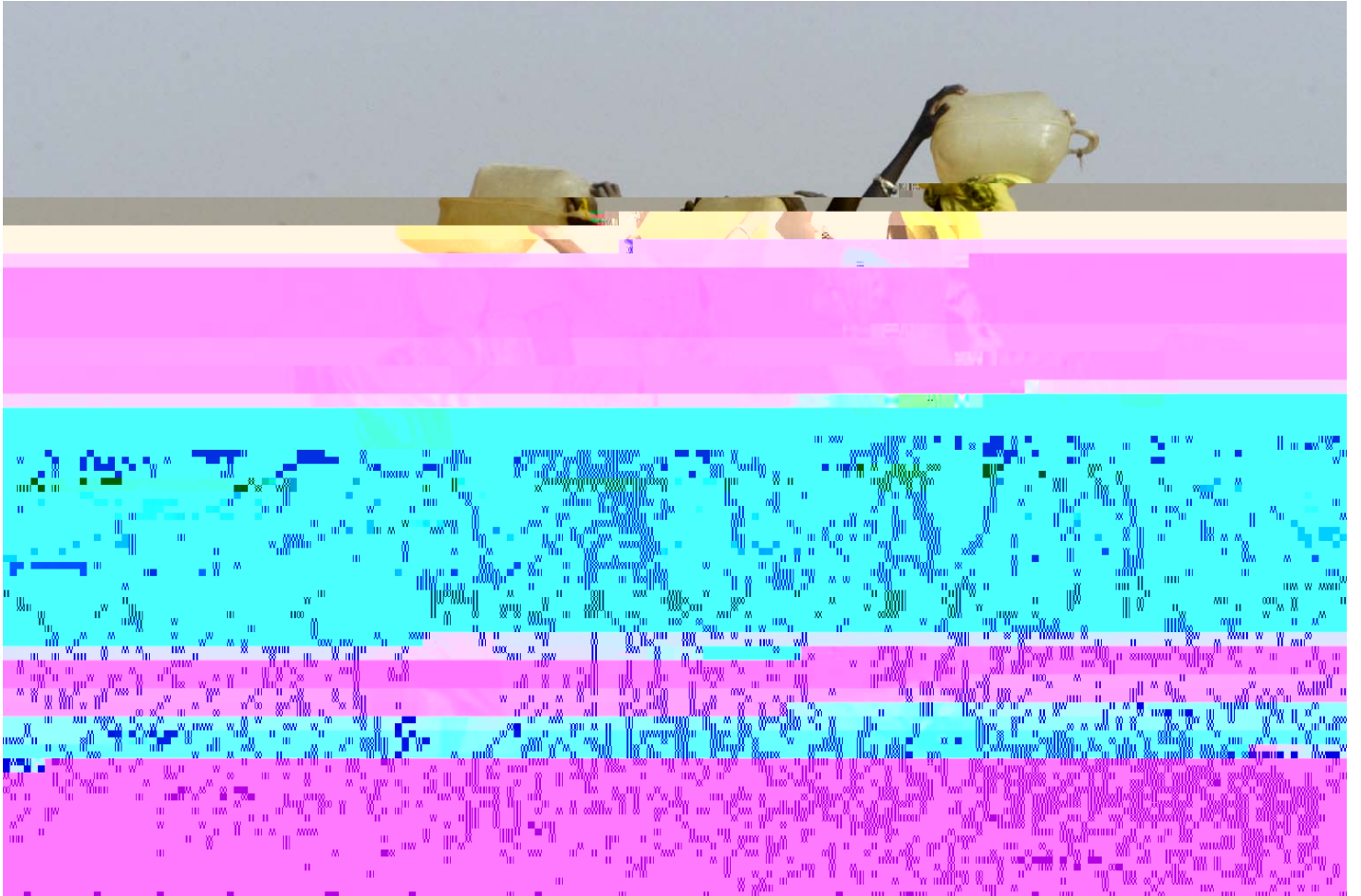


**United Nations
Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
in collaboration with UNICEF**



The following sections present young people's ideas on these issues, primarily the first three. In some cases, their thoughts and views may go beyond the confines of these terms but are included because their relevance to the broader discussion of the task at hand.

Discrimination

Young people see that girls are treated differently, and that this discrimination on the basis of gender restricts girls' access to education, health and other services.

Some, like one 22-year-old female youth from India, see discrimination being directly tied to violence: *"[P]ersistent gender discrimination and inequality towards a girl child [are] manifested in the form of heinous practices like female infanticide and feticide, genital mutilation, domestic abuse, incest, sexual exploitation, non-accessibility of primary education and child labor. . ."*

Others see discrimination against girls in the day-to-day choices made by families. As one 20-year-old female youth from the Republic of Korea describes, *"[i]n a number of countries, girls are given less food than boy. Girls may also be given poorer quality food than their brothers. And because girls may receive less medical care than boys, girl's undernutrition may go undetected, leading to serious health problems..."*

As a 15-year-old Turkish girl points out, such choices are made by adults who do not fully appreciate girls' potential: *"I never ever understand why boys and girls are not equal to each other. In rural areas elders think that girls are born to give birth and to marry and for cleaning the house. Girls who live in rural areas ... are not sent to schools. Their parents are not aware of the changing world yet."*

Girls consider that they undertake on a large share of domestic work compared to their brothers. A 10-year-old girl from Ethiopia who cares for her HIV-positive mother says, *"I am the one who does all the housework. . .I do the cooking and take care of the household items. [My brother] just eats and goes outside to play."*

Girls and boys in Latin America pointed out that the prevalent 'macho' cult]TJ18.39 n2 Tw()efa14.

A girl's work

“My initiation into household chores started swiftly and firmly. With my tiny hands I learned to wring water out of the baby's clothes. My soft back learned to bend and clean the yard. I learned to boil water for tea on a wooden stove in the kitchen. While I learned all this, my brother left me each day for their play. They were never asked to stay at home by my grannies. Come to think of it, the grannies weren't happy when my brother came back home early.

During my grannies' three-month visit, I never went out to hunt birds or play monkeys with my brother. After they left the pattern was established. I was now the sister with home responsibilities, which I was expected to carry out without questioning. I would never play with my brothers again.”

- Mercy Shuma-Iwisi, aged 6, Tanzania, in “Surprises from Granny”, UNICEF, 2001.

One of the avenues for eliminating discrimination that young people, especially girls, strongly advocate is education for girls. A quotation from a 21-year-old female youth from Nigeria eloquently encapsulates their view: *“Educate the girl child today and liberate them from the bondage of discrimination in our societies. Education is freedom.”*

Young people have pointed to the need for governments to spend more on education. Yet as one 21-year-old female Indian youth points out, efforts need to target girls specifically: *“There are lots of children working in unorganized industry sectors to earn only to eat a day's meal. They do not know how to read and write. Providing midday meals, employment and free education to children is being discussed at a variety of levels. But for whom? For those boys who work as chaiwallas along roadsides, or those who work in the carpet industry? [And what about the] girls who work as maids in Indian households?”*

Protection

Young people see that girls need to be better protected from the violence they face in schools as well as the sexual, physical and emotional abuse in their homes and communities. The lack of safety and support in communities, within families and by governments for girls suffering violations of their rights to protection increases their vulnerability to violence.

A 16-year-old girl from India describes how violence against girls has become the norm: *“[v]iolence against children, especially girls, has crossed all limits. Every day in almost every part of India a girl is raped in public transport, or one is molested at malls & market places in front of people who remain silent and do nothing. Even the police constables abuse and insult the victims and their families.*

People feel that a girl is meant to be used - either as a doormat, a maid, a birth-giving machine or as a source of physical pleasure. Something concrete seriously needs to be done to change the current scenario because now a girl does not feel safe even in her own house, let alone the streets.”

As one girl's experience shows from Sri Lanka, some girls have taken a stand themselves against child marriage: *"Every girl child in some corner cries in silence because of marriage in early ages. You may not be among those who cry for freedom, those who wish to study further but are forced to marry an old ugly man for money. But I have seen and faced forced marriage, and I understand how horrible it is. I escaped a forced marriage, because I always went against my parents and society. Sometimes you just need to stand on your own."*

In terms of other ways girls are harmed by traditional practices, one 19-year-old boy in Ethiopia feels that boys and girls have to work together to stop female genital cutting: *"in my country female circumcision is completely terrible. Especially where women [are] sewing the vagina. [Girls] suffer a lot. During menstruation period the pain is sorrowful. We have to fight together this shameful act."*

Moreover, violence against girls is perpetuated not only when they lack protection but also when girls do not speak out because they feel ashamed or are afraid of accusing their violators. The lack of safe spaces and opportunities to share their experiences makes girls even more vulnerable to suffering acts of violence and the harmful traumas that result as one girl's story (see Panel opposite).

Protecting girls is further complicated by poverty, which many young people view as a contributing factor to violence against children. As a 21-year-old Ghanaian girl says, *"Parents send their girls to have sex with older men for a fee...because they don't have money."*

A 17-year-old girl from Sierra Leone shares her own experience as a poor girl with few opportunities, *"I [went] out to the street to be a prostitute to get money... just to get money to eat and to give to my parents."*

Vulnerable situations

Girls in especially vulnerable situations such those living on the streets, orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS or exposed to conflict and war need special protection from violence and discrimination. Young people see this as an important priority. As one 19-year-old girl from the United Arab Emirates describes, *"[a]bandoned and destitute...children devoid of all the basic necessities in life are taken advantage of... they are exploited at the hands of people in numerous ways leaving them scared, helpless and vulnerable. The most heinous facet of child trafficking is forcing children into prostitution and using them as pornographic material..."*

A 20-year-old female youth from Zimbabwe feels outrage at the spread of HIV among girls, whose risk increases with poverty: *“The issue of HIV and AIDS is of great concern in most third world countries like Zimbabwe; almost everyone including the president has been affected by the pandemic . . .What worries me most is that the worst affected are young girls... Older men take advantage of their weak economic position. Older men should leave younger girls alone!! They are not virus dumps!! If they really want to help, they can pay school fees, buy clothing, buy food, etc., without asking for any sexual favors in return!”*

So what do young people see as a way to counter girls’ vulnerability to the spread of HIV/AIDS? Information and education about HIV directed at adolescent girls is cited by one 21-year-old female youth from India: *“Adolescent girls from poor families should be provided with adequate information regarding nutrition, sex and reproductive health, and most importantly, sexually transmitted diseases. The number of women with alarmingly high percentages of AIDS around the globe is an indicator of the lack of this awareness.”*

In addition to education and information about prevention, girls also need access to services specifically geared towards them so they can receive counselling and testing. They also need to develop skills to negotia

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families and communities. Furthermore, even when not directly involved in fighting forces, conflict situations also contribute to girls' vulnerability by thrusting them into roles such as primary caregivers to younger siblings, and head

and addressing the stigma associated with many violations of their rights to protection from violence, abuse and exploitation...

Adults need to see that, with support and opportunities, children and young people have the capacities to be not only recipients but also partners in the process of ending discrimination and violence against girls and women. For one 13-year-old girl from Bangladesh, her experience as a peer educator has given her the power to promote change in her community and gain respect:

References

UNICEF. 2001. *Gender Tales from Africa: Voices of Children and Women against Discrimination*. UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office: Nairobi, Kenya.

UNICEF. 2005.

Footnotes

¹ See Hart, Jason. 2004. Children's Participation in Humanitarian Action: learning from zones of armed conflict. Document prepared for the Canadian International Development Agency (SIDA).

² Voices of Youth is started in 1995 as an online discussion board. It expanded to become a multi-lingual web-based forum for young people to talk to one another about development issues that currently reaches over 17,000 young people in more than 180 countries. Over 60 percent of participants are from developing countries, 56 percent are female and 40 percent are adolescents aged 10-19.

³ *Voices of Youth* No. 14, February, 2005 "Poll on violence". Available at www.unicef.org/voy

⁴ Save the Children UK. 2004. Reaching the Girls: Study on Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Prepared Beth Verhey (Consultant) for Save the Children UK and the NGO Group: CARE, IFESH and IRC (November).