger;⁴⁸ 70 percent of women hospitalized with complications from an unsafe abortion are under the age of 20.⁴⁹

Childbearing, like marriage, is seen by girls as something that should occur later in life, after one's educational and livelihood aspirations are achieved. "Work comes first, then men and children," explained one South African girl.⁵⁰ A 13-year-old Venezuelan girl clearly stated her goals: "I don't want to get married and have children, at least not anytime soon.... I want to work and study. I don't want to be like another girl I know who is 13 years old and already pregnant."⁵¹ In a Nepal study, the majority of girls wanted to delay childbearing, yet 52 percent of them had had children by age 20.⁵²

Girls are acutely aware that boys are held to different standards than girls when it comes to sexual relationships and pregnancy. A 15-year-old school girl in rural Uganda explained, "If you have sexual intercourse when you are in school, you lose your virginity and get pregnant and you drop out of school while the boy continues with school."⁵³ A 17-year-old South African adolescent mother described how motherhood had fundamentally altered her aspirations, "My attitudes and dreams have changed since [having the baby]. Now that I have a child, I will not be able to achieve all the things I wanted."⁵⁴

We want to be free from sexual violence.

Physical and sexual violence can pose one of the greatest barriers to girls as they attempt to conceive of and achieve their aspirations. Experiences of physical and sexual violence lead to severe consequences in girls' health and development, such as depression, anxiety, and sometimes thoughts of suicide, risk of unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.⁵⁵ When asked, "what hinders you from realizing your goals?," a group of adolescent girls in Brazil all pointed to youth violence as an impediment to developing their dreams and plans for the future.⁵⁶

Girls Say:

Educate families, communities, and governments about the need to give girls access to sexual and reproductive health information and health care services that reflect the realities of girls' lives.

In Mozambique, 40 percent of adolescent girls aged 15–19 are pregnant or already mothers. Several ministries in partnership with civil society implemented a comprehensive youth sexual and reproductive health program called Geração Biz. The intervention reaches in-school and out-of-school girls with health information, skills, and services. Data from program evaluation surveys on young people's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors show that an increasing percentage of respondents report receiving sexual and reproductive health information from female youth trained as peer educators (44 percent in 2003, compared with 66 percent in 2005 and 87 percent in 2007), and young clients report that youth-friendly services meet their needs, they are treated with respect, and their privacy and confidentiality are ensured.

The Population Council, working with UNFPA, local NGOs, and the Ministry of Health, created an innovative program in rural Burkina Faso to address the health needs of young mothers. Thirty young mothers, aged 19–24, were identified by community leaders to be trained as "mother-educators." What began as a house-visit by two mother-educators to married adolescent girls to provide information and support during a girl's first pregnancy turned into a girls club and informal school where girls were allowed to meet weekly. The mother-educators gained public support from the Ministry of Health, which strengthened their standing within the community and helped get more adolescent mothers to health centers for prenatal and postnatal care, disseminate health information, and lead community discussions on topics including HIV and AIDS and female genital cutting.

Sources: WHO. 2008. Making Pregnancy Safer: A Newsletter of Worldwide Activity. Geneva: World Health Organization. Available online at: http://www.who.int/making_pregnancy_safer/documents/newsletter/mps_newsletter_issue6.pdf

International Center for Research on Women. 2009. Integrating Multiple Gender Strategies to Improve HIV and AIDS Interventions: A Compendium of Programs in Africa. Available online at http://www.aidstar-one.com/sites/default/files/aidstarone_gender_compendium.pdf

Brady, M. and Salacou, L. 2007. "Addressing the needs of married adolescent girls in Burkina Faso," Promoting healthy, safe and productive transitions to adulthood series. Brief no. 9. New York: Population Council.



A large proportion of sexually active girls in the Guttmacher data from sub-Saharan Africa described their first sexual experiences as unwanted, and reported that they had been physically or emotionally coerced or tricked into having sex. A 19-year-old girl in urban Uganda who was not in school described her painful experience:

“I went to his place because he had asked me to go there many times.... Then he asked me what I thought he wanted. I didn’t reply until he told me himself that he wanted to have sex with me. At first I agreed. But after getting a second thought, I tried to refuse because I had never done it before. I was afraid of the outcome.... But as I was thinking about this, my boyfriend was undressing me.... He hid my clothes. I thought of yelling but this was my boyfriend and people would have asked why I had gone into his house.... But I was just kind of afraid. That day we had sex but I didn’t enjoy it because it was my first time. I felt pain....”⁵⁷

One 16-year-old Nigerian girl in junior secondary school shared the following account of being raped on her way home from school:

“I was returning from school one day when I realized that two boys were following me.... One of the boys had earlier tried unsuccessfully to make me be his girlfriend. After some time they overtook and stopped me. The boy who had wanted to befriend me earlier said, ‘What about the matter we discussed earlier.’ I said I did not know what he was talking about. He then said, ‘Today na today,’ meaning today is a day of reckoning. I sensed what he was up to and said, ‘I’m still a small girl.’ He did not hear my plea. He got hold of me and tore off my clothes, threw me to the ground and forcefully had sex with me. Meanwhile, his friend forcibly held me down and kept watch for passers-by. I tried to free myself but could not because the boys were much stronger than I.”⁵⁸

Unmarried and married girls alike report experiences of coercion and force in sexual relationships. Findings from qualitative studies in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Zimbabwe, Brazil, and Nicaragua reveal that forced sex is common in early marriage in many country settings, especially among married adolescents. One 32-year-old woman in rural Uttar Pradesh, India, who was married at age 13 reflected on her first sexual

experience: “It was a terrifying experience; when I tried to resist, he pinned my arms above my head. It must have been so painful and suffocating that I fainted.”⁵⁹ A low-income factory worker in Brazil, also married in adolescence, recounts a similar story, “I screamed. He said, ‘You have to do it.’ It was a sad bloodbath, the next day I couldn’t even walk.”⁶⁰

Studies from several developing countries of young people and experiences of sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence suggests that people in positions of power and authority, including religious leaders, police officers, employers, and teachers, are often perpetrators of violence.⁶¹ In recent interviews, police officers in Zambia clearly communicated their sense that the young women who come to the police station for assistance are fair game for sexual relationships.⁶² Considerable research has been conducted in recent years on the wide extent of school-based violence and how it undermines girls’ prospects, confidence, and health.⁶³

We want to be educated about how to avoid and combat HIV and AIDS.

Studies in several regions of the world have found strong associations between gender-based violence and HIV risk behaviors and HIV infection rates.⁶⁴ One study of young women and young men in Tanzania revealed that prevailing social norms that young women should be “settled, enduring, and forgiving” inhibit these women from confronting intimate partners about sexual infidelities and resisting unwanted sexual advances that increase their risk of becoming infected with HIV.⁶⁵ Men can engage in acts of sexual violence with impunity in many settings, making girls vulnerable to both violence and HIV.

Globally, girls 15–24 are 50 percent more likely to be HIV-positive than boys, and in sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 75 percent of HIV-positive youth are girls.⁶⁶ A national survey of adolescents in Uganda found the most frequently cited concern among girls ages 15–19 was worry about getting HIV, with more than half saying they were “very worried.”⁶⁷ A separate study among adolescent girls in Malawi similarly found 15–19-year-old girls “very worried” about contracting HIV.⁶⁸ And an 18-year-old school girl in rural Ghana described her fears, saying, “This world is so

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Asma, age 16, is pregnant and lives in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Prevalence of first birth before age 15 in Bangladesh is 35%. Globally, complications from pregnancy are the leading cause of death for girls 15–19 years old.





Girls Say:

Ensure girls' safety from sexual violence in schools and communities. Provide girls, unmarried and married, with information about how to prevent HIV and STI infection and early pregnancy, and imbue girls with the skills and confidence to use that information.

In Ghana and Malawi, USAID implemented a five-year Safe Schools Program to reduce school-related gender-based violence and improve health and educational outcomes for students. Evaluation reports on changes in teacher and student attitudes, knowledge, and practices showed that teacher's awareness of sexual harassment of girls at school increased. Prior to the Safe Schools Program, 30 percent of surveyed teachers in Ghana agreed that sexual harassment of girls occurred in schools; after the program that number increased to nearly 80 percent. Also, after participating in the program, students were more confident that they had the right not to be hurt or mistreated.

The Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) in Kenya, a well-regarded organization that began as a way to offer young boys a place to play soccer and also improve the environment, incorporated girls into their programming five years after its inception. Girls participate in soccer teams, the "slum clean-up" helping to remove and dispose of garbage properly, HIV and AIDS education, and leadership trainings, and receive educational scholarships. The participation of girls in MYSA has helped young women build self-confidence and shift parent and community norms around gender roles. As one participant said, "I have learned how to have my own principles and not to be blown and tossed around by the wind."

Sources: USAID. Gender Equality in Education. Safe Schools Program. Available at http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/ed/safeschools.html

Brady, M. and A. B. Khan. 2002. "Letting Girls Play: The Mathare Youth Sports Association's Football Program for Girls," New York: Population Council.

fierce these days and I am afraid of being infected by HIV/AIDS and being pregnant."⁶⁹

Girls know enough to be anxious about the potential negative consequences of HIV and AIDS as well as early or unsafe sex. These worries could be reduced with information and skills on how to protect themselves from HIV and AIDS, but girls often lack even the most basic information. One in three girls in Burkina Faso, Haiti, Mali, and Benin, and more than half in Nigeria, believe that healthy-looking people cannot be infected with HIV.⁷⁰ Adolescent girls have limited access to HIV testing, and many are hesitant to know their HIV status for fear of rejection by their families or partners.⁷¹

The questions of a 15-year-old school girl in rural Uganda revealed the lack of knowledge surrounding HIV when she asked, "If you had a boyfriend who is infected and the first time you have sex with him do you get HIV/AIDS? I had another question [that] if you are infected and you eat with a person i.e., your siblings do they also get infected if you use the same spoon for eating and you have wounds in your mouth? Will they also get AIDS?"⁷²

Young married women are also worried about HIV and AIDS and desire more information to protect themselves from contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STI). A 17-year-old married girl in rural Uganda describes her experiences trying to negotiate condom use with her polygamist husband:

"He refused me to take any precautions against pregnancy; he refused and said that he wanted a child. He had said that he had no children and my child would be his first-born and that he was looking forward to that. It was much later when I was already pregnant that I discovered he was a liar who had a wife and three children already. Of course every time I have sex with him I fear HIV/AIDS because he has another wife who I cannot trust. He also moves around with other girls so my health is at stake but I have no option since I am solely dependent on him so I just brush my fears off."⁷³

Information is just one part of the solution for girls' vulnerability to HIV and AIDS, STIs, and early pregnancy. A sense of self-efficacy, whether acquired through success in school, participation in sports,

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Petit, left, and two friends are alumnae leaders of a program in Kenya that gives girls safe spaces, life skills and leadership training. Today, she is helping other girls build better lives.

or contact with mentors, makes girls less likely to take risks with their health.⁷⁴ These girls seem to be inoculated against gender normative submissiveness and passivity in their sexual relationships.⁷⁵ Too often programs seek to provide girls with information alone, when they also need the skills to negotiate their sexual lives and build their confidence. Sexual and reproductive health information is necessary but not sufficient for empowering girls and supporting them in achieving their aspirations. Engaging men and boys to reduce violence against girls has been shown to be an effective approach to violence prevention and reducing risky sexual behavior.

We want access to paid work and to be relieved of some of our chores.

Girls carry multiple responsibilities that compete for their time. While boys' days are often wide open and leave plenty of time for schoolwork, play, and interaction with peers, girls face time and unpaid work burdens that undermine their future prospects for education and employment. For poor families, girls work inside the home to subsidize the household economy through a range of domestic services from fetching fuel and water to cooking, childcare, and dependent care. They also work outside the home, mostly in the informal sector, with low pay and little job security. The economic contributions they make to their families and households are substantial, but come at the cost of opportunities to build their own human capital.

Middle-school girls in Morocco lamented that the large burden of domestic responsibilities they were expected to undertake interrupted their school work, leaving them with little time to study. Girls in Tajikistan described how the pressures on them to earn money and care for the family distracted girls in class and impeded their ability to do their homework.⁷⁶ A Nepali girl noted, "We could have learned many things if we were given the chance to study. Then we would not have to cut grass and collect firewood. We could teach others as well."⁷⁷

Compared to boys, girls carry a heavier workload and have less free time than boys.⁷⁸ Expectations for girls' household roles and responsibilities can routinely reinforce gender discrimination in schooling and

Too often programs seek to provide girls with information alone, when they also need the skills to negotiate their sexual lives and build their confidence.

The young boy is privileged to have good education, while the girls go to fetch water from streams... Without water she will not be able to perform other household duties, such as laundry, cooking, and washing of dishes.

other activities. A young woman in Cameroon explained the normative assumption that girls, unlike boys, are expected to conduct most household chores:

“Unfortunately, in my beautiful country Cameroon, potable water is not found everywhere.... In the villages, people trek for kilometers to fetch drinking water from wells or running streams.... The young boy is privileged to have good education, while the girls go to fetch water from streams. One often sees them

with big basins of water on their heads in the early mornings, afternoons, and evenings to fetch water while the boys play football, forgetting that they need water to take a bath. ‘After all,’ they say, ‘why worry when God has blessed us with one or more sisters to relieve us of this task.’ Without water she will not be able to perform other household duties, such as laundry, cooking, and washing of dishes.”⁷⁹

Girls are very aware of the gendered differences between themselves and their male peers. Just as boys enter adolescence and have greater mobility and create social networks, girls’ freedom of movement is restricted, chore burden is increased, and girls become more isolated. Their open-ended, unpaid domestic activities stand in direct competition with training and paid employment. And the constraints on their mobility and social connections prevent them from making use of resources in their communities and learning and sharing with their peers.

Girls aspire to be productive, financially secure, and contributing members of their societies. The reasons girls cite for earning an income include financial independence, the ability to pay school fees, to buy school supplies and other material goods, to own land, to care for their children and parents, to increase their power within marriage and leave bad marriages, and to help others in their community.⁸⁰ “Helping my parents when I grow up and getting a job of my own is what matters to me,” explained a 14-year-old girl who was in school in urban Uganda. “I just want to get a job of my own, [and] help my parents who looked after me when I was young.”⁸¹

Many girls see economic independence as a means of freeing them from relying on others to survive and thus allowing them to make life choices and pursue their aspirations. In urban Malawi, an 18-year-old girl who was out of school noted, “I would like to have an advanced type of life, self-reliant. I would like to be a nurse.”⁸² A rural, out-of-school Ugandan girl and single mother of a young child felt she needed to earn income because the only person she could truly rely on to look after her best interests was herself: “That’s why I am working day and night. I want to make money and become well off like others. As my son does not have a father, I want to buy land and build a house and trade like others....there is nothing [else].... which I think can help me. It is only through my sweat

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Girls in Kenya carry water back home for drinking and household use.









alone. Even if I went to the government, we have bad leaders here who cannot help. The only things that can help are my arms.”⁸³

Even though many girls aspire to have good jobs and be self-reliant, there are limited economic opportunities for girls. Youth in Northern Uganda identified the lack of opportunities to “earn a safe and dignified income” to support themselves and their families as a primary concern.⁸⁴ Among girls enrolled in an accelerated learning program in Afghanistan, more than half wanted to attend a vocational training school as an alternative to high school and university level education.⁸⁵ Youth in 17 conflict-affected countries prioritized the need for viable livelihood opportunities saying, “We want relevant training for those of us who are old enough to work so that we can find safe jobs for ourselves and be useful to our communities.... We want technical and vocational training institutions in all our communities that will lead to real jobs.”⁸⁶

Girls need good role models as they aspire to economic livelihoods. In sub-Saharan Africa, girls frequently described their career and livelihood aspirations in terms of someone they admired and respected. In the Matlab region of Bangladesh during the 1980s, female family planning workers provided doorstep delivery of contraception, which inadvertently gave young girls role models who exemplified female mobility, respected employment, modern dress, fertility control, and the ability of women to work for pay and to make reproductive decisions.⁸⁷

Families, communities, civil society, and governments need to start thinking about the economic contributions girls and young women can make to their countries beyond the support they provide to their households. Economic empowerment of girls is one important pathway to global economic development, and girls are ready and willing to take on this role. But they need adequate training, supportive families and communities, and viable livelihood opportunities to do so. Beyond the economic returns they require, jobs for girls need to be safe and respectable, or their parents will not allow them to participate and they will experience lasting repercussions.

Girls Say:

Help families get beyond the immediate benefits of girls' ad hoc economic contributions and think more about the inputs required for real livelihoods development. Help families treat girls' work as more valuable and not as an endlessly available low-value resource. Older female role models can show girls and their families how it can be done.

In Bangladesh, BRAC's innovative emphasis on microcredit and empowerment of the poor is implemented through a diverse range of social programs recently extended to include girls. Through the Employment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) microcredit program, more than 300,000 adolescents ultimately formed their own groups and were offered financial literacy training and savings and credit facilities by BRAC. BRAC's experience suggests that girls who are emboldened with social programs and whose economic prospects improve may be viewed in new and different ways by their families and communities. The program is producing some important results including some girls' refusal to be married before age 18, brothers' support for girls' increased mobility to the program centers, and parental support for girls' participation.

In Zimbabwe and Zambia, the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) began the CAMA Seed Money Scheme to address the lack of employment opportunities that faced girls who had completed secondary education with the help of CAMFED. The CAMA Seed Money Scheme provides small loans and business training to young women to create small enterprises. The program model is designed to have the program alumnae create a network of mentors to younger girls just starting the program. In Zambia, CAMA alumnae gave a grant to five other members to start up a hairdressing business. Although the program reach is still small, it is a promising approach.

Sources: Shahnaz, R. and R. Karim. 2008. "Providing Microfinance and Social Space to Empower Adolescent Girls: An Evaluation of BRAC's ELA Centres", BRAC - Research and Evaluation Division: Dhaka. Accessed at http://www.bracresearch.org/workingpapers/REDWP_3.pdf

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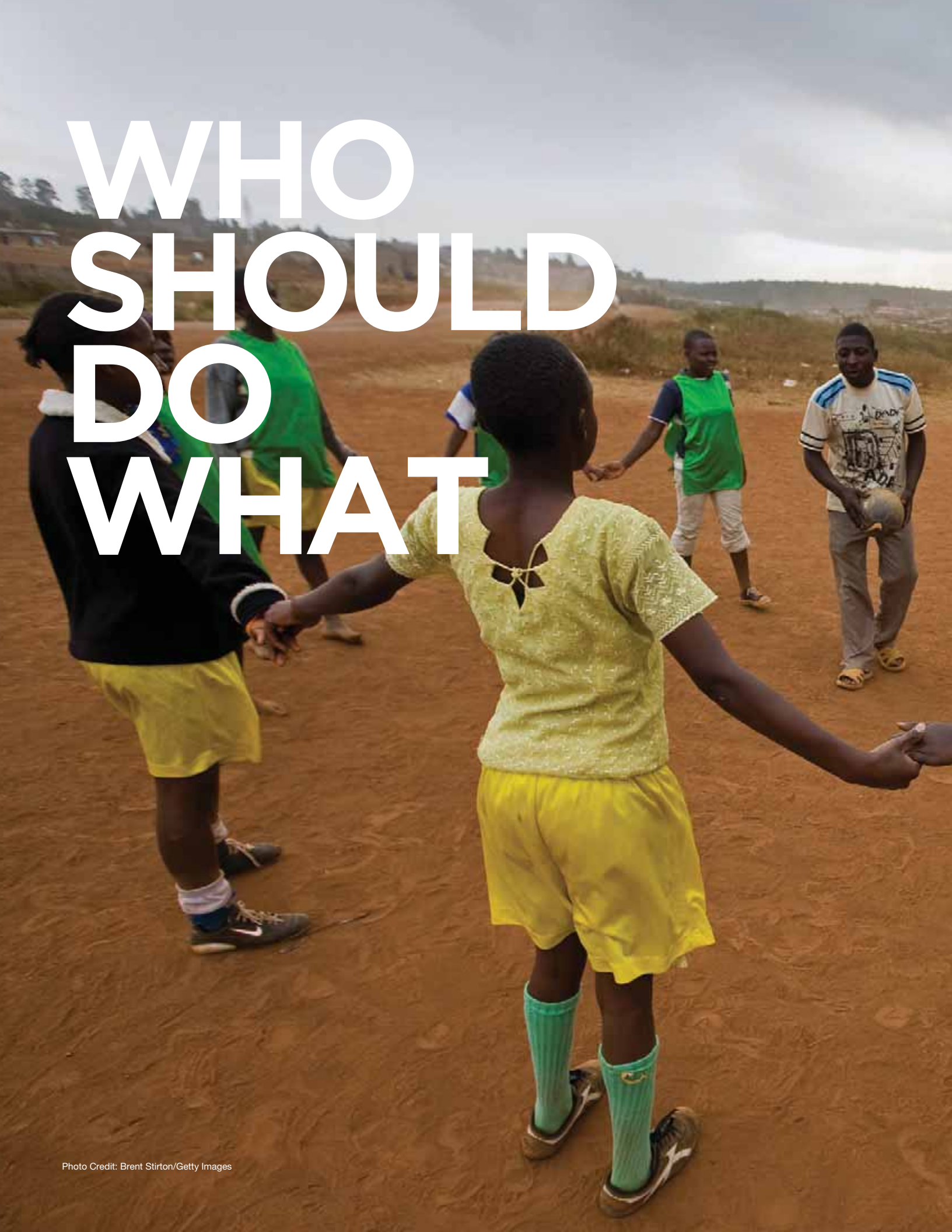
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Sharifa, a budding entrepreneur in Bangladesh, sells eggs near her home. She is raising poultry and earning money as part of a program sponsored by BRAC.

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Fatima, a teen mother in Bangladesh, sits with her two young children.

WHO SHOULD DO WHAT





For girls in the developing world, being young and female is a double disadvantage in life, one they cannot overcome on their own. Girls' voices provide a moral authority that backs up and expands on some of what we already know about how to reach them. Families, communities and policymakers must acknowledge the low status girls are relegated to and help them overcome the constraints. Policies and programs can help girls, their families and their communities bridge the gaps between their aspirations and their actual experiences. To be effective, these solutions must be oriented around families, communities and governments because these entities determine what girls can and cannot do. The authors have built on the preceding "Girls Say" boxes in ways that tailor the recommendations and make them more accessible to programmers and policymakers.

For programmers

Effective programs help girls to think more expansively about their own lives and to form aspirations.⁹⁸ Girls can realize their aspirations, even in the most dispiriting environments, when they have the decision-making, management, leadership and income-generating skills that provide them with an increased sense of autonomy and empowerment. Adolescent girls want to realize their potential and contribute more fully to their communities, societies and economies.

The best programs will seek to transform the environments where girls lead their daily lives and are so often thwarted in what they want to achieve. Girls consistently point to those around them as the source

of important limits on their accomplishment. At the same time, for real change to occur, family and community members must be part of the solution.

1. Amplify girls' voices in their communities. Girls make many contributions to their households and communities, and they have a lot to say about how many of the services they provide conflict with school and other goals. The tendency to emphasize their contributions while neglecting their needs can undermine their futures. Parents and other family members want to do the best for their children. But they often lack a complete picture of the costs of girls' missed opportunities, and they do not always have full information about the health and development impacts of their decisions. Programmers can survey parents and community members prior to implementation to fully understand these concerns and engage family and community members in finding sustainable alternatives and solutions.

As part of raising awareness, programs therefore need to promote community dialogue on the long-term costs of short-term decisions about girls. Families make daily decisions that sacrifice their daughters' schooling. A constellation of factors contributes to ending girls' schooling. Early marriage is one such factor that presents a specific opportunity for awareness raising and mobilization. Expectations around marriage dictate the lives of many girls, and the nexus of education and marriage is central to many girls' stories of the aspirations and constraints that shape their lives. Early marriage brings with it many costs to girls, including social isolation and lost educational opportunities, and to their societies. Marriage-related interventions must work with girls, but families and communities, including men and boys, must be significant targets of these interventions.

2. Build a network of advocates and mentors for girls. Time and time again, girls wish out loud for more support from those around them. Community and family members can become advocates and mentors for girls. Once family and community members begin to appreciate girls' needs, they require help in identifying specific roles they can fill in supporting girls. Identifying these roles could be an important contribution. If safety on the way to school is a problem, for example, brothers can escort and chaperone. If doing homework is difficult, parents can be supportive in finding

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Girls in the slums of Nairobi have the chance to play soccer and learn life skills at the Girls Soccer Academy in Kibera.

the right place and time for girls. Men and boys especially have roles to play in changing how girls are viewed and in providing greater mobility and access for them.

3. *Alleviate the time burden that domestic chores place on girls.* Girls often speak of the direct tradeoffs between their domestic contributions and schooling, play or paid work. New organizational collaborations are needed to overcome girls' heavy commitment to household work and generate solutions for girls. Infrastructure is needed, and where it is not available, clever ways to overcome its absence must be designed. Innovative thinking is needed on specific technologies such as solar ovens and tube wells that can reduce the time girls spend gathering firewood and fetching water. A key to introducing these technologies is ensuring that girls get to use them and are not simply shifted to other time-draining activities. Programs can help families see past the immediate benefits of girls' ad hoc economic contributions and think more about the inputs required for real livelihood development. Programs to empower girls economically are increasingly engaging girls in serious training and improving their access to financial resources, which can help change how households and communities view girls' livelihoods.⁹⁹

For policymakers

Change must occur at the policy level since this is where scale is achieved, national laws and requirements are set, and implementation is driven. Governments are the largest providers of services, including education and health, and increasing girls' access to them has to start at the highest levels. Governments also pass laws and set standards in response to internal demand and international agreements in areas such as minimum age at marriage, minimum years of schooling, and rights of access to health services. Government is held accountable on the basis of these laws, and its performance in implementation can be measured on the basis of these standards. So, what have girls indicated that policymakers could do to improve their lives?

4. *Address the needs of girls in infrastructure projects.* Without better access to water, fuel, and light, it will be difficult to bring about any real change in girls lives. Until sustainable solutions are developed to reduce the time girls spend completing domestic

BOX 1.1

Girls with no aspirations

Many girls cannot conceive of the future. Poverty, gender inequality, harmful social norms, and the threat of violence can leave girls with no aspirations at all. Where girls are socially isolated and their life transitions are tightly controlled by family and community norms, girls' opinions are not valued or cultivated.

Girls can feel that it is pointless to dream or are unable to articulate any dreams.⁸⁸ They may not believe it makes sense to “aspire” to something for which they have no control. A young woman in Morocco described her relationship with her parents and her lack of control over decisions that affect her life: “Anything you tell them you want to do, they say no.... You ask them, ‘Why am I studying?’ They say, ‘You should leave your studies.’ They should have just told me that in the first place.”⁸⁹ A young woman living in a slum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, shared her helplessness over improving her life in the future, saying, “What does it matter to think about university, a car, or money, when what will actually happen is that I will make a career of having children.”⁹⁰

In sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, some girls conveyed a strong sense of fatalism. When asked how she would be in three years, a young woman from Brazil answered, “I wonder if I will even be alive then.”⁹¹ When a 16-year-old urban school girl in Uganda was asked what she hoped her life would be like in five years, she replied, “Haa...in five years, haa. I wonder whether I will reach there. They are many years. It is a long time.”⁹² In Malawi, a 19-year-old rural girl who was out of school responded similarly, saying, “There is nothing I can think of. I think that maybe by then I will be dead.”⁹³

BOX 1.2

Human rights: Girls matter

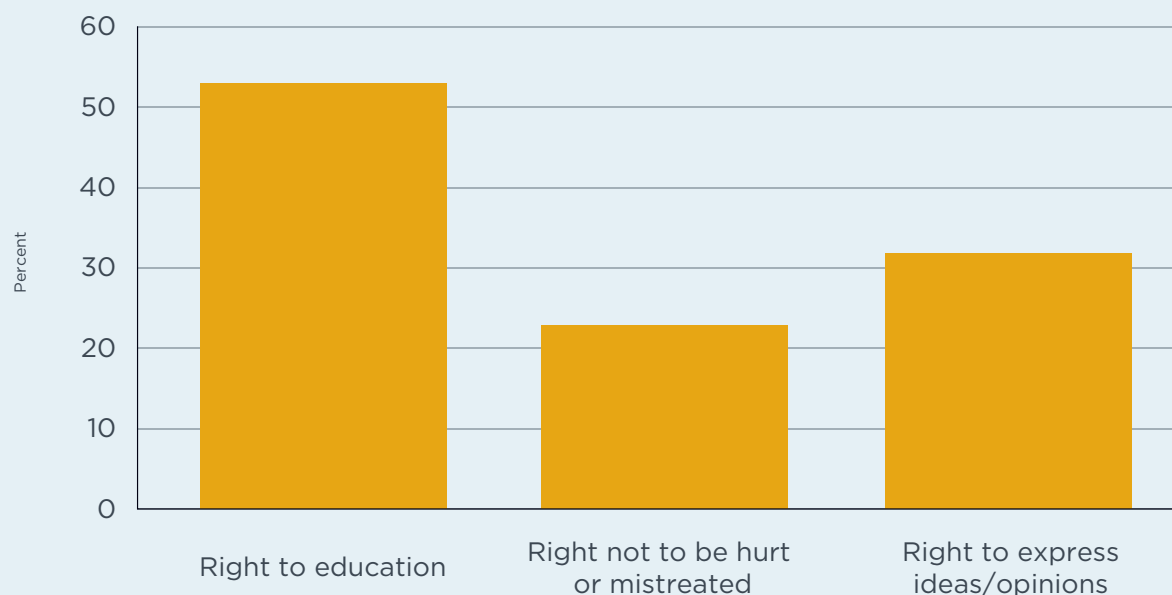
Girls find themselves at the intersection of age and gender discrimination. While girls do not often refer to their own rights, they express a sense of injustice in many areas of their lives. From expressing frustration at what their brothers get to do to anger about their parents' lack of support to hopelessness at their experiences of sexual violence, they consistently appeal to a sense of fairness and the violation of that sense. As adolescent girls living in a slum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, lamented, "Rights exist on paper, but in reality they aren't put into practice."⁹⁴

The Convention on the Rights of the Child lays out the full range of rights relevant to the lives of children, including girls, and attempts to address some of these challenges for children.⁹⁵ These rights include the right to education, the right to contribute to decisions about a marital partner, the right not to be separated from one's parents against one's will (especially relevant in cases of early patrilineal marriage), the right to bodily integrity, and many others. One major challenge is that any discussion of children's rights raises questions from some quarters whether they should be subordinated to the needs and rights of parents.

According to a UNICEF survey of youth in 17 countries in East Asia and the Pacific, few girls realize they have rights.⁹⁶ A total of 53% of girls ages 9-17 knew they had a right to education; only one-third believed they had a right to express their ideas or opinions. Less than one-fourth of girls in East Asia said they were unaware or uncertain about their right not to be hurt or mistreated.⁹⁷

FIGURE 1.3

Girls ages 9-17 from Asia Pacific Region were asked: What specific rights are you aware of?



Source: UNICEF. 2001. *Speaking Out! Voices of Children and Adolescents in East Asia and the Pacific: A regional opinion survey*. New York: United Nations Children's Fund.

chores, they will remain the “infrastructure solution” that makes the most sense to families. Girls’ lives in the household are compressed by their limited roles. Their social lives are constrained by worries about their security in public spaces. Their energy ends up substituting for the absence of electricity.¹⁰⁰ Research in India suggests that improvements in infrastructure, particularly streetlights and schools in the village (so girls do not have to go far), are associated with increased agency and autonomy.

Yet the gender implications of investing in infrastructure are rarely considered. As one IMF economist has put it, “Policymakers may easily ignore how infrastructural service needs are presently being met in the absence of infrastructure and the incidence of the burden associated with that absence. For example, in the absence of piped water to a dwelling, it may be the efforts of women—their time and energy—that may account for the provision of water.... The value of these services is rarely reflected in estimates of GDP and is often ignored in estimates of the costs and benefits associated with infrastructure provision. The “payoff” to the provision of infrastructure may thus be understated.”¹⁰¹

5. Expand laws, policies, and services for violence against women to include younger ages. Girls everywhere speak about their experience of fear and constraints on their activities and mobility they experience as a consequence of violence and the threat of violence. Given the extent of coercion in sexual relationships and the statistics available on violence against young women and harassment at school, a shift is needed in how violence against girls is treated. The normalization of violence against girls stems in part from their status as children, and the impunity accorded to perpetrators of “private” sexual violence. The social control reinforced by violence sharply circumscribes all aspects of girls’ lives.

6. Track expenditures on services girls need to thrive. Girls observe how schools and health services, for example, are not always welcoming to them. Budget allocations reveal how legislative commitments translate—or do not translate—into concrete benefits for specific population groups. Tracking expenditures down to beneficiaries is famously difficult, but it is important for everyone

BOX 1.3

Innovations for girls: Community awareness

In 2002 PATH surveyed girls in Managua, Nicaragua, to better understand their reproductive health needs. They found that relationships between mothers and daughters as well as among girls themselves were sources of vulnerability, instead of support. In response, PATH created the program “Entre Amigas” (Between Girlfriends), using youth and community member involvement to develop activities that would create safe spaces for girls to learn and share their ideas about the risks of HIV and AIDS, early pregnancy, and violence. Components of the program eventually led to the creation of “Sexto Sentido” (Sixth Sense), a TV drama series that deals with topics of interest to youth and families and airs nationally. This is one example of a successful way to engage adolescent girls, their families, and communities in the development of programs that improve their lives.

BOX 1.4

Innovations for girls: Making schools accessible

Schools are especially important institutions for girls, and despite the many education programs that exist, deserve special mention here. Schools represent one of the few public resources to which girls are widely seen as having legitimate access. Yet their access is usually curtailed around the time of puberty. Given the centrality of education in a globalized world, programs that ensure girls' ongoing access to education are fundamental.

At the policy level, Iran is one of the few countries that has articulated a commitment to the education of married girls specifically, and the National Education Policy mandates schooling for married pregnant girls. In Afghanistan, a consortium of NGOs and international partners offered an accelerated elementary school program for out-of-school youth ages 10–18 that dramatically accelerated the attainment and aspirations of girls who had been all but shut out of primary schooling during the Taliban regime.

In Ghana, the Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education (SAGE) employed a variety of community- and girl-centered strategies in different districts to keep girls in school. Communities took action to create more opportunities for girls to stay in school, building school bathrooms for girls and encouraging parents to make time for girls to study and to create spaces dedicated to studying in their homes. The program addressed parents' concerns about girls' safety walking to and from schools by encouraging parents to arrange for girls to walk in groups, or be chaperoned by a trusted adult. Girls' clubs helped girls in math and science and built girls' confidence, while incorporating lessons on self-esteem, leadership, and assertiveness.

Sources: Greene, M. E., Z. Rasekh, and K. Amen. 2002. In *This Generation: Sexual and Reproductive Health Policies for a Youthful World*. Washington, DC: Population Action International. http://www.popact.org/Publications/Reports/In_This_Generation/English.pdf, page 29; Intili, J. Kissam, E. Fostering education for female, out-of-school youth in Afghanistan, *Journal of Education for International Development* 2:1, p 1-2. March, 2006.; Rihani, M. 2005. Keeping the Promise: Five Benefits of Girls' Secondary Education. Washington, DC: AED. <http://cge.aed.org/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=705;KjellEng>. "Coming to Grips with the Crisis: Findings from Recent Studies." AED, SAGE, Colloquium on HIV/AIDS and Girls' Education, U.S. Agency for International Development, Washington, DC, 2000; <http://cge.aed.org/Projects/SSAfrica/sage.cfm>

seriously interested in supporting girls. In sectors as diverse as education, health, gender, and infrastructure, opportunities exist to follow the money.

A systematic effort to track resources for girls requires special attention to how the health sector serves them in terms of both access and the degree to which they are welcomed. Providing girls and their families with information about nutrition, sexual and reproductive health, family planning, drugs, violence, and the risks of HIV and AIDS is only part of the solution. Girls also need access to health clinics, and health workers require training on how to better attend to adolescent girls and their specific health needs. Government ministries of health must try to expand the scope and reach of successful small programs.

7. Make local resources and institutions more available to girls. Girls routinely describe their informal exclusion from public spaces, and the failure of local law enforcement to enforce their access to what is rightfully theirs. From sports fields, to paths, to social spaces to locales such as the police station, girls lack access to public resources—institutions and spaces—that are often readily available to others. This important deprivation must be addressed head on through institutional capacity building and rights education. This requires engaging governments on the implementation of laws and engaging communities on norms that shape the implementation of those laws. Girls' participation in programs often requires "safe spaces" in which both girls and their parents feel girls are protected and cared for as they meet, talk, and play.^{102 103}

For donors

8. Listen to girls and learn about their aspirations. Girls are telling us how commonly they are thwarted in the pursuit of their goals. They are insightful and informed about their own circumstances and what needs to change for improvement to occur. Responding to what girls say provides real moral authority for development policymakers to act on. So much is riding on the future health and well-being of adolescent girls that we should know much more about girls than we do. The information we gain will foster more attention to their needs, highlight their contributions to their families and communities, and give them greater visibility in the development agenda. By better understanding what girls say they want and what they need

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A girl in Bangladesh attends an urban primary school.





Photo Credit: Brent Stirton/Getty Images

to make it happen, we can work harder to make sure that girls, as Amartya Sen has said, “lead lives they have reason to value and to enhance the substantive choices they have.”¹⁰⁴

9. Make commitments that invest in long-term change.

Girls identify a broad range of interconnected realities that need to change for their lives to improve. Effectively improving girls' lives will require transformative social change, which cannot be achieved with short-term investments. Donors need to collaborate with development practitioners and policymakers at the local, national, and international levels to create innovative solutions that address the harmful social and gender norms that discriminate against girls.

For all levels

10. Formally recognize girls as citizens. Girls note their invisibility: They point out that they are often voiceless in family decisions that affect their lives and that their domestic responsibilities may exclude them from school and other opportunities. Collecting more and richer data on girls and their experiences will contribute to making girls visible. Research has noted the need to more systematically register girls and to provide them with official identification to increase their visibility and access to resources. Boys are more likely to be registered, in part because the government is likely to be interested in recruiting them into the military. Young men are also more likely to move into jobs that require some form of identification, which facilitates access to other resources such as bank accounts. Some restrictions to these resources are age-based, and some gender-based. Unrecognized as citizens in these practical ways, girls face far greater obstacles in accessing resources and institutions—from obtaining health services to opening bank accounts and to receiving inheritances. Girls must be brought into existence in the eyes of the state.

Promoting girls' citizenship will give support to the protection of their human rights as a matter of fairness. One aspect of increasing the availability of institutions for girls is to promote the concept of rights and explain the importance of implementing them for girls. Attitudes of girls' family members and community members need to keep pace with girls' self-awareness of rights to be able to use new knowledge and decision-making skills. Programs that explicitly take on broad social change exist, some

through curricula that promote dialogue among *all* members of a community, others through community mobilization efforts that center on human rights. Programs and policies cannot shy away from taking on the social constraints to investing in girls and supporting their achievements. It is a question of fairness.

* * *

The recommendations arising from what girls have to say call for a social transformation that creates an environment where girls can thrive. Changing harmful social norms and the way families, communities and societies traditionally view adolescent girls is a long-term investment that will pay huge dividends in social and economic development. Most important, girls have a fundamental right to be heard, valued, and respected. We must do all we can to ensure that they are given the opportunities and abilities to fulfill their potential and contribute fully to their societies.

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Girls in Bangladesh enjoy a chance to play and express themselves in a safe spaces program organized by BRAC.

GIRLS SPEAK

APPENDIX

Data Sources

Burkina Faso, Ghana, Malawi and Uganda data

In 2003 the Guttmacher Institute conducted qualitative research with young girls in Malawi, Ghana, Uganda and Burkina Faso to examine the context of and motivations for adolescents' behavior. Two-hundred and forty in-depth interviews were conducted with married and unmarried girls aged 13-19 both in- and out-of-school in rural and urban settings, and translated from local languages into English or French, in the case of Burkina Faso.¹⁰⁵ Girls were asked a range of questions about their sexual and reproductive health, current relationships, first sexual experiences and health care seeking behaviors, much of which shed light on their future goals. Girls were also asked specifically about their future aspirations, what they perceived as barriers to achieving these aspirations and ways in which the barriers could be overcome.¹⁰⁶

UNICEF data on East Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia

In the first half of 2001, UNICEF's East Asia and Pacific Regional office fielded an opinion survey among youth in 14 countries and three territories in East Asia and the Pacific. The purpose of the survey was to create a forum for youth voices to be heard and taken into consideration and to promote authentic participation for youth in programs and policies targeting their development. A total of 10,073 young people ages 9-17 were asked a variety of questions regarding their everyday lives including questions about their homes, family, school, teachers, their rights and their future expectations.¹⁰⁷

Getting Girls to Graduate data on Morocco

In 2006, the Getting Girls to Graduate: Qualitative Determinants of Female Retention Rates in Secondary Education project conducted 13 focus group discussion in four regions of Morocco, Oriental, Fes, Casablanca and Marrakech with adolescent girls

between 6th and 9th grade. The purpose of this research was to capture the educational aspirations of young girls in Morocco and to gain insights on how to best improve the education system in these areas. In speaking about schooling, girls naturally brought in a wider range of relevant life experiences and constraints.

Nepal data

Initiated in 1998, ICRW, its US partner Engender Health and two Nepali NGOs, New Era and BP Memorial Health Foundation, initiated a community-based project to assess the potential and effectiveness of a participatory research approach to improving adolescent reproductive health. Questions on reproductive health knowledge and practices, social networks, communication patterns, ideals and understanding of social norms were asked through focus group discussions, participatory exercises and surveys. This mixed method approach allowed insight into young people's reproductive health knowledge and practices, their ambitions and desires, and the limitations they faced, given the social context of their lives. Target populations were married and unmarried male and female adolescents, 14-24 years.

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APPENDIX

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The Coalition for Adolescent Girls

The Coalition gathers over 30 leading international organizations dedicated to bringing adolescent girls to the global development agenda. Launched by the UN Foundation and the Nike Foundation in 2005, the Coalition offers fresh perspectives, diverse resources, and concrete solutions to the challenges facing adolescent girls in developing countries.



The United Nations Foundation

The UN Foundation (www.unfoundation.org), a public charity, was created in 1998 with entrepreneur and philanthropist Ted Turner's historic \$1 billion gift to support UN causes and activities. The UN Foundation is an advocate for the UN and a platform for connecting people, ideas, and capital to help the United Nations solve global problems, including women's and girls' inequality.

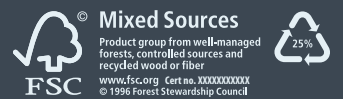
Nike Foundation

The Nike Foundation

The Nike Foundation (www.nikefoundation.org) invests exclusively in adolescent girls as the most powerful force for change and poverty alleviation in the developing world. The Foundation's investments are designed to get girls on the global agenda and drive resources to them. The work of the Nike Foundation is supported by Nike, Inc. and the NoVo Foundation, a collaboration that has significantly broadened the impact of the Girl Effect.



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“At last girls with experiences like mine are being listened to. Girls around the world face so many common problems and it is wonderful to know their voices could influence programs and policies.”

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Afghan asylee from forced marriage, came to the US at age 19

“An important publication that aims not only to mobilize families, communities and governments to work to end discrimination and violence against adolescent girls but also, most critically, places the voices of adolescent girls at the center of all interventions.”

Yasmeen Hassan

Deputy Director of Programs,
Equality Now

“Every girl deserves to have her voice heard and the realities of her life understood because for too long girls have been forced to be silent, invisible and subordinate. Now is the time for these creative, smart, beautiful voices to tell the world how they feel and what they think. And, I want to hear what's on their minds.”

Congresswoman Betty McCollum

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