Online discussion on Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

REPORT

Organized by

Division for the Advancement of Women
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
United Nations

14 August to 8 September 2006

1. **Introduction** 3

2. **Protection of the Girl Child** 4

Early marriage / child marriage 4
Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) 7
Vulnerable girls in industrialized countries 8
Female foeticide 9
Child labour 11
Child sexual abuse 11
Girls in prisons 12

3. **Empowerment of the Girl Child** 14

Education 14
Changing stereotypical attitudes and behaviour 17
Role of the media 18

4. **Monitoring progress - data and statistics on the girl child** 20

5. **Conclusions** 23

6. **Annex 1:** User statistics charts 24

7. **Annex 2:** Numbers of participants in online discussion by country 27

8. **Annex 3:** List of recommended links 28

1. INTRODUCTION

The online discussion "Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child" was organized by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), which is part of the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

The discussion was held from August 14, 2006 to September 12, 2006. It was moderated by Mr. Christoph Schuepp, who also prepared this report. Mr. Schuepp presented the report to an Expert Group Meeting on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women in collaboration with UNICEF, and hosted by UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy, from 25 to 28 September 2006.

The report does not give a comprehensive coverage of all inputs received but provides a summary overview of the discussion, with some illustrative examples of contributions.

The results of the online discussion will feed into and contribute to a further understanding of the issue, as the experts' findings will be used as input to the Commission in the Status of Women in its deliberations on the priority theme, "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child", during its 51st session in 2007.

The online discussion was spread over four weeks:

- **Week One**: "Protection of the girl child; girls in vulnerable situations"
- **Week Two**: "Empowerment of the girl child"
- **Week Three**: "Monitoring progress - data and statistics on the girl child"
- **Week Four**: "Wrap up and recommendations"

The DAW invited interested parties and individuals to participate in the online discussion on the DAW website. 560 individuals from 105 countries registered and participated (actively and passively) in the discussion. There were 470 female and 90 male participants. The organizational distribution showed great numbers of participants from the NGO sector (more than 300), from academia (85) and the UN (54). Geographically, the United States of America (131, incl. several UN staff), India (40), Nigeria (25), the UK (20), Pakistan (19), Australia (18), Canada (16) and Kenya (15) had the highest representation in terms of numbers (see Annex 2 for a complete list of countries of origin of participants.

During the discussion, a total of 274 messages were posted: Week One had 87 postings, Week Two 90, Week Three 48 and Week Four 49. More statistics concerning the online discussion and the geographical distribution of the discussion members, their organizational backgrounds and gender distribution are to be found in Annex 1.

2. PROTECTION OF THE GIRL CHILD

The theme set the stage for a general discussion of protection issues and a more detailed look at certain groups of girls who are more vulnerable than others. To be able to take measures against discrimination and violence, it is necessary to understand the full extent of the problems that girls and women face in societies. The discussion members used the topic to take stock of existing violations of the rights of girls and highlighted issues where extra efforts are to be made. Jane Mutoni of the Rwanda Chapter of the NGO Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) said: *"When we talk of protection of girls in vulnerable situations, I think we mean girls in refuge camps, poverty stricken areas, wars and maybe girls in societies that believe in early marriages for girls."*

Caroline Nalyanya of the NGO Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children added: *"Based on our organizational experience, the main issues concerning the protection of the girl child are protection from harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)*[*]*, early marriage and negative attitudes towards girls and women; of concern is also commercial sexual exploitation and child labour."*

The discussion about protection was based on a two-step approach: Firstly problematic issues were raised and violations of girls' rights exposed. Secondly, measures to more effectively address the needs of girls requiring special protection were discussed, i.e. strategies were recommended for carrying out protective work on the local, national and international level. This included a focus on both existing legislation and international standards and recommendations.

Early marriage / child marriage

One of the most discussed topics throughout the whole online discussion was early marriage / child marriage. The discussion board users noted that there is a general problem with the age at which children - especially girls - get married.

Dr. Jaya Sagade of the Indian Law Society Law College in India gave a very good introduction to the topic: *"Throughout the world, particularly in Africa, Asia and Latin America, girls are married young, sometimes even before they reach the age of puberty and many a times before they reach the age of eighteen years, the age recommended by the Committee on Rights of Children. Child marriage is a harmful traditional cultural practice and violates many basic human rights of children. It is a form of domestic violence too. Child marriage affects both girls and boys. However, it has profound adverse physical, psychological, developmental and economical impact, particularly on girl children, which either remains unexamined or is taken for granted, or justified under the guise of their need of protection from vulnerability and sexual abuse."*

Many of the online discussion members voiced their concerns about the fact that the recommendations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are not followed in their

[*] Please see page 7 for a discussion of female genital mutilation/cutting

local/national legislation. Dr. Sagade noted: *"My first point is how to use the existing legal instruments such as CEDAW and CRC to stop child marriages. I feel that by and large child marriage is not treated as violation of human rights issue. This needs to be emphatically argued with the governments."*

While the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) does not explicitly mention child marriage, it defines "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (Article 1). The CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) mentions "child marriage" in Article 16, 2: ″The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.″ (see http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/cedaw.htm). Ms. Angela Melchiorre, a PhD Researcher at the University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, and the author of *At what age?... Are school-children employed, married and taken to court?*[†], posited that the possibility to acquire majority before the age of 18 enshrined in Article 1 of the CRC is, however, "*critical in situations where children acquire majority through marriage. Such cases, paradoxically, would not seem to breach the Convention. (...) If majority is acquired through marriage, and if girls are married at a younger age than boys, then girls are also at a higher risk of losing the protection of the CRC earlier than boys. (...) It should then be the responsibility of the state to demonstrate that there is consistency in its interpretation of childhood and that married children, especially girls, continue to fully enjoy their rights as set out in the CRC."*

Additionally, the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, recalling article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, states that only ″men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family." It leaves the specification of the minimum age for marriage to the state parties: "States Parties to the present Convention shall take legislative action to specify a minimum age for marriage. No marriage shall be legally entered into by any person under this age, except where a competent authority has granted a dispensation as to age, for serious reasons, in the interest of the intending spouses.″ (see http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/convention.htm)

Esther Ajayi (NGO, Action Health Incorporated) from Nigeria submitted a note regarding the potential impact of early marriage: *"Early marriage, marriage before the age of eighteen, exposes the girl child to all forms of evils raging from: domestic abuse, low self esteem, poverty, abandonment by husband and parents, health problems (...), HIV and ultimately death."*

Another discussion member, Lea Mwambene, a Malawi-born PhD student from Cape Town, wrote: *"[It] is indeed worrying, in my opinion, to see that the very countries that have ratified the CRC enact laws that are inconsistent with it. For example, Malawi ratified the CRC in 1991. The majority age of CRC is set at 18 years. (...) The Republic of Malawi (Constitution) Act 1994 defines a child to be anyone under the age of 16 years. (...) [A]ccording to the Malawi Constitution, persons can be married with their parents' consent between the age of 15 and 18 years. Even though the CRC does not oblige state parties to enact laws specifying the age limit, it*

---

† This publication may be found at: http://www.right-to-education.org/content/age/age_new.pdf

could, however, be argued that counties that are Party to it would be expected to comply and therefore enact laws to reflect the CRC's age limit. It is further argued that while Malawi is not categorically in opposition to the CRC on the issue of 18 years as (...) being the majority age when one can give his/her full consent to marriage, for example, it is not taking a strong position which could decrease the occurrence of early marriages that mostly affect young girls."

However, it was also noted by other discussion members that changes in legislation alone are insufficient. In some countries, the socio-cultural context might lead young girls into marriage willingly before they reach the age of 18, a fact which has to be kept in mind, as Asina Omari from the Faculty of Law at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania noted: *" When discussing the issue of child marriages, one has to take into consideration that the prevalence varies in regions and even within countries, the causes also vary because societies are not homogeneous, and the possible solutions have to be cross-cutting, not only law reform or adhering to internationally set standards by the governments."*

Esther Ajayi from Nigeria added: *"It might be very true that some girls who marry at an age earlier than eighteen might be willing to do so because of the cultural environment. In such a situation, we might ask ourselves the following questions: Do we want to consider all cultures as right and protecting the interest of a child? Do we want to leave the judgment of the best interest of a child in the hands of the child? Is it possible for a child to know what is best for her? How empowered is a girl below eighteen, and how well can she make a rational decision about marriage?"*

In this context, Zebo Ibragimova from Uzbekistan added that it was difficult to judge readiness for marriage by the criteria of age alone. *"As was mentioned already, in most countries (and in ours as well), the age of 18 is suitable for marriage, as it is considered that girls are ready for it and have reached their pubescence. This old tradition of early marriage is a factor of discrimination of women. Nevertheless we consider that only at the age of 20-21 can girls be ready for family life from the point of view of psychology, physiology and social development. By the age of 20-21 she is easily adapted to the new conditions of new life if compared with the girls of the age of 18 and younger. By the age of 21 a young woman should have the necessary knowledge and experience which will help her to build her family to preserve it in peace and bring up children and she will be able to protect her rights. Not every young girl of 17 or 18 can cope with such a difficult task."*

The complexity of the issue of early marriage / child marriage, the unclear relationship between UN recommendations and local legislation, and impact of the different cultural backgrounds fueled a very stimulating debate that led to more submissions on this topic in the last week of the discussion. Angela Melchiorre also shared findings of her review of 158 state party reports to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the period 1997-2004, which indicate that 38 countries have no legislation setting a minimum age for marriage. Among those states where minimum age of marriage is legislated, the majority (71) sets it below 18, a very few (7) set it above 18 and only 11 set it at 18 for both sexes. Most importantly, girls can marry at a younger age than boys in 44 countries, and sex discrimination in marriageable age is spread all over the world (see Annex 3 for more links to relevant documents). This is despite the fact that legal instruments such as CEDAW and the CRC and their respective monitoring bodies have established that the minimum age for marriage should be the same for boys and girls and should be set at 18.

Angela Melchiorre concluded that establishing a minimum age for marriage was a complex task, requiring:

- *"A clear justification of criteria (competence, maturity, puberty, best interest of the couple, etc) and exceptions (parental consent, judicial/administrative dispensation, pregnancy, etc.);*
- *A careful consideration of cultural, religious or traditional values;*
- *A complex evaluation of purposes and implications (is the protection of the child the purpose for establishing such an age? Or is it a way to acknowledge the child's competence and entitle him/her to the full exercise of a right?)*
- *Harmonisation with the general principles of the CRC and its definition of the child, namely that:*
    - *There is no discrimination based on gender*
    - *The best interests of the child are a primary consideration*
    - *Attention is given to the evolving capacity of the child*
    - *The child's point of view and consent is taken into account*

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)

Caroline Nalyanya of the NGO Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children NGOs, provided a short introduction to the issue, stating that "*female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is common in several countries around the world, predominantly in Africa. It is estimated that more than 100 million women and girls have undergone FGM/C worldwide. A multi-country study was carried out by WHO countries: Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and Sudan. The results of the study showed that women who have had FGM/C are significantly more likely to experience difficulties during childbirth and their babies are more likely to die during the pre-natal period as a result of the practice."*

Study results presented by Ms. Nalyanya's show a clear link to Angela Melchiorre's conclusions on child marriage (see above) that put maturity and age into context: *"Girls and boys are considered mature upon being circumcised. This rite of passage is mostly done when the girls and boys are between nine and twelve years of age, a time when the majority of them is between classes four and six of primary education. After circumcision, girls are considered mature and ready for marriage. They are thus married off. On the other hand, circumcision makes girls feel that they have reached womanhood, and are uncomfortable among 'younger children.' This forces them to drop out of school to either get married or go to towns where they look for odd jobs such as being house helps or at times engage in child prostitution."*

Regardless of the age of the girls, FGM/C is viewed as a rite of passage into the world of adults. However, FGM/C is an act of violence against girls and a violation of rights. Furthermore, Mrs. Nalyanya made the point that apart from the psychological implications, female genital mutilation/cutting also puts the health of the young girls in severe danger as it *"threatens the health of girls with infections including HIV/AIDS because of use of unsterilized instruments. Girls' further experience complications during delivery and this endangers the life of the baby and the mother. Girls may loose their lives through death as a result of bleeding and infections from the instruments used."*

Female genital mutilation/cutting can only be addressed through awareness campaigns that bridge all sectors of society. The Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children (KAACR) is making progress through educational campaigns and has recorded a significant reduction in numbers. According to Mrs. Nalyanya, *"32 per cent of Kenyan girls and women aged 15-49 have been 'cut' (2003 Kenya Demographic Health Survey). A reduction of 30 per cent has been reported after education, female economic empowerment and alternative rites of passage."*

This success has only been possible through a holistic approach in which KAACR advocated for the elimination of FGM/C through educating children, girls and boys, religious leaders and community leaders on the need to protect children against this practice. Mrs. Nalyanya stressed that *"the effectiveness of existing conventions, such as CEDAW and the CRC, in protecting girls from violence and discrimination can be increased by advocacy, multi-sectoral collaboration of partners and negotiations with leaders to stop the practice."*

Vulnerable girls in industrialized countries

Much of the discussion about protection focused on the most "visibly" vulnerable girls in Africa and Asia. The situation of girls in the "industrialized world" however, was also discussed with an attempt to find out what forms of discrimination are the most urgent to address there.

Mary Rarden from the USA noted: *"First, I want to acknowledge that girls in the USA have far less vulnerability than in most other societies in the world. Recognizing that, I am grateful. I grew up as a girl in the USA and have been free to achieve an education, a career, and realize many of my dreams and aspirations. That said, it is still significantly different to grow up a girl in the USA than to grow up a boy. The differences are somewhat subtler than elsewhere in the world, but they are real.*

Elizabeth Nunez of the US-based non-profit organization CACHE commented: *"What do you do in a country where so many girls are growing up without values and so many women are living without morals or self-respect? How do you solve a problem in a country that claims that girls and women should be grateful for what they do have?"*

Mary Rarden also noted: *Parents are often influenced by some of the religious traditions in this country to groom their daughters for a passive, subjugated role that discourages them from aspiring to anything in addition to being wives and mothers, and which requires them to accept a parental type of control and authority from their future husbands. (This is one common practice among the most conservative adherents of several different religious traditions--Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.) Girls are much more likely than boys to be coerced into dressing and acting sexually precocious as a cultural "standard." Girls often receive pressure--from parents, other girls, and prospective boyfriends--to downplay their intelligence because female intelligence is not considered attractive; girls are therefore pressured to either hide their intellect or neglect their education so the "man is smarter than the woman."*

Violence and abuse of power was one common theme in the discussion, Jeanne Sarson noted that most or even all acts of violence have one thing in common: They require the abuse of power. Her comprehensive explanation of "Abuse of power" is as follows: *"I repeatedly read that poverty, lack of education, war, civil unrest, hunger, custom, class or caste, race, religion,*

colonialism, the misuse of science and technology, and gender are some leading factors in the oppression of, the domination of, the neglect, exploitation, abuse, torture, and other forms of maltreatments inflicted against the girl child. While this is so, it must be identified that embedded in each of these contributing factors is the ultimate use/abuse of power. For example, a mother may be poor and be forced into sexualized exploitation for survival but if she stops her female child from "escaping" then an abuse of power happens. If a "middle-class" pedophile rapes her/his "middle-class" friend's daughter there is an abuse of power. If a priest or shaman rapes a trusting mother's girl child there is an abuse of power. If custom, religion, or colonialism oppresses the girl child there is an abuse of power. The reality is, in all forms of oppression, domination, and violence, abuse of power is the fundamental irreducible element. Until this abuse of power is visibly named and addressed, "curing" the contributing factors will not stop the many forms of violence inflicted against the girl child."

In all of these cases, there are victims and perpetrators and positive change requires that both receive the help that they need.

As an example of one of the most atrocious acts of violence against children – and girls in most cases - the topic of ritual abuse-torture was introduced by Jeanne Sarson and Linda MacDonald, two researchers from Nova Scotia, Canada, who argued that ritual abuse-torture victimization, so far ignored by policy makers at all levels, must be added to the list of relational and gender-based violence. (http://www.ritualabusetorture.org/) Jeanne Sarson and Linda MacDonald's organization *"emphasizes the universality of acts of torture whether committed by the political state sanctioned torturer - the state actor - or whether perpetrated by the ritual abuse-torture family and/or group - the non-state actors. Both groups of torturers inflict acts of torture that are a violation of the victimized person's human rights".*

The disrespect for the lives of their victims shown by the perpetrators of ritual abuse-torture can be explained with the term "misogyny", which was introduced to the discussion by Dr. Patricia Willis, Co-Chair of Advancing Human Rights/CEDAW Committee of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: *"Misogyny is hatred of or strong prejudice against women. The word comes from the Greek words misos, "hatred" and gunê, "woman". Compared with anti-woman sexism or misandry (hatred of or strong prejudice against men), misogyny is usually regarded as directed against women by some men, though women can also hold misogynistic views. In feminist theory, misogyny is recognized as a political ideology - similar to racism or anti-Semitism - that justifies and maintains the subordination of women by men."* (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misogyny)

Female foeticide

Female foeticide, or the practice of aborting female foetuses, stemming from a cultural preference for sons, which is prevalent in countries such as India and China. Vijay Rai, Project Coordinator at Plan International (India), quoted a Lancet journal (January 2006 issue) figure of 10 million female foetuses aborted over the last two decades in India alone. Mr. Rai named the following four key factors influencing female foeticide:

- Obsession to have a son due to religious, cultural and traditional values.
- Position of girls and women in society and the practice of dowry

- Misuse of modern technology of sex selection
- Two-child norm policy of certain state governments.

According to Mr. Rai, the alarming rate of female foeticide has led to a dangerously declining sex ratio, *"with negative results that are already making themselves apparent in India. These include an increase in sexual and social crimes against women, such as rape, abduction, bride selling, etc., which in turn will lead to an in increase in prostitution and sexual exploitation and cases of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS, with a resulting increase in physiological and psychological disorders, particularly among women, as well as unwanted pregnancies and forced abortions."*

Gomathy Venkateswar, also from India, wrote: *"Horrifying newspaper reports in India in some of the leading news dailies, have in recent weeks brought to light how female foeticide is being practiced in some Western States in India. The patriarchal family systems look down on the birth of a first born girl, and mothers are then treated horribly for having delivered a daughter. As a result, women secretly get amniocentesis done in spurious Nursing Homes (though the government prohibits under law such practices). (...) In India as is the custom the pregnant woman comes to her paternal home for the delivery, and where no earlier tests have been undergone on the sex of the child, the entire family is under tremendous strain and anxiety that their daughter delivers ...a boy. Last week in Kolkata, in West Bengal, a neo-mother strangled her baby daughter soon after birth, and buried it in the garden fearing reprisals from her-in-laws on the birth of a second daughter. Age-old mindsets and attitudes towards girls have to change through strong governmental measures to change society."*

As lessons learned / recommendations, Vijay Rai named the following points:

- Campaigns targeting awareness on female foeticide should be run in connection with awareness building for the importance of birth registration, as it will be an effective tracking mechanism.
- Working with self-help groups) helps to reach the community in an effective way.
- Use of audio/video media helps in environment building around the cause.
- Capacity building of staff including Govt. and NGOs, help in better understanding of the concept.

It is important to note that in this contribution the role of the media is again highlighted. Gomathy Venkateswar of India suggests that even the film industry (in India) could make a major impact by promoting positive images of women and girls rather than engaging in a further manifestation of negative gender stereotypes: "*The pleasure of having a daughter in the house must be highlighted through media coverage and through messages in Bollywood films which weave so much influence on the minds of the millions of Hindi film buffs across the country be it in the cities or the rural areas, especially if this is portrayed through the much loved popular film heroes and heroines."*

Vijay Rai (PLAN International India) also suggested a set of measures, including female foeticide campaigns, in connection with awareness-raising for proper birth registration, working with self-help groups in reaching the community in an effective way, the use of audio/video media to generate interest in the cause, and capacity building of NGO staff and government workers.

Child labour

Child labour was identified as another area where protection is critical. In the discussion, child domestic work (CDW) was mentioned repeatedly as one of the most invisible and therefore underreported issues. Virginia Murillo Herrera, Vice President for the Americas with Defence for Children International (DCI), provided a useful overview on Child Domestic Work:

"*Child Domestic Work (CDW) constitutes one of the most invisible forms of child labour and takes place in work places where children are in vulnerable conditions. Girls and adolescent women are the most affected by this kind of work. The child domestic work belongs to the informal sector with informal conditions because these children work out of sight in public spaces, contrary to other children. Child domestic workers work in private family homes (third houses) on their own, where it is not possible to see them and to have access to them. (...) Poverty and migration are common causes for child domestic work. The children's families are facing marginalization and vulnerable conditions of their native communities. These children start working at 5-6 years of age, work during long hours (more than 12 hours a day), receive no or very little income, have no contract, have no access to school, their rights are not recognized, have no opportunities to play with other children and are exposed to mistreatment, sexual abuse and labour accidents.*"

Although international recommendations exist, Virginia Murillo Herrera sees the problems around CDW in a lack of awareness in the local/national level: "*Even if the CRC, CEDAW and ILO Convention 182 provide dispositions and elements to protect children, there are still many cases to address and a need to combat the lack of political will to recognize the important dimension of these figures and international standards fail to see CDW as a problem, the weakness of domestic law and the difficulties to combat work at private places such as homes.*"

Luc Franzoni, who works with UNDP in Switzerland, quoted the Second Global Report on child labour issued by ILO, the International Labour Organization, in 2004, *which "reminds us that (...) 218 million children are trapped in child labour of which 126 million were in hazardous work. "* Mr. Franzoni added: *"The little girl from West to East, South from North, seems to be forgotten from the analysis, the statistics, the radar screen while probably the most vulnerable group of child. Agriculture and child domestic work are still relatively neglected for action against child labour on both national and international levels."* He suggests stronger strategic partnerships, *"backed up by a more focused and vibrant worldwide advocacy and support"*.

Child sexual abuse

The discussion about child domestic work led to additional comments on child sexual abuse. Moses J. M. Emanuel, Assistant Lecturer at the Department of Sociology at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, made the connection between the two issues: *"It is becoming increasingly apparent that Domestic Workers, and in particular Child Domestic Workers (CDWs), are repeatedly sexually exploited by their male employers and/or other males in the house. There are lots of cases of marriage conflicts associated with this behavior, also many cases of these children getting pregnant and even STIs from such sexual encounters. It is essential to scientifically establish qualitatively and quantitatively the extent and nature of this problem, its dimensions and consequences particularly to the CDWs. This will enable exploration of legal, policy and program options for effective intervention."*

Lakshmi Krupa Ginjapalle from India regarded child sexual abuse as *"a problem that's on the rise everyday..."* She concludes that the less empowered a girl is, the more vulnerable is she and the easier it becomes for the abuser to perpetrate his crime. What makes it all even worse, is that *"in most cases, the abuser is someone whom the girl child knows already very well, and its only later in life that the child understands that she has been abused. "*

Child sexual abuse also goes hand-in-hand with the threat of HIV/AIDS infection. Moses Emanuel shared his experiences from a study he carried out in Tanzania: *"It was clear for example that majority of children were aware of HIV/AIDS, and majority of them knew how it was spread and how one needs to protect oneself from getting infected. However, in terms of practice, young girls in normal relationships can go as far as suggesting the use of condoms, but mostly they depend on the willingness of the male partner to actually use a condom, for various reasons, which brings us to the fact that many girls are still not empowered enough in regard to decision-making and firmness in upholding their position when it comes to sexual relationships."*

It was interesting that Mr. Emanuel also mentioned that girls in urban regions were more vulnerable than those in rural settings. The anonymity of large cities and the lack of personal communication with girls and their parents outside rural areas seem to make them an easier target for abuse. Poverty is also a factor that supports child sexual abuse, which is often the case in international trafficking and local sex trade.

Girls in prisons

A number of discussion members also shared their experiences with another highly vulnerable group of girls: Girls in prisons. Most of the contributions acknowledged that the situation of boys in prisons can be much worse than the situation of girls, and that there are larger numbers of boys in prison.

Luc Franzoni wrote about his experience with a UNDP programme in support of Penitentiary Reform (1995-1998) in Haiti: "*(It) has convinced me that a geographic separation between kids and adults in jail is a basic first protection against cruelty! (...) I agree with you that the international community must think and act more on this account and in particular on girls in jail. The issue is on the judicial side as well as on the budgeting side.*"

Marie-Antoinette Sossou from the College of Social Work at the University of Kentucky argued that more support should be given to girls under the age of 18 who are in jail: *"[G]irls under the age of 18 should not even be in prison. In Ghana, where l worked as a probation and court officer for 12 years, there are special remand homes for girl juvenile offenders under the age of 18. These cases are brought before the juvenile courts specially set up for young girls and in situations where these girls have to be sentenced for a period of time, they are sent to Girls Industrial Schools under the supervision of the Department of Social Welfare for a period of three years or a minimum of one year. While they are there, they continue with their formal education or they are put to vocational training programs.*

She noted further that *the main rationale for this program is based on the understanding that children are amendable to change given the proper nurturing and structured environment that most of these juveniles do not have in their homes due to poverty, divorce or dysfunctional family situations. Secondly, juvenile offences do not necessarily lead to criminal behavior in adulthood. Occasionally, girls do end up in adult prisons due to inflation in their years by police personnel*

for obvious reasons, one being that the juvenile court process is too cumbersome for them to deal with. In such situations, it is the duty of social workers or probation officers to appeal such sentences with proper documentation of their ages and request for their transfers to juvenile institutions.

Finally, Ms. Sossou highlighted that *incarcerating both young boys and girls under the age of 18 years in adult prisons anywhere in the world is a human rights abuse of these children and should be prevented by judges, magistrates, social worker/probation officers, the police and legal aid officials."*

3. EMPOWERMENT OF THE GIRL CHILD

The empowerment of the girl child is an important pre-requisite for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child. As noted in the discussion by Vijay Rai, Project Coordinator for PLAN International in India, it is important to understand the concept of empowerment. Mr. Rai quotes social scientists (Weber, Rappoport, Zimmerman) who defined empowerment as *"as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society by acting on issues that they define as important"*.

Marie-Antoinette Sossou of the College of Social Work at the University of Kentucky added that empowerment should be seen as both a goal and a process. *"As a goal, it will not be achieved overnight and as a process, it is a life long ongoing undertaking. As a process, it involves the psychological, educational, cultural and spiritual and attitude change dimensions that will help individual parents, especially the mothers, to understand the nature of their own oppression and discrimination as women and then to take steps to overcome the hurdles that they face on daily basis and pass on to their girl children."*

Empowerment of girls and women is a tool to prevent gender-based violence and discrimination. It requires an understanding of the problems as well as ways of addressing them to generate positive changes. This understanding only comes with education; educated girls and women will find it much easier to fight for their rights, and work with others in their communities and elevate the empowerment of girls to the social agendas in their countries. Therefore, empowerment and education were mentioned by many of the contributors as two issues that cannot be separated.

Education

The discussion highlighted in particular one key factor that leads to empowerment, - education. Education in this context means both education in terms of enabling children to attend school and learn how to read and write, but also education in terms of life-skills, including the knowledge of health and hygiene basics and a better awareness of child rights. To make education successful, many contributors suggested a holistic approach. The broader the responsibility for the education is spread throughout the community, the better the chances that everybody benefits. One of the most comprehensive contributions focusing on education and the benefits of education came from Ann M. Scholz (Schools Sisters of Notre Dame, United States of America)

- *"While education for both boys and girls leads to increased income, the education of girls leads to greater gains;*
- *Educated women have smaller, healthier and better educated families;*
- *Educated girls are less likely to fall victim to HIV/AIDS, trafficking and other forms of violence;*
- *Increased education is one of the most important tools to empower women within the family and society and, as that happens, women not only increase their own agency but improve the well-being of their families and help to transform their communities.*

The right to education has been enshrined in many international documents. Ms. Scholz noted: *"The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantee the right to education. In 1990 governments promised that Education for All would be reality by the dawn of the new millennium. That commitment was reaffirmed, by the Dakar Framework for Action, which placed a particular emphasis on girls' education. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action assured us that action would be taken to eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training. Those promises were repeated yet again in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals include commitments to end gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005."*

Advocating for education is however not enough; it has to be quality education: *"If education is to be truly empowering it must be quality education,* Ms. Scholz continued*."* In this context, she insisted that *"educational facilities must be safe and the environment gender sensitive and that educational institutions must put in place policies aimed at preventing violence and harassment of girls and include mechanisms which protect complainants and monitor effectiveness*

She called for better training of teachers so they are prepared to "*address the underlying causes of gender inequality, violence and discrimination.* Finally, Mrs. Scholz mentioned that "*gender bias in curricula and teaching practice that perpetuates gender inequality must be eliminated and educators develop engendered curricula and materials that empower girls to act on their own behalf and contribute to the transformation of the social, cultural, and economic structures, which perpetuate patriarchy and inequality."*

This comprehensive look at the benefits and challenges of education showed that education has to be seen as a process and a goal. Education is not limited to learning in schools or other institutions, but also includes the learning of life-skills. David Kenneth Waldman, Founder and CEO of a US-based NGO To Love Children Educational Foundation International Inc noted that it is also important to educate and train others on the rights of the girl child. "*Education that is sustainable for the girl child, sensitivity training for males, along with creating opportunity is the best investment we can make. We need to act cohesively as a world body of girl child advocates to bring clean water, security, micro finance for women, health education and clinics to name a few and to stand behind the force of our UN conventions but also to work to get all sectors to see this as a priority that is essential for world peace and prosperity. Am I naive or setting the impossible goal of reaching all girls? (...) Imagine if all of us [participating in this online discussion] pooled our resources, funding, ideas, volunteers and expertise to come together and create as a first step a sustainable world wide media campaign to solicit many more millions all over the world dedicated to working for the girl child, imagine what can change."*

While these views were voiced from the perspectives of the industrialized world, the problems in the developing countries are even more serious. Here, even basic education is lacking and the question of how girls and women can raise their voices and fight for their rights is an important one. Illiteracy can be a major constraint to the empowerment of girls.

Marie Mathilde Manga from the NGO: African Women's Association in Cameroon posited, *"It seems evident that the crucial issue is illiteracy, especially in our Countries in Development Process. Illiteracy is a vulnerability factor, in so far as it exposes the Girl Child to prostitution and any kind of work, demeaning or not, just for her survival. So, it would be advisable to encourage the Education of the Girl Child of Countries in Development Process."*

In many parts of the world, children (and especially girls) have to start working at a very young age to support their families. Poverty can cause lack of access to education – lack of education results in a lack of empowerment, which in turn leads to more poverty, discrimination and violence.

Gomathy Venkateswar from Kolkata, India, added this perspective when he asked: *"How are these problems to be solved except through gigantic poverty alleviation programs by Government and NGOs and civil society?"* His conclusion was clear: *"As a teacher for the last 34 years, how else but through education, spread of information and knowledge of one's own rights can we hope to tackle this almost insurmountable evil problem that besets us not only in South and South East Asia, but throughout the Western World in some form or the other where there is the huge influx of cultures, beliefs and practices?"*

Indira Koirala from Nepal also added a list of recommendations, including "*Increase awareness among girls - through school education and also through other mechanisms such as mass awareness campaigns etc about the CRC - right to participate, right to non-discrimination, right to be free from abuses and exploitation and right to growth and development. Many girls in developing countries don't even know that they have these rights that must be fulfilled by family, community and state*."

A controversial issue in the discussion arose regarding affirmative action, in particular on the issue of admitting girls to university with lower grades than boys. Lea Mwambene from Cape Town wrote in this context: *"Apart from been ridiculed by other students, it is indeed very demeaning to feel, as a woman myself, that you are educated because your passing mark into the University system was reduced, for example. This would, in my opinion, have an effect on the completion of that programme. What is ideal, as a suggestion, are policies that will champion equal entry and retention of both boys and girls into the educational system. What we also need are positive initiatives that will achieve the goal of educating and empowering girls for a better world. Initiatives that will instill confidence in a girl child throughout the education system and after graduating."*

Finally, Lea Mwambene from the University of Western Cape in South Africa did not leave any doubt that education plays a central role in the elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child and recalled the text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: *"Article 28 of the CRC provides for education as a basic right and for free and compulsory primary education as a matter of urgent priority. Although the term girl child does not appear anywhere in the CRC, it has been argued that several provisions of the CRC speak to the situation of the girl child and can be used as an agenda for action to identify persistent forms of inequality and discrimination against the girl child in all fields, including education. The CRC is buttressed by four other articles that assert overarching principles of law on this right. All have far reaching ramifications, particularly in terms of what is needed to mould the education system. These are article 2, on non-discrimination; article 3 on the best interest of the child; article 6 on the child's right to life, survival and development; and article 12 on the views of the child. The non-discrimination principle has been argued to be key to combating gender discrimination. Schools must ensure that they are responsible to girl's needs in every possible way, from physical location to classroom curriculum and practice."*

While education is not the only important factor in the process of empowerment of girls and women, it nevertheless can be regarded as the central element that leads to a better protection of

girls. It is the starting point from which all campaigning and advocacy starts. Only educated girls can stand up for their rights and take the future in their own hands.

Changing stereotypical attitudes and behaviour

The empowerment of girls requires positive change for girls themselves. It also requires change in the attitudes and behaviour of others in families, schools and other institutions in the community. Participants in the online discussion agreed that changing stereotypical attitudes and behaviour was one of the main issues surrounding girls' empowerment.

Examples from developing countries were presented that demonstrate how positive change can be brought about when different groups in a community are part of the process. "Breast ironing" in Cameroon (introduced to the discussion by Bessem Ebanga of the NGO RENATA in Cameroon), a painful and unhealthy local custom where mothers "iron" their daughters' breasts to make them appear unattractive to young men, illustrates why a holistic approach is needed to achieve gender equality: Mothers who iron the breasts of their adolescent daughters need to understand that the procedure is wrong, painful and unhealthy. The girls need to be educated to be empowered to withstand the pressure from their mothers – and to speak up publicly on the issue to raise awareness among their younger peers. At the same time, the men and boys need to be educated, as sexual harassment of young girls is the main reason why mothers perpetuate this harmful practice. A group of teenage girls called Association of Aunties has recently started a TV campaign to raise awareness of the breast ironing issue among the population of Cameroon, men and women alike.

Close partnerships with men and boys are needed. In this context, Busakorn Suriyasarn, an independent consultant from Thailand wrote: "*Often I feel that many of us girls' and women's advocates, who of course, have our hearts in the right place, just keep talking to the "converts". What we need in our larger efforts to create a more gender-equitable and fair world is the cooperation of the males, young and old.*" These comments were followed up with a useful example from Cambodia, where women's and men's organizations cooperate in a campaign on domestic violence. The Gender and Development Center (GAD/C) helped launch the Cambodian Men's Network (CMN) in 2000 as part of the 1st White Ribbon Campaign in Cambodia. More information on CMN and GAD/C here: http://www.online.com.kh/~gad/Networks.htm.

Adeyinka Adewale of the University of Lagos, Nigeria, wrote: *"The roots of our problem especially in Africa stem from cultural beliefs. There have been peculiar practices from times past which are still manifesting in our present day world."*

The complexity of the issue was also well described by Nite Tanzarn, an independent consultant from Uganda, who said: *"In order for girls to be totally empowered, the root causes of their relatively lower positions in society as compared with boys need to be addressed. The inequalities between girls and boys are produced, reproduced and reinforced in,* inter alia*, the family, at school, in religious institutions, in the media and by the state. This thus calls for a multi-pronged, multi-level approach to girls' empowerment involving the state, civil society organizations, the community, religious institutions, etc. etc."*

Edwin M. John, Director of Neighbourhood Community Network (NCN) in India, proposed that one way to support the empowerment of girls was by supporting "neighborhood parliaments":

"Each neighborhood parliament has a neighborhood cabinet, with a neighborhood chief minister and ministers for various concerns like health, hygiene, environment, income generation, children's welfare, adolescent's guidance - and what not - that are relevant at its level."

Neighborhood parliaments are just one example of the value of engaging a wide range of actors in the efforts to eliminate discrimination and violence against girls. It starts on a small scale, but Mr. John advocated for a network of neighborhood communities where everybody is included and decisions are made while taking into account the special needs of every member of the community.

Role of the media

Examples from Fiji, India and other countries show how positive media coverage of gender issues can effectively contribute to the elimination of discrimination and violence against girls. Lakshmi Krupa of Ginjapalle of the University of Madras mentioned the positive use of television in India: *"The country's PBS - public broadcasting system, Doordarshan, and All India radio have its main motto as Information, Education and Entertainment. True to living up to the spirit of this, they have launched round the clock information and education channels. They run almost 75% of shows for the welfare and improvement of the society with more than 15 channels in different Indian languages. They run special shows on girl child's welfare, women's welfare schemes, talks from NGO heads, and interviews of women achievers, and so on and so forth. (...) One of the most successful campaigns has been their use of a cartoon image of a girl child to address several social issues. It is also to be noted that this is a central autonomous body receiving funds from the government and hence does not frankly care about profit as such. This is a great disadvantage with commercial TV and radio channels, because they feel it is a waste of resource and precious airtime."*

NGOs should actively engage with public TV stations to advocate for girls' empowerment, as well as with private and commercial stations. Commenting on the role of media, Linda MacDonald of Canada wrote about the importance of public broadcasts including messages on gender equality: "*[T]here need to be direct media messages that tell girls that there is gender inequality in the world. Just like racism and other hate crime ads we see, I think we need just as direct messages about gender inequality. They could be written in the positive but still direct. Statements such as: All girls in the world have human rights even if they are not treated as such – or: Girls are equal persons in the world. (...) These messages could be on TV during daytime children's shows and be posted in schools."*

Throughout the discussion, there was also a lot of criticism of the media. In this context, Moses Emanuel from the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania wrote about the media portrayal of women and girls: : *"Some of the music videos portray women as objects of entrainment to men, to arouse him, to give him pleasure and to worship him. Others imply that the only thing women need and what they live for is to be taken care of and to be sexually satisfied. In most movies, women are the last prize of a hero. In advertisements, women positions, roles etc., are noticeably explicated. ... Such portrayals apart from being a manifestation of the social view of women, also sustain and promote such perceptions, consistently making girl children and girl youth strive to be like 'their models, ' while reifying the position of men. It is not easy to fight media portrayal of women without some sort of a consensus on which is the negative and which is the positive*

portrayal of women... Such issues also necessitate debates on freedom of expression, of media, of arts and performance etc. "

Busakorn Suriyasarn replied with a look at the positive and the negative side of the media: *"I think the role of media is often a double-edged sword. Media are very useful *when used with care* in raising awareness and setting a public and policy agenda on issues that need public and political attention. For example, on issues such as girl domestics, domestic violence, sexual harassment, etc. that need to have the profile raised to the wider audience. Targeted use of media, such as radio or TV dramas, PA spots, etc. on issues such as above are a good advocacy strategy that compliment real actions on the ground. However, like everything and everyone else, the media are not perfect and many journalists are not necessarily well informed and they espouse values and prejudices like everyone else in the society. Sensationalism also often gets in the way of reporting. The standards of professionalism also leave a lot to be desired in many countries."* Busakorn's final recommendation on this topic was that *"there should be serious sensitivity training programs for journalists."*

The image of the "double-edged sword" regarding the media was supported by many of the discussion members. They acknowledged the importance of the media and its power in opinion making. The general view was that the media should be used much more for conveying positive messages prompting behaviour change or for making educational programmes available to underprivileged groups. There were some good examples given, but there are also a lot of negative examples where the media convey stereotypes and give wrong advice. While adults are usually in a position to differentiate between good and bad, wrong and right, true and false, children are in a different position and find it hard, especially when not supported by their parents in the process, to filter the right messages from the massive media exposure they are surrounded with. In the context of girls' education and girls' empowerment, the discussion members called for better training of journalists on gender issues and a more development-based approach by broadcasters and newspaper publishers.

4. MONITORING PROGRESS - DATA AND STATISTICS ON THE GIRL CHILD

Collecting data for statistics is always a difficult, rather expensive and time-consuming issue. Quality and quantity have to be balanced, and even then access to information sources can become a problem. In the field of protection and empowerment of girls, some factors are difficult to measure. While, for example, the number of girls in prisons in a given country should be fairly easy to measure, it might not be in the interest of the government to have these numbers published and therefore access to information could be restricted. Other problems arise when it comes to measuring empowerment. What factors define empowerment – and how can they be measured? Can the empowerment of girls in a country in the industrialized world be compared with the level of empowerment of girls in the developing world?

Esther Ajayi from Action Health Incorporated in Lagos, Nigeria, wrote in response to Dr. Jaya Sagade from India who had demanded that governments should provide sex disaggregated statistics on marriage and the age of marriage that "*this will be a bit difficult in a situation where there is a poor statistics method; I mean where the birth of children is not registered in the first instance. Another problem will be about the predominant situation in which marriage only means the transfer of a girl child to a man's house - no rites, no ceremony, no registration*…"

In one of the opening remarks pertaining to the issue of data and statistics, Yuko Mori, a private researcher from Japan based in Denmark, called for a better cooperation between the different stakeholders interested in the research data: *"It's necessary not only to depend on the UN or the government of each country, but also to ensure participation of all people. "*

Moses JM Emanuel of the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania supported this view by saying: *"[T]here is usually a very weak association between the international community, the government, civil society and academic institutions. (...) If we foster the relationship between the four stakeholders, and establish partnership agreements that delineate the roles of each in these endeavors, I feel certain we will be more effective and register very significant achievements."*

Irada Gautam from the NGO AAWAAJ ("which means Voice in Nepalese") argued for the *"need to* ***develop a standard format*** *and reach a consensus through dialogue on the collection of data on the girl child "*and to follow the same guidelines throughout the data collection and analysis process

Describing the situation in India, Dr. Neeti Mahanti of the Jigyansu Tribal Research Centre, said: "*The existing indicators are grossly inadequate at the country level. Most of the data is not available and also unreliable. Hence, the indicators so far used become totally redundant. ... Indicators should be fixed depending on the database on a particular country… A strong monitoring system should be in place and regularly utilized for ensuring the regular collection of the field data about girl children. Civil society organizations and local Panchayat Bodies, having access to professional help should be given the responsibility of fixing indicators and monitoring the entire process of grassroots level data collection, data processing, developing indicators and monitoring the process for the protection, empowerment and development of the girl child."*

Indira Koirala from the Tribhuvan University in Nepal agreed with the rather negative picture regarding current monitoring situation: *"Monitoring on aspects that particularly relates to women and girls has suffered from high resistance … [In some countries,] organizations even need to fight to put simple Male/Female disaggregate database column. (…) Similarly, there is also a very high resistance among donors to allocate resources for monitoring. They often allocate funds for "activities" (that are visible), but where monitoring the implications of such activities on women and girls are concerned [the argument is made that resources] should come from the budget of implementing organizations. On the other hand, they (donors) are happy to bring teams (with a large amount of resources allocated) for evaluations."*

Lack of resources, methodologies and cooperation were quoted as the main reasons for insufficient data collection, dissemination and use and therefore also a lack of monitoring of progress. Research data has also to be fully utilized to develop new approaches to tackle the issues identified.

The solution therefore should be increased resources, increased cooperation among the different stakeholders and the development of improved methodology. But even this will not solve the problems unless well-equipped local organizations, in cooperation with politicians, governments and other decision-makers, will incorporate the lessons learned into the design and implementation of projects and campaigns that eradicate the roots of the problems.

Various contributors to the discussion described some promising projects in this area. Valerie Hudson of the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies in the USA introduced the WomanStats database, a project in development, to the discussion forum: The team of scholars from Brigham Young University, the University of Minnesota, and the University of California (Santa Barbara) has so far coded over 22,000 pieces of information from different sources and are in the process of entering the data into a database that will feature 240 variables on the status of women for all nation-states with a population of over 100,000 (171 total nation-states). They began the project to further their own research, *"and realized that data on women are so scattered, fragmented (and in many cases, just plain missing) that one important contribution we could make is to compile existing data on the status of women and to make that available to scholars and policymakers all over the world. Since we are only at about 54% completion, we have not posted the data online yet. We will do so when we reach 80% completion. We have posted a preliminary homepage (www.womanstats.org), and we are willing to send data on particular countries or particular variables to those scholars who might need these now (with the caveat that the data is not yet completely "cleaned")."*

Valerie Hudson noted further that *"The WomanStats database is constructing what is already the most comprehensive database on the status of women cross-nationally. Already over 50% complete, when finished it will cover over 240 variables for 179 nations. Variables include those relating to women's health, security, education, legal status, and human rights, among others.*

She pointed out the usefulness of WomanStats. *To demonstrate the difference WomanStats data make, suppose one were interested in assessing women's security through examining complex issues such as rape. Existing cross-national data sources would provide an indication of the prevalence of rape according to official sources, where available and reliable. But WomanStats would give you much more. Uploaded onto a publicly available internet site, one would find the following variables concerning rape for any chosen country: official and unofficial estimates of*

the incidence of rape, laws concerning rape, laws concerning who can testify in a rape case, estimates of the level of enforcement of rape laws within the society and across various sub national regions, customary practice after rape (ostracism, honor killings, effect on marriage ability or on divorce), laws concerning abortion in the case of rape, laws on marital rape, customary practices regarding marital rape, presence of resources for women who have been raped, legal punishments concerning rape, and estimates of HIV/AIDS transmission due to rape, and even first-hand accounts of rape victims of their treatment within the society. Clearly, the constellation of information provided in WomanStats database paints a far more accurate and detailed picture of how rape affects the lives of women in various nations than what is currently available."

Valerie Hudson and her team are *very interested in hearing from experts that may have developed datasets that they would like to have included in the larger database. Full credit is given to the creator of such sets, and full bibliographic cites are given online. In addition, we also seek country experts that would be willing to answer questions concerning missing data for particular variables for particular countries.*

The database could, once the data is entered and updated, provide a possible solution to the problem of monitoring progress and possibly facilitate comparison between countries. It could also become a tool for measuring progress in a given country by comparing the research data on a yearly basis. The team of researchers is trying to compile data from as many sources as possible, to guarantee the best possible results quantity-wise, while also putting up enough variables to have good results on the quality side of the research. Ironically, the countries with the best research facilities and the best financial support for monitoring are those which have the least need for it, that is, the industrialized countries where the level of protection and empowerment of girls is much higher.

5. CONCLUSIONS

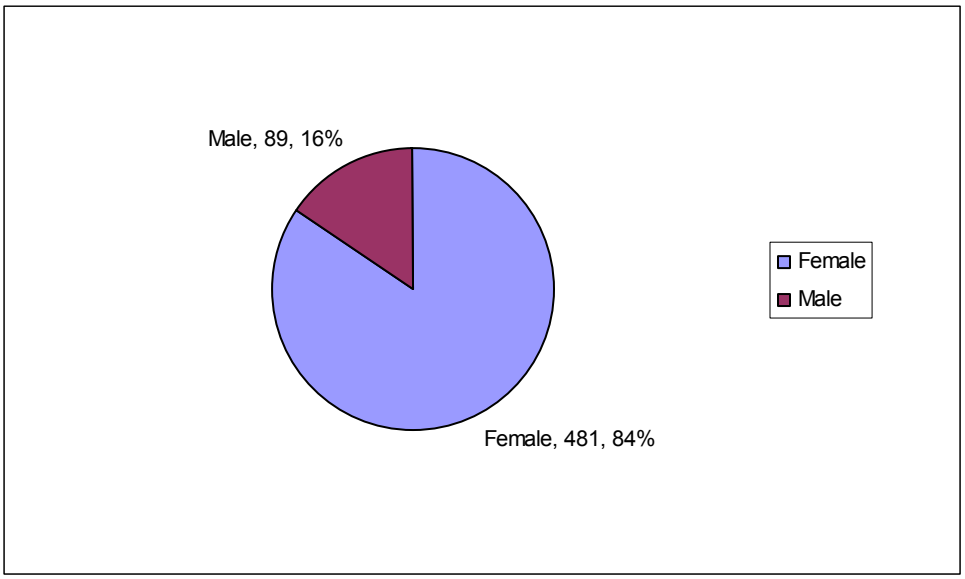
The online discussion clearly showed that there is an urgent need to take further steps to achieve the goal of eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child. Progress has been made over the last few decades in working on this situation, but major inequality persists, including through harmful traditional practices, child marriage, lack of educational opportunities for girls, negative stereotypes in the media and the use of girls as child domestic workers and sex slaves. Violence against girls is far reaching and affects millions of girls even before they are born.

In nearly every contribution that described possible solutions to the different issues facing the girl child, the need for a better cooperation between all stakeholders was emphasized. David Kenneth Waldman described it as follows: "*There are tens of thousands of NGOs, individuals, government officials, private businesses that are now working to improve the human rights of children. We need to find ways to better coordinate our efforts. The task now as I understand it to be, is to bring together this army of private, education, Non Governmental Organization, government and international government sectors in a coordinated and cohesive way - a federation that will not only educate and safeguard the needs of the girl child with the international community at large and will also will work in a concerted manner to create a grassroots awareness and constituency to help change the political will.*"

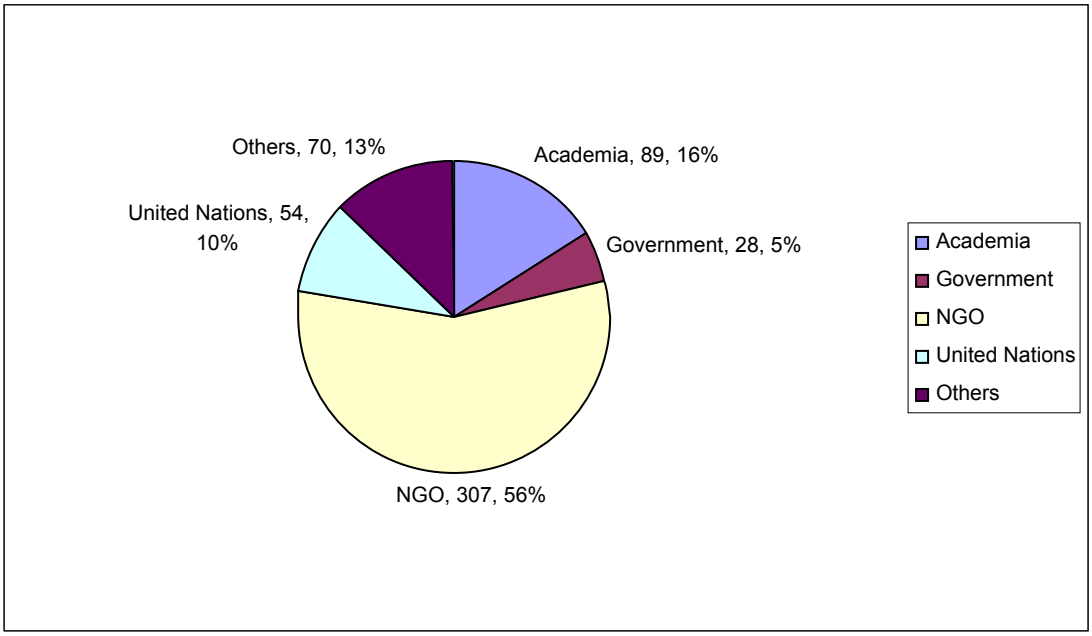
Finally, it should be noted that the vast majority of the online discussion contributors saw education as the principal tool for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child. Education in this context does not only mean education of girls, but also the education of society at large. Awareness comes through education, and the problems that girls and women face in many of the countries are a direct result of a lack of awareness at all levels of society.

Annex 1: Participant statistics charts

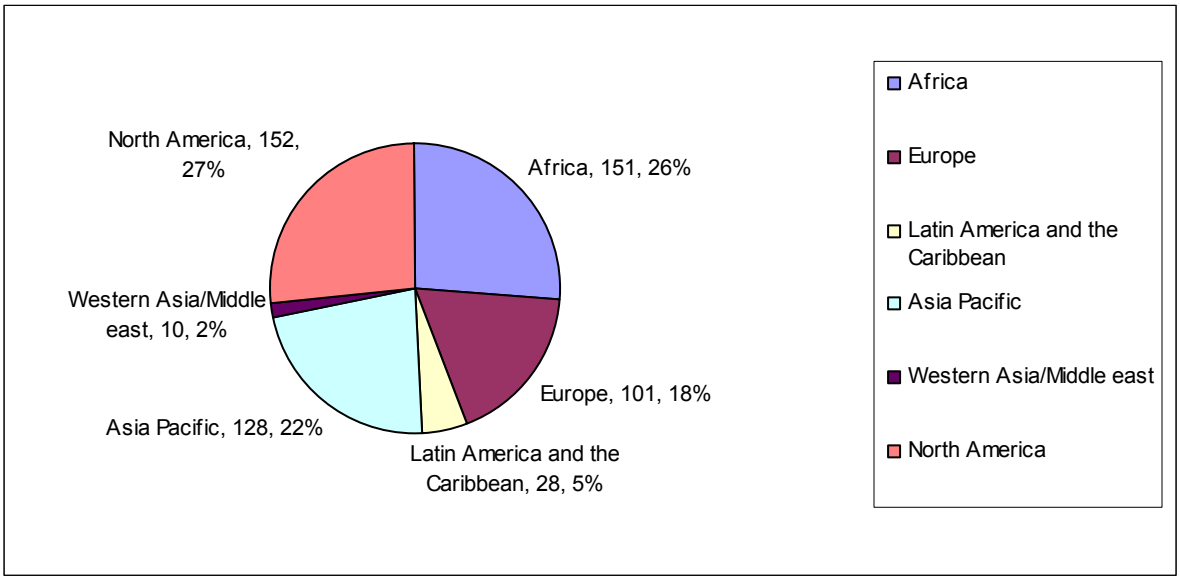
Participants, by sex (total number and percentage)



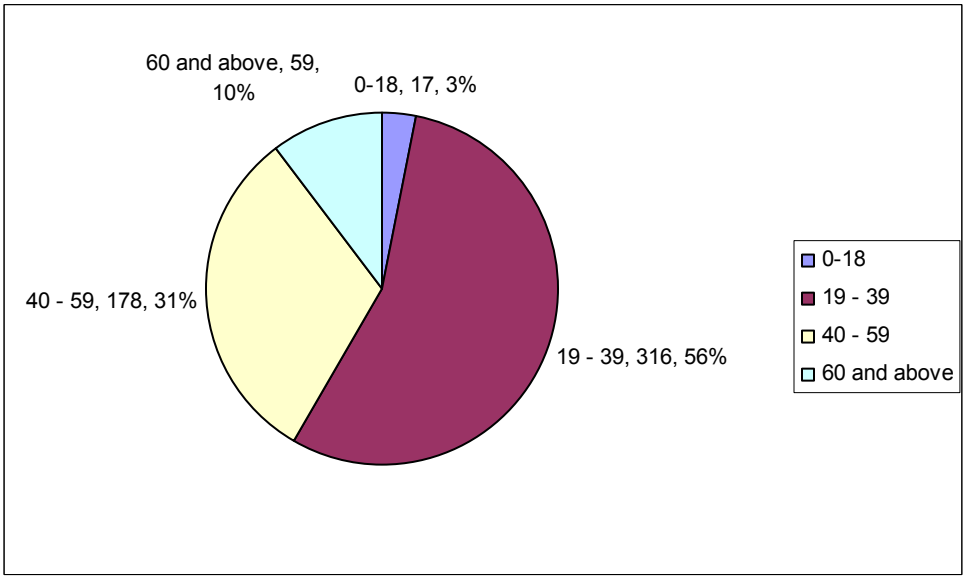
Participants, by affiliation

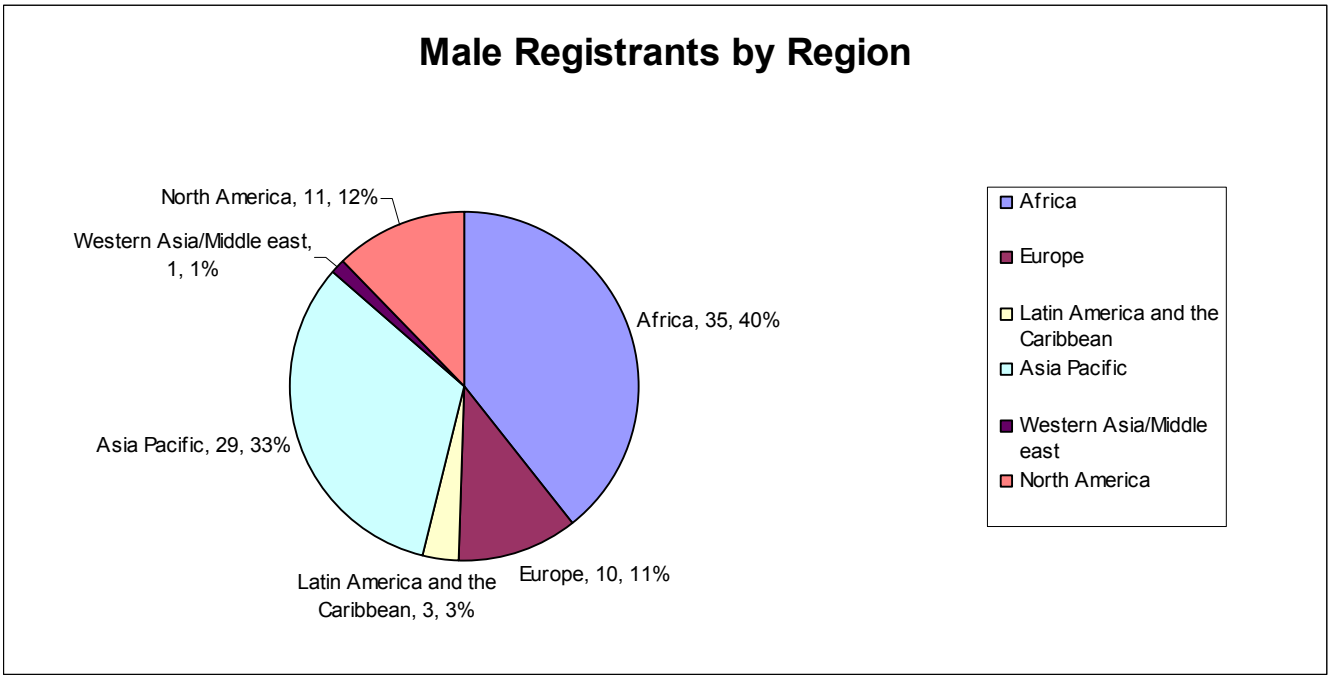


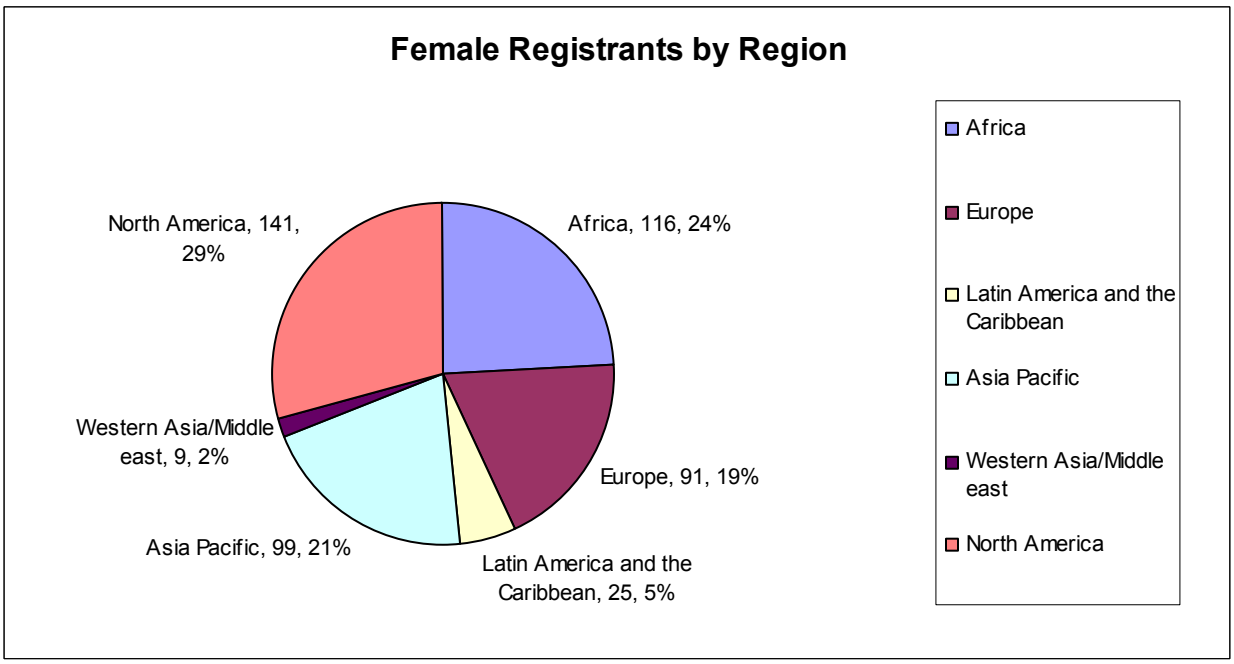
Participants, by region



Participants, by age




Male Registrants by Region
North America, 11, 12%
Western Asia/Middle east, 1, 1%
Africa, 35, 40%
Asia Pacific, 29, 33%
Latin America and the Caribbean, 3, 3%
Europe, 10, 11%
Africa
Europe
Latin America and the Caribbean
Asia Pacific
Western Asia/Middle east
North America


Female Registrants by Region
North America, 141, 29%
Africa, 116, 24%
Western Asia/Middle east, 9, 2%
Europe, 91, 19%
Asia Pacific, 99, 21%
Latin America and the Caribbean, 25, 5%
Africa
Europe
Latin America and the Caribbean
Asia Pacific
Western Asia/Middle east
North America

Annex 2: Numbers of participants in online discussion by country

Country	Total
Afghanistan	1
Albania	1
Angola	1
Argentina	4
Australia	18
Austria	2
Azerbaijan	1
Bangladesh	2
Barbados	1
Belarus	1
Belgium	3
Benin	1
Bolivia	1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2
Botswana	1
Brazil	1
Bulgaria	1
Burkina Faso	1
Burundi	4
Cameroon	10
Canada	16
Chad	1
Chile	2
China	3
Colombia	1
Congo, DR	6
Costa Rica	1
Cote d'Ivoire	1
Czech Republic	1
Denmark	4
Dominican Republic	1
Ecuador	1
Egypt	5
Eritrea	1
Ethiopia	1
France	4
Gambia	2
Georgia	1
Germany	6
Ghana	5
Guinea	3
Hungary	1
Iceland	1
India	40
Indonesia	5
Iran	2
Iraq	2
Ireland	2
Israel	1
Italy	3
Jamaica	1
Japan	1
Kazakhstan	1
Kenya	15
Korea	2
Kyrgyzstan	1
Liberia	5
Lithuania	2
Macedonia	1
Malawi	2
Malaysia	3
Mali	3
Mauritius	1
Mexico	2
Nepal	10
Netherlands Antilles	2
New Zealand	7
Nicaragua	1
Nigeria	25
Pakistan	19
Peru	2
Philippines	1
Poland	2
Romania	2
Rwanda	7
Samoa	1
Senegal	9
Singapore	1
Somalia	1
South Africa	8
Spain	4
St. Vincent & Grenadines	1
Sudan	6
Suriname	2
Sweden	3
Switzerland	8
Syria	2
Tajikistan	1
Tanzania	3
Thailand	4
The Netherlands	3
Togo	2
Turkey	12
U.S.A.	6
Uganda	11
United Arab Emirates	1
United Kingdom	20
United States of America	131
Uruguay	5
Uzbekistan	2
Venezuela	1
Vietnam	3
Yugoslavia	5
Zambia	3
Zimbabwe	1
(blank)	
Grand Total	558

Annex 3: List of recommended links

The following list of links is compiled from links mentioned in the online discussion and/or sent by discussion participants to the discussion moderator by email.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm

Convention on the Rights of the Child

http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm

Melchiorre, Angela: At what age? …are school-children employed, married and taken to court?
http://www.right-to-education.org/content/age/age_new.pdf

Gender and Development Network of Cambodia
http://www.online.com.kh/~gad/Networks.htm

Empowerment for Children, Youth and Families
http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/library/pub4d.htm

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)
http://www.ungei.org/

Girl Child Quiz (on Voices of Youth)
http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/rights/711_girlchildquizen.php

BBC report on "breast ironing" in Cameroon
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5107360.stm

Girls' Education Monitoring System
http://www.educategirls.com/

The Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations Girls Education Initiative - A Guidance Note to UN Country Teams
http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/know_sharing/flagship_initiatives/ungei_guidance.pdf

UNESCO Multimedia gender training kit
http://www.ignou.ac.in/igun_gentr/index.asp

Gender for journalists – Online training toolkit
http://www.cpu.org.uk/cpu-toolkits/gender_reporting/index.html

Female Foeticide in India
http://www.indiafemalefoeticide.org.

Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages
http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/convention.htm

Ritual abuse torture – Jeanne Sarson and Linda MacDonald
http://www.ritualabusetorture.org/

The Gender and Development Center (GAD/C) and Cambodian Men's Network (CMN)
http://www.online.com.kh/~gad/Networks.htm

Woman Stats database
www.womanstats.org