

# Stemming girls' chronic poverty

Catalysing development change  
by building just social institutions



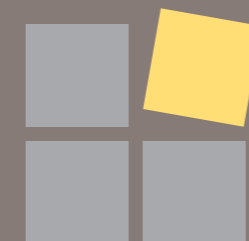
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by building just social institutions**

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with

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**Chronic Poverty  
Research Centre**

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We would like to thank five expert peer reviewers for their very helpful feedback and inputs: Kate Bird, Overseas Development Institute Research Associate; Professor Sylvia Chant, Professor of Geography and Environment from the London School of Economics; Jennifer Grant, Global Child Rights Advisor and Advocate from Save the Children UK; Ravi Karakara, Child and Adolescent Participation Specialist from the United Nations Children’s Fund New York; and Eliana Villar, an independent gender expert from Peru. We also wish to acknowledge indispensable editorial support from Roo Griffiths; valuable design and layout support from Portia Reyes; and project management support from Julia Brunt and David Walker.

This document is an output from the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) which is funded by UKaid from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of DFID. The CPRC gratefully acknowledges DFID’s support.

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# Acronyms and abbreviations

AGI	Adolescent Girls’ Initiative	FGC	Female Genital Cutting
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome	FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
ARI	Acute Respiratory Infection	FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee	FSP	Female Stipend Programme (Bangladesh)
CAR	Centre for Advocacy Research (India)	GAVI	Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women	GCEDAW	Gambia Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CEDPA	Centre for Development and Population Activities (US)	GDI	Gender-Related Development Index
CGD	Center for Global Development (US)	GDP	Gross Domestic Product
CHIP	Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre (UK)	GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
CIDA	Canadian International Development Association	GEM	Girls’ Education Movement
CLADEM	Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Women	GFEP	Global Financial Education Program
CPG	Children Participating in Governance (South Africa)	GNP	Gross National Product
CPRC	Chronic Poverty Research Centre	GPA	Grade Point Average
CRENoS	Centre for North South Economic Research (Italy)	HAI	HelpAge International
DAW	Division for the Advancement of Women	HDI	Human Development Index
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration	HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN)	IAC	Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)	IANWGE	Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (UN)
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey	IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	ICC	International Criminal Court
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education	ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services (India)
EFA	Education For All	ICRW	International Center for Research on Women (US)
ELA	Employment and Livelihood for Adolescents (Bangladesh)	IDA	International Development Association
EPAG	Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls & Young Women (Liberia)	IDASA	Institute for Democracy in South Africa
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization	IDRC	International Development Research Centre (Canada)
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists	IDS	Institute of Development Studies (UK)
		IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs (UK)
		IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
		IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems (US)

IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute	RUF	Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone)
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development (UK)	SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index
		SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (Ethiopia)
IIPS	International Institute of Population Sciences (India)	STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
IIPS	Paris Institute of Political Studies	TRY	Tap and Reposition Youth (Kenya)
ILO	International Labour Organization	UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
IMAGE	Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity (South Africa)	UCW	Understanding Children’s Work
INEGI	National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Mexico)	UK	United Kingdom
		UN	United Nations
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation	UNAIDS	United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/ AIDS
IOM	Institute of Medicine (South Africa)	UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
INMUJERES	National Institute of Women (Mexico)	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
INSTRAW	International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women	UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
IPC	International Poverty Centre (Brazil)	UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
IRC	International Rescue Committee (US)	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ISDS	Institute of Social Development Studies (Vietnam)	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks	UNGEI	United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
LISGIS	Liberia Institute of Statistics & Geo-Information Services	UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation (US)	UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
MDG	Millennium Development Goal	UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey	US	United States
NAPA	National Adaptation Programme of Action	USA	United States of America
NBER	National Bureau of Economic Research (US)	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation	VAG	Violence Against Girls
NIPORT	National Institute of Population Research and Training (Bangladesh)	VAW	Violence Against Women
NRC	National Research Council (South Africa)	VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas (UK)
ODI	Overseas Development Institute (UK)	WEDO	Women’s Environment & Development Organisation (US)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	WFP	World Food Programme
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights	WHO	World Health Organization
OSAGI	Office of the Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues (UN)	WIDER	World Institute for Development Economic Research
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Programme (Ethiopia)	WSSCC	Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council
REDE HOPEM	Men for Change Network (Mozambique)		

# Stemming girls' chronic poverty

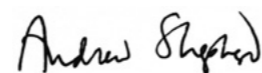
Catalysing development change by building just social institutions

On the basis of consultation among partners and other stakeholders, and following the successful launch of the Second Chronic Poverty Report in 2008, the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) has decided to work on four major issues in its policy analysis work. These are gender, social protection, economic growth in landlocked countries and fragile or chronically deprived states. Gender is the first of these to report its work.

Addressing gender inequalities is often among the more intractable policy and political issues of our time, not least in countries where many women and girls are absolutely poor. However, addressing gender inequalities is a critical aspect of the struggle against chronic poverty. Teenage girls and young women are a key group, whose experience and progress, or lack of it, at this point in their lives not only shapes their own adulthood but also the life chances of their children.

Beyond 2015, the chronically poor must certainly be better included in the world's efforts to eradicate poverty. To do this, it is important to learn the lessons from practice on what works in the more difficult policy areas that must be tackled during the coming period. The richness of this report lies in the many examples of programmes and policies that address the institutional barriers faced by teenage girls and young women in the realisation of their potential.

It will be different combinations of such approaches that will make a difference in the widely varied contexts where girls and women face discrimination and disadvantage, and that will ultimately play a role in changing social norms and institutions.



**Andrew Shepherd**

*Director, CPRC*

## Executive Summary

### Girls, chronic poverty and social institutions

Childhood, adolescence and early adulthood remain for many girls and young women a period of deprivation, danger and vulnerability, resulting in a significant lack of agency and critical development deficits. In many cases, overlapping and intersecting experiences of deprivation, foregone human development opportunities and abuse or exploitation serve to perpetuate and intensify poverty for girls and women over the life-course. Girls' vulnerabilities in relation to poverty dynamics are different to those of boys and to those of adult women. This is in part because of their relative powerlessness and the particularities of their life stage. What happens at this critical time in their lives can reinforce their poverty status and that of their offspring, or influence their movement into or out of poverty.

Poverty research has historically focused on material manifestations of poverty (measured by income and basic human development indicators such as educational enrolment and nutritional status). However, the role that social risks and vulnerabilities play in perpetuating chronic poverty and propelling people into poverty has gained recognition over the past decade. Accordingly, in this report we focus on social institutions – the collection of formal and informal laws, norms and practices that have an effect on human capabilities by either limiting or enabling individual and collective agency. These social institutions, we suggest, have far greater influence on developmental outcomes than is generally appreciated.

Social institutions are part of the wider culture that informs multiple aspects of our behaviour and our societies. They play a key role in determining girls' and young women's life opportunities and capabilities, by either limiting or enabling individual and collective agency. Social institutions are not inherently good or bad, but when they result in processes that lead to inequality, discrimination and exclusion, they generate a myriad of development deficits and physical and psychological trauma. These barriers to human development

**Investing in girls is one of the smartest moves a country can make: today's girls will be half of tomorrow's adults, but investing in them offers returns that will go to all of humanity.**

can lead to and perpetuate chronic poverty and vulnerability over the course of childhood and adulthood, and potentially inter-generationally.

In this report, we identify five critical social institutions, broadening and modifying the Social Institutions and Gender Index of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation

and Development (OECD). Within this set of institutions, we pay particular attention to how gender intertwines with other forces of exclusion (class, caste, ethnicity, urban/rural locality, disability, etc). We also highlight the importance of local context, which matters both in the analysis of constraints and in the identification of solutions.

Our key modifications to the SIGI are as follows: first, we extend the SIGI range to cover girls rather than just women. Second, we consider a broader definition of well-being beyond the economic, one which captures a range of capabilities and outcomes as well as the complexities of supporting girls and women to both avoid and exit chronic poverty. Third, we give our own labels to the institutions, and also modify some of the component variables, in order to better capture the range of norms and practices that underpin them. Below is a brief overview of each of the characteristics of the five institutions we cover.

### Discriminatory family codes

Family code is taken to mean formal and informal laws, norms and practices that influence the capabilities and related decision-making power of women and men, boys and girls in the household. Family codes include parental authority,

inheritance laws, marriage practices and family structure and resulting rights and responsibilities. In their negative form, these have particularly significant impacts by preventing girls from developing their capabilities and agency, leading to poverty.

In particular, discriminatory family codes can result in: early marriage; separation of girls from maternal presence, influence and authority; lack of decision-making influence by girls themselves; denial of vital material assets through ownership and inheritance; and, in some cases, physical harm. The ensuing negative development outcomes include: reduced capabilities, educational attainment, employment potential and job quality; increased fertility and maternal and infant mortality rates; increased ill-health and physical harm; and increased poverty and potential for increased incidence of life-course and intergenerational poverty.

### Son bias

Amartya Sen (1990) hypothesised that international distortions in sex ratios equated to as many as 100 million ‘missing women,’ (or the number of women who could have been expected had girls received equal health care, medicine and nutrition), explained by female foeticide and ‘gendercide’ – the systematic and often lethal neglect of and underinvestment in girls and women.

We conceptualise son bias more broadly, to refer to unequal investments in the care, nurture and resources allocated to sons and daughters within the household. This encompasses a spectrum of negative developmental outcomes, from mortality through to human capital development deficits, time poverty linked to labour roles and psychosocial ill-being. These general intra-household differentials between sons and daughters are widespread, and there is good evidence that they exist across regions. Son bias is not shaped by poverty alone, but there are important linkages between poverty, vulnerability and son bias over the life-course and in intergenerational terms.

### Limited resource rights and entitlements

Under this social institution, we focus on girls’ and young women’s access to and control over land, microfinance, property and natural resources, in order to examine the causes and consequences of girls’ lack of entitlements, rights and access to resources.

Discriminatory inheritance systems and particular practices of bride wealth and dowry, as well as legislation which defines and limits married women’s property rights, have historically disadvantaged women. Family and community norms may contribute to this, particularly if they are founded on patriarchal value systems. Meanwhile, gender disparities in education, along with unequal access to and preparation

for productive employment opportunities, segmented labour forces, lower wages, poor access to financial services and tensions between reproductive and productive work impinge on young women’s ability to accumulate wealth and achieve economic empowerment.

### Physical insecurity

Physical insecurity is a harrowing reality for millions of girls, of all ages, ethnicities and religions. This institution encompasses laws, norms and practices which condone or fail to challenge gender-based violence in the household, school, workplace and community. Physical insecurity as a consequence of gender-based violence is also a particular risk in times of conflict and social upheaval.

Physical insecurity is manifested in condoned norms or unchallenged practices of domestic and school-based violence, sexual abuse, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and traditional practices of ‘honour’ killings and ‘femicide,’ among others. Violence against girls causes long-term and often irreversible physical and psychological harm. It deprives girls of their human capabilities as well as their agency – suppressing their voices, constraining their choices and denying them control over their physical integrity and future. It also increases girls’ risk of sliding into, and remaining trapped in, chronic poverty.

### Restricted civil liberties

This institution includes laws, norms and practices which result in restrictions vis-à-vis freedom of movement, freedom of association and participation in collective action.

Practices which limit girls’ ability to claim an independent identity through birth registration have knock-on effects with regard to other civil rights and liberties. Restrictions on mobility, linked to deeply rooted traditions and customs, can perpetuate gender disparities in access to social and economic resources and contribute to processes of disempowerment of women. In addition, girls’ and young women’s limited voice in family matters can lead to a particular gender-based experience of the poverty trap of limited citizenship in their own societies. This is characterised by limited opportunities to participate in associative groups, leisure activities, educational programmes and/or extra-curricular activities and both political and economic development processes

### Is social transformation possible?

Culture is constantly being shaped by human interaction, which means that transformative social change to enable equitable development and social justice is possible. Promising policy and programme approaches that are emerging globally

give evidence to this. However, girls and young women are currently weakly incorporated within international legal and human rights frameworks, and there is limited availability of gender- and age-disaggregated data, impeding social transformation efforts. Debates about chronic poverty also need to be enriched by more systematic attention to gender dynamics throughout the lifecycle, both within and outside the household, and in particular the role that discriminatory social institutions play in constraining girls’ life opportunities and the exercise of their full human agency.

This report underscores the importance of taking social institutions and culture seriously and making them more visible components of development debates to better tackle the poverty traps facing girls and young women – not only in childhood and early adulthood, but also potentially across their life-course and that of their children. Although it is widely accepted that gender is a social construct imbued with power relations, too often there is a disconnect with policy and programme development. In other words, if we want to promote progressive social change, we need to think carefully about how best to reform or reshape discriminatory social institutions which structure the realm of the possible for girls, their families and communities. Along with our strengthened focus on girls and young women, we must also consider in more depth the specific poverty and vulnerability experiences of boys and young men, and the role they can play in reshaping and reforming gender discriminatory social institutions.

There is compelling evidence that progressive social change is possible, although much more needs to be done to take promising initiatives to scale, as well as to effectively monitor, evaluate and learn from such experiences cross-nationally. Because of the context specificity of social institutions, different models of change will be essential in different places and at different times. Nonetheless the report identifies a number of crosscutting findings about the linkages between gendered social institutions and girls’ and young women’s experiences of chronic poverty. These inform the report’s recommendations for action, which are inspired by some of the effective policy, programming and advocacy approaches discussed in the individual chapters.

The recent focus in development circles on girls and young women is clearly very positive. It does, however, present a number of analytical and programming challenges.

- Gender- and age-disaggregated data on girls’ poverty experiences over time in developing country contexts are very limited, constraining well-tailored policy and programme interventions.
- Within international legal and human rights frameworks, female youth in particular are not well covered (either in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) or in the Convention

on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW)), limiting the specific measures that need to be developed or strengthened to protect them from the poverty traps besetting them at this stage of the life-course.

- Definitions and understandings of childhood, adolescence and youth vary considerably according to cultural context, with important implications for development interventions.
- It is also important to consider in more depth the specific poverty and vulnerability experiences of boys and young men, and in particular the role that they can play in reshaping gender discriminatory social institutions.

Given these complexities, a multipronged, long-term commitment is essential, involving strategic partnerships with state and non-state actors alike. Approaches that overlook the multi-dimensionality of gendered and generational experiences of chronic poverty and vulnerability are more likely to flounder and to fail to support girls and young women in new pathways to empowerment. Moreover, families and wider communities are likely to miss out on the potential multiplier effects of investing in girls and achieving development goals more broadly.

To more effectively tackle chronic poverty and promote progressive social change, six key recommendations for action are highlighted. More details on these can be found within the main report.

1. Develop and enforce context-sensitive legal provisions to eliminate gender discrimination in the family, school, workplace and community
2. Support measures to promote children’s and especially girls’ right to be heard and to participate in decisions in areas of importance to them.
3. Invest in the design and implementation of child- and gender-sensitive social protection.
4. Strengthen services for girls who are hard to reach, because of both spatial disadvantage as well as age- and gender-specific socio-cultural barriers.
5. Support measures to strengthen girls’ and young women’s individual and collective ownership of, access to and use of resources.
6. Strengthen efforts to promote girls’ and women’s physical integrity and control over their bodies, especially in conflict and post-conflict settings.

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Rwanda, Kigeyo. A Grade 4 student writes on the blackboard during an English class in the primary school in the village of Kigeyo in Western province.

# Introduction

## Stemming girls’ chronic poverty

As highlighted by the recent commitment to creating a higher-profile and better-resourced United Nations (UN) agency to tackle gender inequality,<sup>1</sup> there is growing recognition among international development actors that promoting gender equality and empowerment across the lifecycle makes both economic and development sense. This is captured by World Bank President Robert Zoellick’s recent statement that: ‘Investing in adolescent girls is precisely the catalyst poor countries need to break intergenerational poverty and to create a better distribution of income. Investing in them is not only fair, it is a smart economic move’.<sup>2</sup> Debates about gender have historically focused largely on unequal relations between men and women, as underscored by the focus of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, recently – in part because of the child-related focus of a number of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the 2007 World Development Report on Youth – there has been growing attention to the need to include girls (and boys) more prominently (e.g. Levine *et al.*, 2009; World Bank, 2006).<sup>3</sup> How to do this effectively, however, remains an under-researched subject, especially in debates around chronic poverty – i.e. the experience of severe and multidimensional poverty for an extended period of time<sup>4</sup>. Although the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09 spotlighted the often overlooked social and non-income dimensions of poverty traps, including social discrimination and limited citizenship (CPRC, 2008), in general scholarship on chronic poverty has paid relatively limited attention to gender dynamics (see further discussion below).

This report seeks to address this gap by placing girls and young women centre stage and highlighting ways in which context-specific social institutions inform and determine their life opportunities and agency. We recognise that ‘childhood,’ ‘adolescence,’ ‘youth’ and ‘adulthood’ are to a significant extent socially constructed life-course junctures and, as a result, age ranges for each stage tend to vary considerably across cultures.

**‘Investing in adolescent girls is precisely the catalyst poor countries need to break intergenerational poverty and to create a better distribution of income.’**

- World Bank/ Zoellic (2008)

For the sake of simplicity, however, we draw on internationally accepted definitions of childhood as extending from 0 to 18 years (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); adolescence from 10 to 19; and youth from 15 to 24 (UNFPA, 2007). Our focus on girls and young women does not deny the importance

of addressing poverty more broadly and for all population groups across the lifecycle. Rather, we seek to highlight girls’ particular vulnerabilities in relation to poverty dynamics, vulnerabilities which are different to those of boys and to those of adult women. This is in part because of their relative powerlessness and the particularities of their life stage. The report discusses how what happens at this critical time in their lives – especially the role of social institutions in shaping their life stage opportunities – can reinforce their poverty status and that of their offspring or influence their movement into or out of poverty.

In this introductory section, we begin by setting the stage for the report with a brief overview of the gendered patterning of poverty and vulnerability, and the dividends accruing to individuals, households and society if efforts are made to tackle gender injustice from the beginning of the lifecycle. We then turn to the central focus of the report – the importance of taking culture and social norms and practices seriously in an effort not only to better understand girls’ experiences of chronic poverty but also to identify possible entry points for intervention. This dual emphasis is core to the report: we want to draw the reader’s attention to the particular poverty experiences of girls but also to spotlight a range of promising policies, programmes and practices that

are emerging globally in an effort to reform and reshape discriminatory social institutions that hinder the realisation of girls’ full human capabilities and risk trapping them in chronic poverty. As explained in more detail below, we take the social institutions identified in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) as the organising framework for the report. However, we pay particular attention to the ways in which gender intertwines with other forces of exclusion (class, caste, ethnicity, urban/rural locality, disability, etc) and the importance of context, which matters both in the analysis of constraints and in the identification of solutions.

Chronic poverty and vulnerability using a gender and generational lens

Childhood, adolescence and early adulthood are critical in determining life-course potential. Physical and neurological development and social, educational and work skills attainment are all decisive development and learning acquisitions. Yet this key period remains for many girls and young women one of deprivation, danger and vulnerability, resulting in a significant lack of agency and critical development deficits, with often life-course consequences (see Box 1). More than 100 million girls are expected to marry between 2005 and 2015,<sup>5</sup> bringing the known dangers of early pregnancy. Girls under 20 giving birth face double the risk of dying in childbirth compared with women over 20, and girls under age 15 are five times as likely to die as those in their 20s.<sup>6</sup> This leads to 60,000 to 70,000 girls aged 15 to 19 dying from complications of pregnancy and childbirth every year (WHO, 2008d, in Temin *et al.*, 2010).

Box 1: Multidimensional vulnerabilities faced by adolescent girls living in poverty

‘If girls don’t pass Grade 10, they generally don’t retake the exam but instead sit at home and support the family and wait to get married. However, if guys don’t succeed in education, they work in groups in trading activities. They have a good life – they get a job or can continue their education. Even if they start as daily labourers they can then earn enough money to trade in charcoal/wood. But girls, even if they earn 200-300 birr, this is usually absorbed by the family. They can’t go off and be independent like guys [...] In my case I was lucky – I was underage when I was pressured to get married – but my brother-in-law gave me a loan to start my own business so I could refuse. He told me that the best way to avoid marriage was to have a shop which would give me status and then I could get married in the town. Men don’t give you enough respect if your economic situation is weak’ (adolescent girl, Ethiopia, 2009, in Jones *et al.*, 2010).

‘I was taken out of school in fourth grade, when I was 17 or 18 [...] My uncles told my parents it was not worthwhile to let girls study [...] I cried and my parents yelled at me: “you only want to study for men.” Then I started shepherding every day’ (single mother, 25, Peru, in Vargas, 2010).

‘Husbands are the ones who take care of great matters [such as loans], so I can’t say much [...] He didn’t tell me anything about the loan. He thinks a wife knows nothing. I didn’t talk to him about the [loan repayment] deadline or the interest because it would make my husband’s family worry too, and I was afraid it would upset him. He says I don’t know anything so I couldn’t ask. I was too afraid to ask him’ (married woman, 19, Viet Nam, 2009, in Jones and Tran, 2010).

‘It is difficult for girls to move freely outside the village because they may face rape. For instance, if I do not come back home early, there are a lot of problems that I may face since I am alone. That is why whenever I go to the market I always return home early (before 6pm)’ (female adolescent, Ethiopia, 2009, in Jones *et al.*, 2010).

Meanwhile, it is estimated that more than 130 million girls and women alive today have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) or cutting (FGC) (hereafter referred to as FGM/C), mainly in Africa and some Middle Eastern countries, and 2 million girls a year are at risk of mutilation (UN General Assembly, 2006). Moreover, young women are particularly vulnerable to coerced sex and are increasingly being infected with HIV and AIDS. Over half of new HIV infections worldwide are occurring among young people between the ages of 15 and 24, and more than 60 percent of HIV-positive youth in this age bracket are female<sup>7</sup> (UNIFEM, 2010). Two-thirds of the 137 million illiterate young people in the world are women (UNFPA, 2005), and in 2007 girls accounted for 54 percent of the world’s out-of-school population (UN, 2009). Over 100 million girls between 5 and 17 years old are involved in child labour all over the world, and the majority are engaged in hazardous work, including domestic service (ILO, 2009). As a result of the gendered division of labour, time poverty is a central feature of the lives of many girls and young women. In Mexico, for instance, evidence shows that girls spend 175 percent more time on household tasks than boys (Brunnich *et al.*, 2005). In a recent study of 35 countries, between 10 and 52 percent of women were found to have experienced physical violence at some point in their lives in all countries, of these, between 10 and 30 percent reported sexual violence (WHO, 2005).

In many cases, these overlapping and intersecting experiences of deprivation, foregone human development opportunities and abuse or exploitation serve to perpetuate and intensify poverty of girls and women over the life-course,

as the life history of a woman in her 50s in rural Ethiopia illustrates (Box 2).

Of note, however, is the relatively limited attention that has been paid to gender dynamics in scholarship on chronic poverty, especially vis-à-vis girls. Much of the research that does consider gender tends to treat it (and often just sex) as one variable among many that increase vulnerability and exclusion (e.g. Bhide and Mehta, 2008; Bhutta and Sharma, 2006; Lawson *et al.*, 2003; McKay, 2009; Mosley, 2005; Osmani, 2007; Silver, 2007).<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, there is frequent mention of the particular vulnerabilities faced by female-headed households and widows,<sup>9</sup> insecure asset and inheritance rights for women, the risk of chronically poor women transferring their poverty status in intergenerational terms,<sup>10</sup> socio-cultural expectations around marriage and dowry<sup>11</sup> and mobility restrictions and migration.<sup>12</sup> There is, however, little sustained treatment of gender as a specific site of disadvantage and social exclusion.<sup>13</sup> Important exceptions include work by Baulch and Quisumbing (2009), Cooper (2008; 2010), Quisumbing (2006; 2007; 2008) and Tudawe (2001) on assets and inheritance;<sup>14</sup> by Slater (2008) on the linkages between HIV/AIDS, asset depletion and increased care burdens<sup>15</sup> for women; by Hickey (2007;

2009) on the gendered and gendering nature of citizenship;<sup>16</sup> by the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC, 2008) on the importance of women’s movements and collective action; by Deshingkar (2009), Doane (2007) and Shah and Mehta (2008) on the importance of improving working conditions for women;<sup>17</sup> and by Moore *et al.* (2008) on linkages between gender and conflict.<sup>18</sup>

In terms of specific research on girls’ and adolescents’ experiences of chronic poverty, the knowledge base is thinner still. There is, however, a fledgling body of work that looks at linkages between poverty dynamics and education, HIV/AIDS and protection from exploitation and abuse. Rose and Dyer (2008) identify girls’ education as widely understood to lead to reduced fertility and lower infant mortality and morbidity, although they argue that there is a need for more research into what produces the link between education and poverty reduction. Hossain (2008) discusses gender differentials in education in Bangladesh, and demonstrates that, among the poorest, boys are most likely to be excluded from primary education and are subject to increasing social exclusion.

Quisumbing’s work (2007) considers girls in terms of differences in household allocation of resources and care

Box 2: Gender and chronic poverty across the life-course

‘When I was a young girl my father died. My aunt took me to the burial and left me there telling me that she would take me back when school opens. In the meantime I could not get by – my siblings and I faced a difficult life in the countryside. So I decided to move to the town where I met a man who asked me if I would live with him and get a proper education like his children. I agreed and went with him. But he made me his servant and exploited me heavily and refused to send me to school. So I had to stop my schooling and worked as a servant for nine years.

I have had three unsuccessful marriages [...] When I married my second husband I relied on the rental house we had for baking bread for sale. But my husband later moved to the nearby town and sent me a message telling me “you can go anywhere with the child, but leave all the property.” Then his father threw me out of the house I used for living and trading purposes. I sold all assets that I had and returned to my family’s area.

During the last five years my house burnt down and I lost many assets. My [third] husband’s brother gave us 1,600.00 birr to construct a house but my husband only built a small house. He is a drunken man and as a result he wasted some of the money. He said he would buy oxen with the remaining money but he has bought and sold oxen in the past and just wasted the money – I did not benefit from the proceeds.

I came to know my positive status of HIV/AIDS at the end of 2007. I think I was infected while I was providing care for my sister who had HIV/AIDS. Now my interaction with community members has decreased a bit because of their attitude towards my positive status [...] Because the safety net administrators know my HIV positive status they do not expect me to participate in the activities but some beneficiaries are not happy. I would like to participate if I was not sick [...] I also asked the kebele administrator why I wasn’t given an ox as some community members were through the safety net program. And he responded that you [implying someone who is HIV positive] do not get oxen.

My son suffers from a mental illness. I planned to take him to get holy water, but I cannot because I do not have enough money. My daughter also has an eye problem: in the classroom she does not see the blackboard properly.

Now, I try to sell wood, grass, and use other sources of income to feed and buy second-hand clothes for my children. Now my hope is only to see the success of my children. Mine is already gone! I advise my children to focus on their education to save them from the challenges associated with dropping out, which I face’ (married woman, Ethiopia, 2009).

Source: Jones *et al.* (2010)

between children, arguing that children may not all be shown the same level of concern and that levels of concern may vary over time. She identifies the perceived low return from investments in children as a ‘stumbling block,’ stressing that investments in boys may be considered a type of insurance for old age. Seeley (2008) draws on this framework to examine the impact of HIV/AIDS on children in Uganda, arguing that more attention needs to be paid to relationships beyond the parent–child relationship and what can reasonably be expected from investments in a child. Moore (2005) specifically considers youth poverty through the lens of intergenerational poverty. She argues that life-course events such as leaving school, starting work and bearing children play a central role in vulnerability to poverty, and that how these events are experienced is closely related to parental poverty and childhood deprivation. Young women are considered in terms of the impact of maternal nutrition and education on future children.

Finally, the vulnerability of girls to violence and sexual abuse is discussed by De Coninck and Drani (2009), who examine the vulnerabilities of Ugandan girls who have been married early and those who rely on transactional sex, and by Cramer (2008), who considers the vulnerability of girls to sex work in situations of conflict as a survival strategy to pay for school fees, food and shelter. Moore *et al.* (2008) also deal with sex work in conflict situations and the potential exclusion of women and girls from their communities as a result.

### Catalysing change by investing in girls and young women

Investing in girls is one of the smartest moves a country can make. Today’s girls will be half of tomorrow’s adults, but investing in them offers returns that will go to all of humanity. The second MDG calls for achieving universal primary education by 2015. On a global level, tremendous progress has been made towards this. Nearly 90 percent of the world’s children are enrolled in primary school (UN, 2010). However, this global trend hides alarming disparities, both economic and gendered. The children most likely to be out of school are those most likely to live in the poorest regions of the world – South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa; in these regions, girls have even more limited access to education than boys (Lloyd and Young, 2009). The poorest girls are 3.5 times more likely to be out of school than the wealthiest girls, and the ratio grows in comparison with boys, reaching 4:1 (UN, 2010). The laudable progress towards MDG 2 also fails to address the fact that gender differences in secondary education remain large (Tembon and Fort, 2008) and are even growing in the case of some sub-Saharan African countries (UN, 2008). This is particularly problematic given that public investments in

girls’ secondary education are both higher than investments in their primary education and higher than investments in boys’ secondary education (Levine *et al.*, 2009; Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2004).

Educating girls postpones marriage; reduces the risk of HIV/AIDS; increases family income; lowers eventual fertility; improves survival rates, health indicators and educational outcomes for future children; increases women’s power in the household and political arenas; and lowers rates of domestic violence (Grown, 2005; Lloyd and Young, 2009; Plan International, 2009; Tembon and Fort, 2008). These returns trickle down to far more than individual women and their families. Communities with educated, empowered women are healthier, have more educational options and are less poor (Levine *et al.*, 2009; Lloyd and Young, 2009; UNESCO, 2000; World Bank, 2006). For example, Benefo (2009) found in Ghana that the percentage of educated women in a community directly impacted fertility choices for the village; Kravdal (2004) found strong community-level effects of women’s education on child mortality in India. Furthermore, countries with educated, empowered women have stronger

economic growth and higher gross national product (GNP) (Dollar and Gatti, 1999; Patrinos, 2008; Plan International, 2008). Klasen and Lammana (2009) found that gender gaps in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa cost those regions up to 1.7 percent growth compared with

**More than 100 million girls will marry between 2005 and 2015, with girls under 20 facing double the risk of dying during childbirth compared with women over 20, and girls under age 15 five times as likely to die as those in their 20s.**

- Clark, 2004; [www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org); [www.wfp.org](http://www.wfp.org)

East Asia. The return on investment in girls offers a double dividend.

Girls who continue their education into the secondary years tend to delay both marriage and sexual initiation (Lloyd and Young, 2009; Mathur *et al.*, 2003; Morrison and Sabarwal, 2008). In one study, it was found that young women with ten years of education were likely to marry up to six years later than their peers without schooling (Martin, 1995). Women with a secondary education have also been found to be three times less likely to be HIV positive (De Walque, 2004). Girls who stay in school and delay marriage also have a lower lifetime fertility rate (Lloyd and Young, 2009; Morrison and Sabarwal, 2008). On average, each year of female schooling has been found to increase the use of contraceptives and lower fertility by 10 percent (UNICEF, 2006). Comparing women in



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Bangladesh, Hatibandha Upazila. 13-year-old Saira in front of her family’s maize field in Dawabari river bed area.

developing countries with more than seven years of education with those with less than three years, this translates into two or three fewer children per family (Plan International, 2009).

This lower fertility rate then cascades into multiple health advantages for women and their children. Delayed, less frequent pregnancy not only reduces maternal mortality, it also improves child survival rates (Lloyd and Young, 2009; Temin *et al.*, 2010). One large, cross-national study found that doubling the proportion of girls who completed secondary school (from 19 to 38 percent) would have cut infant mortality rates from 81 per 1,000 to 38 (Subbarao and Rainey, 1995). Women with education are twice as likely to immunise their children and far less likely to participate in FGM/C (Plan International, 2009). Their children are also less likely to be stunted, underweight or anaemic (Herz and Sperling, 2004; Rihani, 2006; UN Millennium Project, 2005; World Bank, 2006). Moreover, an estimated nearly 45 percent of the global decline in child malnutrition seen between 1970 and 1995 can be attributed to higher productivity directly related to female education (IFPRI, 1999).

Educating girls also has a myriad of non-health advantages for their future families. More education translates into higher rates of employment with commensurately higher wages (Dollar and Gatti, 1999; Lloyd and Young, 2009). Each extra year of education for a girl has been found to increase

her income by 10 to 20 percent, with the completion of secondary school returning up to 25 percent (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2004; Schultz, 2002). Since women reinvest 90 percent of their incomes back into the household, compared with men’s 30 to 40 percent, the families of educated women are less likely to be poor. Education increases women’s role in household decision making and their control over family assets (Agarwal, 1997; Lloyd and Young, 2009; Khandkar, 1998; Pitt and Khandkar, 1998). Women’s control of resources is in turn closely linked to their children’s cognitive abilities, their eventual school attainment and their adult productivity (Hoddinott and Haddad, 1995). Domestic violence rates are also tightly linked to women’s education. Evidence shows that the Latin American and Asian women least likely to have experienced violence are the most likely to have completed secondary school (Kishor and Johnson, 2004).

The communities of educated women also accrue benefits from educating their girl children. As women expand their economic roles, communities experience more gender equality and economic prosperity (Lloyd, 2005; 2009; World Bank, 2006). Educated women are more likely to participate in community forums, thus furthering not only the democratic process but also political concerns that tend to improve the daily lives of families (Barro, 1999; Malhotra *et al.*, 2003; Sen, 1999; UNESCO, 2000). Studies in India, for example, found that

### Box 3: Social institutions and human capabilities

An appreciation of the importance of social and cultural issues in development has been advanced, now famously, by Amartya Sen (1993; 1999; 2004), whereby social institutions constitute part of the ‘capabilities’ that societies and individuals have. Culture matters not just because it is a ‘constitutive part of the good life,’ but also because it has an ‘instrumental influence on the behaviours of individuals, firms and governments’ (Sen, 2004). This translation of ‘social’ aspects of development into economic terminology has enabled a much wider understanding of its potential influence in development action. Social institutions are important because they are part of a wider culture which defines ‘what is valued in terms of well-being, who does the valuing and why economic and social factors interact with culture to unequally allocate access to a good life’ (Rao and Walton, 2004).

women’s education led to improvements in community health facilities (Drèze and Murthi, 1999; Mari Bhat, 1998). A study by the International Water and Sanitation Centre found that women’s participation was the key to improving community access to clean water and sanitary facilities (Van Wijk-Sijbesma, 1998). Similarly, a study in Pakistan highlights how important local role models are to girls’ success. Schools that were staffed with female teachers from the local community were found to have better retention rates than schools that were staffed with female teachers from outside the community (Ghuman and Lloyd, 2007; Lloyd *et al.*, 2005; 2007), showing that each generation of girls is crucial to the success of the next.

The impact of investing in girls and young women can also be seen at national and international levels. Declines in fertility, which reduce overall population growth and thus increase per capita income, coupled with a better educated, larger workforce, may produce rapid economic expansion (Bloom *et al.*, 2002; Levine *et al.*, 2009). For example, one study found that, if female labour force participation in India were similar to that of the US, India’s gross domestic product (GDP) would be lifted by 4.2 percent a year and its growth would be 1.08 percent higher (UNESCAP, 2007). In order to promote higher female economic participation, investing in gender-sensitive vocational training for young women is critical, as they often face a more protracted and difficult transition to working life compared with their male counterparts (ILO, 2008). The lack of decent job prospects increases young women’s vulnerability in the transition from childhood to adulthood, often trapping them in ‘informal, intermittent and insecure work arrangements, characterized by low productivity, meagre earnings and reduced labour protection (ibid).’

Other studies have noted the costs of gender inequality. On average, countries with highly disparate educational enrolment rates have been estimated to have a GNP up to 25 percent lower than countries closer to achieving gender parity (Hill and King, 1995a; 1995b). Over time, it is predicted that this difference will continue to grow; an annual economic growth loss of 0.1 to 0.3 percent between 1995 and 2005 was expected to become an annual loss of 0.4 percent between 2005 and 2015 (Abu-Ghaida and Klasen, 2002). These seemingly small numbers aggregate to staggering sums. In addition to losing over \$40 billion per year as a result of women’s limited access to employment, the Asia Pacific region alone is losing up to \$30 billion per year as a result of gaps in education (UNESCAP, 2007). Moreover, given that girls constitute part of the current demographic bulge, characterised by a relatively large number of young people of working age, ensuring that these young people are educated, healthy and gainfully employed leads to what some term a ‘demographic dividend’ and can make a major contribution to development (Marcus and Gavrilovic, 2010). Indeed, Bloom and Canning (2003, in DESA, 2007) point out that educated youth accounted for one-third of the growth of the ‘tiger’ economies from the 1960s to 1990s.<sup>19</sup> When it comes to investing in tomorrow’s women, it is obvious that ignorance is expensive.

### The importance of social institutions

Poverty research has historically focused on material manifestations of poverty (measured by income and basic human development indicators such as educational enrolment and nutritional status). However, the role that social risks and vulnerabilities play in perpetuating chronic poverty and propelling people into poverty has been gaining recognition over the past decade (Holmes and Jones, 2009). As mentioned above, of the five poverty traps identified by the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09, four are non-income measures: insecurity (ranging from insecure environments to conflict and violence); limited citizenship (lack of a meaningful political voice); spatial disadvantage (exclusion from politics, markets, resources, etc, owing to geographical remoteness); and social discrimination (which traps people in exploitative relationships of power and patronage) (CPRC, 2008). Accordingly, in this report we focus on social institutions<sup>20</sup> – the collection of formal and informal laws,<sup>21</sup> norms and practices which have an effect on human capabilities by either limiting or enabling individual and collective agency. These social institutions, we suggest, have far greater influence than is generally appreciated in shaping developmental outcomes.

However, international development action over the past 50 years has generally treated social institutions as fixed and largely untouchable, either looking to science and technology to modernise societies or focusing on free markets (misguidedly treated as devoid of social aspects) to bring

about change (Attaran, 2005; Easterly, 2006; Ferguson, 1994; Rao and Walton 2004). This has been reinforced by a tendency in poverty research to focus on material manifestations of poverty (measured by income and basic human development indicators), and it is only more recently that social risks and vulnerabilities have been considered in relation to the role they play in both perpetuating poverty and propelling people into poverty. Amartya Sen (2004) suggests that this neglect, or what he terms ‘comparative indifference’ to the importance of ‘the social,’ needs remedying.

Laws, norms and practices are part of the wider ‘cultures’ that inform multiple aspects of our behaviour and our societies. Importantly, culture is not an untouchable and permanent fixture. Rather, it is always in flux and contested, constantly being shaped by human interaction (Rao and Walton, 2004). Indeed, this malleability is a vital aspect of the transformative social change required to enable equitable development and social justice (see Box 3). As we discuss below, such change has been seen in many societies and is central to inclusive policies and action. It is, however, critical to emphasise that cultural norms and practices can endure across time and space by adapting to new contexts, including demographic, socioeconomic and technological changes. For example, as we discuss in Chapter 2 on Son Bias, traditional practices of female infanticide in some societies are increasingly being replaced by female foeticide, facilitated by the availability of new reproductive technologies, especially among better-off wealth quintiles.

Importantly, social institutions are not inherently good or bad. Rather, they provide the parameters or social framework in which individuals and groups are able to develop their human capabilities. When they result in processes that lead to inequality, discrimination and exclusion, they become detrimental to development. Thus, our argument is that social institutions can and should enhance human capabilities but, when they instead cause harm, action should be taken to reform and reshape them.

Those institutions we are focusing on in this report are currently detrimental to gender equality and to the empowerment of girls and young women, and influence the possibility of their falling into long-term poverty. In

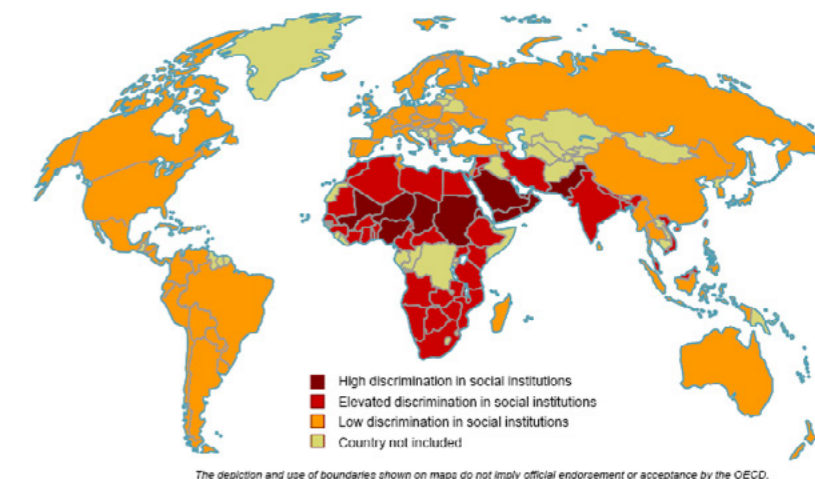
analysing the situation of girls, we here choose to focus on social impediments to the realisation of their capabilities, impediments which also result in material deprivation. Too often, policymakers, donors and development practitioners focus on supply-side measures, such as the provision of services and technologies, but overlook the importance of informing the choice of any intervention with a clear analysis of the socio-cultural dynamics that may impede the uptake and effective enjoyment of the benefits of those services (e.g. Sen and Ostlin, 2010). Even in the case of development approaches that seek to strengthen demand, attention to the complexity of social factors that may influence the patterning of demand is often too limited, as the growing body of work on gender and social protection initiatives, such as cash transfers and public works programmes, highlights (e.g. Holmes and Jones, 2010; Molyneux, 2008).

### Gender, social institutions and poverty dynamics

In this report, we focus in particular on five specific institutions identified by the OECD SIGI, which include discriminatory family codes and resource entitlements, son bias, gender-based violence and restricted freedoms in terms of physical mobility and societal participation. Practices stemming from these institutions may result in a myriad of development deficits and/or physical and psychological trauma, such as early marriage, inequitable inheritance, FGM/C, assault and abuse, limited access to productive assets, servitude and exploitation, high rates of infant and maternal malnutrition, morbidity and mortality and low educational achievement, among other outcomes (Amnesty International, 2010; Plan International, 2009). These barriers to human development

**Social institutions can and should enhance human capabilities, but when they instead cause harm, action should be taken to reform and reshape them.**

**Figure 1: Levels of gendered social discrimination in developing countries**



Source: <http://genderindex.org/>

can lead to and perpetuate chronic poverty and vulnerability over the course of childhood and adulthood, and potentially in intergenerational terms. It is our contention that efforts to reform or reshape these social institutions will substantially contribute towards improving development outcomes in general, and the multidimensional well-being of girls and young women in particular.

Recently, the effects of social institutions have been made more visible by the development of the OECD SIGI (see Box 4). Led by the OECD Development Centre and a team headed by Stephan Klasen from Gottingen University, the SIGI aims to address the weaknesses of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) created in the mid-1990s, and to create a new composite index of gender equality (Jutting *et al.*, 2008).<sup>22</sup> SIGI architects are primarily interested in highlighting the relationship between social institutions – defined as laws, norms, traditions and codes of conduct – and women’s economic empowerment. Their approach is informed by Morrisson and Jutting (2004), who argue that social institutions are the most important single factor determining women’s freedom of choice in economic activities outside the household, directly and indirectly constraining women’s access to resources such as education and health care, which are necessary for women’s economic participation (see also Figure 1).

This report takes as its starting point an appreciation of the SIGI’s focus on socio-cultural norms, codes of conduct and formal and informal laws. It uses the quantitative data that the SIGI database generates, but only as one data point among a number of sources. It also seeks to both broaden and modify the conceptualisation of gendered social institutions that underpins the SIGI, as follows. First, the SIGI refers only to women, whereas we believe it is important to extend this to cover girls, where data are available. Second, in this report we go beyond the SIGI’s narrow focus on economic benefits to consider a broader definition of well-being, one which captures a range of capabilities and outcomes as well as the complexities of supporting girls and women to both avoid and exit from chronic poverty. Third, we think it is critical to address inconsistencies in the labelling of the five social institutions that SIGI comprises. The terminology used is neutral for some SIGI institutions (family code), positive for others (physical integrity, ownership rights, civil liberties) and negative for yet others (son preference). Accordingly, we have relabelled the institutions as follows, and also modified some of the component variables, in order to better capture the range of norms and practices that underpin specific institutions:<sup>23</sup>

1. Discriminatory family codes: This institution includes parental authority, inheritance laws, early marriage practices, family structure and resulting rights and

**Box 4: Progress in understanding and measuring gendered experiences of poverty**

Gender-related measures, variables and datasets tend to focus on the results and not on the causes of gender discrimination, which are more often related to the institutional frameworks that constrain women’s economic roles (Morrisson and Jutting, 2004). However, Klasen (2006b) emphasises that both the Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) suffer from serious conceptual and empirical problems, focusing on the effects of inequitable development rather than the status of inequality *per se*.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the GEM has an elite bias, focusing on formal political representation and formal sector employment at the expense of informal sector work or community participation, among other concerns. The measures also fail to appreciate the care economy (Folbre, 2006, in Klasen, 2006b), to make genuine links between women’s representation at different political levels, to consider issues such as violence, control over the body, sexuality and reproduction or to capture empowerment at the household level (Ellsberg, 2006).

Analysts called for fresh thinking and measures to better capture the feminisation of responsibility and obligation (Chant, 2006) and to measure gender inequality and not just gender and development (Dijkstra, 2006). Klasen (2006a) recommended that a measure of gender equality: consider the relation between market work and care responsibilities (using data on time use and leisure use); develop indicators measuring physical security/absence of violence; and examine the enabling environment for promoting gender equality, that is to say, the legal and institutional framework, norms and social values. Thus, the need for a new measure to go alongside a corrected GEM and GDI was identified (Klasen, 2006b), to provide a measure of gender inequality.

The Atlas of Gender and Development, derived from the SIGI, measures social institutions as mirrored by societal practices and legal norms and which produce inequalities between women and men in non-OECD countries. Klasen *et al.* (2006b) argue that this is a more accurate indication of gender disparities, as it reflects the social institutions that can prevent women from participating in society despite increased investments in human capital. Higher discrimination against women within family codes (defined as women’s right to inherit, early marriage, polygamy, parental authority), physical integrity (prevalence of FGM/C, legislation punishing acts of violence against women, percentage of women who are missing as a result of sex-specific abortions)<sup>25</sup>, civil liberties (women’s freedom to leave the house independently, restrictions to freedom of dress) and ownership rights (women’s access to bank loans, right to acquire land and property) is correlated with lower levels of female achievement in relation to education, economic growth and other key macro-level development indicators (Jutting *et al.*, 2008).

responsibilities (including polygamy, multigenerational households, female-headed households).

2. Son bias: This refers to unequal investments in the care, nurture and resources allocated to sons and daughters within the household and is manifest in terms of survival/mortality rates, human development indicators (nutrition, education, health), time use, household labour contributions to the care and mainstream economies.
3. Limited resource rights and entitlements: Here, the focus is on girls’ and young women’s access to and control over land, microfinance, property and natural resources.
4. Physical insecurity: This institution encompasses gender-based violence in the household, school, workplace and community, and also includes harmful gendered traditional practices, such as FGM/C.
5. Restricted civil liberties: This institution includes restrictions vis-à-vis freedom of movement, freedom of association and participation in collective action.<sup>26</sup>

**Organisation of the report**

The report is organised according to the five key social institutions outlined above. Accordingly, the first chapter, on Discriminatory Family Codes, focuses on the formal legal frameworks that play an important role in shaping the boundaries of the household as well as intra-household dynamics. Chapter 2 on Son Bias then focuses on more informal intra-household relations, unpacking both reasons for familial gender discrimination and its impacts on girls and young women. Chapter 3 on Limited Resource Rights and Entitlements explores the barriers that girls and women face in securing equitable access, use and ownership of a range of physical, natural and financial resources. Chapter 4 on Physical Insecurity discusses the threat and experience of violence that

girls and young women endure within the home, school and community environments, including heightened vulnerability in conflict and post-conflict environments. Finally, Chapter 5 on Restricted Civil Liberties considers the restricted freedoms that girls and young women face in terms of citizenship rights, mobility and collective action.

Each chapter follows a similar format, including a discussion of the characteristics of the social institution in focus, its gendered dimensions, its linkages to poverty dynamics and its impacts on girls and young women; and a review of promising policies and programmes aimed at tackling the discriminatory dimensions of these social institutions. In this vein, we highlight that social institutions are constantly undergoing change. This process of change may be slow, uneven and even suffer from reversals in some contexts, but the evidence that we present underscores that positive change for girls and young women is possible, even in the most challenging socio-cultural, political and economic contexts. There are multiple agents of change, from girls themselves, to their mothers, brothers and fathers, to the wider community, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the state and international actors. Movements for girls’ and women’s rights have played an important part, including in advocacy efforts around CEDAW, the UNCRC, the Beijing Platform for Action and Convention 135. And there are multiple approaches: public education campaigns, use of the media and TV drama, school curriculum reforms, litigation, legal literacy, empowerment programmes focused on girls, change initiatives that involve men and boys, policy advocacy, peer support and mentoring, use of champions and role models and social protection measures, among others.

The report concludes with a brief summary of the key lessons learnt as well as a set of policy recommendations, which we hope will inspire debate and discussion among an array of development actors and, most importantly, action for transformative change and gender justice for all.

**Notes**

- 1 The new UN Entity for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (UN Women), to be launched in early 2011, will absorb the functions of existing UN bodies addressing gender issues (the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the less well-known Office of the Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues (OSAGI), Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE)). This will aim to provide much stronger vision and oversight of initiatives to promote gender equality and empowerment in all UN work. As part of a broader UN initiative to improve strategic policy and programming coherence, UN Women will combine both normative and operational functions, while also introducing an innovative new formula for reflecting a greater balance between Northern and Southern countries on its Executive Board (Jones, 2010).
- 2 a) See, for example, Plan International (2009).  
b) World Bank/International Monetary Fund Annual Meetings: Adolescent Girls Initiative Launch. World Bank President Robert B. Zoellic, October 10, 2008. See <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTABOUTUS/ORGANIZATION/EXTPRESIDENT2007/0,,contentMDK:21936128~menuPK:64822279~pagePK:64821878~piPK:64821912~theSitePK:3916065,00.html>
- 3 A detailed list of recent reports on girls and poverty can be found in Annex 1.
- 4 Multidimensional poverty, including ‘deprivations related to health, education, isolation, “voice” and security’ (Bird *et al.*, 2002), may be (come) chronic: ‘when individuals or households are trapped in severe and multidimensional poverty for an extended period of time. This may be five years or may be linked with the inter-generational transmission of poverty, where people who are born in poverty, live in poverty and pass that poverty onto their children’ (Bird and Shinyekwa, 2003).
- 5 Based on girls aged 10 to 19 in developing countries, excluding China, projected to marry before their 18th birthday (Clark, 2004). [www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts\\_child\\_marriage.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm).

6    [www.wpf.org/reproductive\\_rights\\_article/facts](http://www.wpf.org/reproductive_rights_article/facts).

7    [www.unifem.org/gender\\_issues/hiv\\_aids/facts\\_figures.php](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/hiv_aids/facts_figures.php).

8    It is important to note that data and variables in analytical models are not always sex disaggregated, which can mean that in-depth analysis of the differences between women and men and boys and girls is difficult.

9    Heslop and Gorman (2002), for example, are specifically concerned with the gendered experience of old age and identify differential risk factors between women and men, with factors for women including widowhood, inequitable inheritance systems and low access to health and education services.

10   Smith and Moore (2006) consider the positive impact of maternal education and health care on children’s development and argue that, along with shocks and interventions, they are key factors in determining poverty transfers. Maternal education is identified as especially significant in preventing the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Behrman *et al.* (2009) identify biological capital as a significant factor in children’s schooling attainment, birth weight and length for age at three. Investments in human capital are seen as a way of breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

11   Dowry payments are identified as a lifecycle factor which can have a significant impact on chronic poverty in Quisumbing’s work (e.g. 2008) and are considered in the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09 (CPRC, 2008), which uses an example from Bangladesh to stress the negative impact of daughters’ weddings (which can cost 10,000 taka in dowry and 4,000 in other expenses) in relation to household income, increased vulnerability and preventing families moving out of poverty.

12   The gendered impacts of migration are considered in terms of those migrating and those ‘left behind.’ Kothari (2002) identifies that women are increasingly likely to migrate themselves, whereas both Kothari (2002) and Bird *et al.* (2002) consider the potential of migration to change gender roles as women take on more decision making. However, Bird *et al.* (2002) argue that, even in absentia, men often remain head of the household. Alider (2001) considers the gendered impacts of migration in South Africa, drawing on the KwaZulu-Natal Income Dynamics Study to argue that migration has led to increased numbers of female-headed households, which are especially vulnerable owing to lack of status and unreliable remittances.

13   A significant gap relates to consideration of men and masculinity. Colvin *et al.* (2009), who are concerned with a male South African HIV/AIDS support group, deal with issues of masculinity. There are papers discussing the need for a change in gender relations, but how work with men can be carried out to achieve this is lacking. Similarly, despite consideration of human capital and the impact of mothers’ education on reducing the intergenerational transmission of poverty, there has been little discussion in the literature on links between chronic poverty and reproductive health, or gender analysis of service provision and design.

14   Quisumbing is a major contributor to thought in this area. Quisumbing (2006) on the transfer of wealth in Bangladesh identifies ‘women’s assets’ as more likely to have been transferred in vivo, at marriage, in the form of products like jewellery. She argues that, because of economic restrictions, women are more likely to invest in human capital such as health and education for children. Quisumbing (2007) stresses the importance of considering in vivo transfers of wealth and suggests that more equitable opportunities to acquire and transfer assets are needed, along with reduced inequality in the control of resources within the household. Widows’ inheritance rights are particularly important in the context of HIV/AIDS to ensure the transfer of wealth to the next generation. Baulch and Quisumbing (2009) argue that women’s access to ‘solid’ assets, which they are able to sell or pawn, enables them to compensate for shocks to family income. Cooper (2008; 2009) focuses more on legal rights in property and inheritance. She discusses the need for legal reforms to improve women’s status and argues that increased land ownership leads to increased bargaining power within the household, which has positive effects on consumption and development for other household members. Cooper is also concerned with the need to harmonise land, marriage and inheritance laws with national constitutions and international human rights agreements.

15   Pelham (2007), in work on HIV/AIDS and care work by grandparents in Lesotho and Namibia, calls for pensions, as these can have a positive impact on women’s status and the well-being of children. De Coninck and Drani (2009) argue that programme design should learn from and strengthen existing indigenous help structures, including women’s groups.

16   Hickey’s work examines relationships of citizens to the state. Hickey (2009) argues that policy reform has created problems in the understanding and exercise of masculinity, as gender orders have been upturned by the empowerment of women.

17   In India, Shah and Mehta (2008) argue that better monitoring of the impact of women’s participation in Guaranteed Employment Schemes is needed, alongside increased response to women’s needs, for example being close to the village, shelter, drinking water and crèches and improved recording of time worked to allow better access to maternity benefits. Deshingkar (2009) makes a case for better labour inspection regimes in order to monitor and improve working conditions, and identifies women as a particularly vulnerable group. Doane (2007) considers women home workers and how social protection programmes can be targeted to reduce the vulnerability of this group.

18   Moore *et al.* (2008) identify violence and conflict as a maintainer of poverty and draw on case study research to demonstrate women’s particular vulnerabilities in conflict situations – women forced into sex work, perceptions of girls who are ‘spoiled by rape’ and excluded from the community. Orero *et al.* (2007) also identify women as particularly vulnerable to dispossession in the context of conflict.

19   Failing to invest in young people has serious and long-term economic costs. Marcus and Gavrilovic (2010) cite the example of Jordan, where youth exclusion (joblessness, adolescent pregnancy, early school dropout and migration) cost an estimated 7.2 percent of GDP in 2007. In Egypt, similar neglect meant a loss of 17.2 percent of GDP (Chabaan, 2007, in Dhillon *et al.*, 2008).

20   Several terms are used to define these institutions. Branisa *et al.* (2009), for example, suggest: ‘long-lasting codes of conduct, norms, traditions, informal and formal laws that contribute to gender inequality in all spheres of life.’

21   The term customary law or norm is frequently used and will be used in this report to mean informal but often nationally acceptable law.

22   Reviewing their use on their tenth anniversary, Klasen (2006a; 2006b) proclaimed the need for a new gender index, easily interpreted, with wide coverage, a clear policy message, annual updates and new variables, measuring gender inequalities and not gender-related human development and agency.

23   Given the SIGI’s focus on quantitative measurement, these institutions and their constituent components have been shaped in part by data availability and face a number of limitations. Accordingly, because our analysis draws on a range of quantitative and qualitative sources, we do not need to be subject to the same set of constraints.

24   The GDI and GEM, introduced in 1995 to add a distribution-sensitive measure to the Human Development Index (HDI), undoubtedly represented important new measures of progress in gender-related development and empowerment. The GDI measures achievement on the same basic capabilities as the HDI, but takes note of inequality in achievement between women and men. The GEM is a measure of agency, evaluating progress on women’s standing in political and economic forums and the extent to which women and men are able to actively participate in economic and political life and in decision making.

25   Note that the variable ‘missing women’ was initially included within the Physical Integrity Sub-Index but later was separated out into a standalone sub-index in order to denote its emphasis on the economic valuation of women.

26   Note that we did not focus in any detail on freedom of dress, as we would have required considerably more space to address the complexities of this issue and to avoid potential problems of Western bias.

1

Discriminatory  
family codes



# Discriminatory family codes

## 1. Introduction

Girls’ capabilities and agency, or lack of, within the family determines much of their development and well-being as well as those of their own families and children. Lack of capabilities and agency leads to poverty, and can be maintained by discriminatory family codes. Addressing these discriminatory family codes entails many challenges, but there is extensive evidence that this can be achieved.

In line with the SIGI, family code is here taken to mean those formal and informal laws, norms and practices that influence the capabilities and related decision-making power of women and men, boys and girls in the household. Such laws, norms and practices may be captured in legal systems, or in customary law that also carries a nationally recognised authority, or in what are labelled ‘traditions and cultural practices.’ These social institutions are neither inherently good nor inherently bad, but their negative forms have significant impacts on girls.

In particular, they can result in: early (compulsory) marriage; the separation of girls from maternal presence, influence and authority; a lack of decision-making influence by girls themselves; a denial of vital material assets through ownership and inheritance; and, in some cases, physical harm, including female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). The ensuing negative development outcomes include: reduced capabilities, educational attainment, employment potential and job quality; increased fertility and maternal and infant mortality rates; increased ill-health and physical harm; and increased poverty and potential for increased incidence of life-course and intergenerational poverty.

How these consequences come about as a result of laws, norms and practices related to the family is the subject of this chapter, which also explores experiences of positive change in relation to discriminatory family codes, as well as effects on the capabilities of girls and young women.

The *Family Code* sub index of the SIGI refers to the social institutions that influence the decision-making power of women in the household and includes four variables: *parental authority* measuring the right of women to be legal guardians of children during marriage, and their custody rights over

children after divorce; *inheritance* measuring formal inheritance rights of spouses and daughters; *early marriage* measuring the percentage of girls aged between 15 and 19 who are/were ever married; and *polygamy* measuring the acceptance of the practice in the population or its legality, wherever information on acceptance is not available in order to increase the number of countries included. In line with the SIGI, we consider here the same variables, however, we take a somewhat broader view to consider a wider age band for early marriage, and, in the case of polygamy, focus more particularly on girls and younger women. Here we redefine the parameter of analysis to a focus on the power imbalances typically experienced in polygamous marriages with girls, which tend to exhibit large age differentials shown to be detrimental to girls’ agency and the development of their capabilities.

## 2. Gendered constraints in family codes

Family codes as captured in both formal and informal laws, norms and practices is not fixed or permanently embedded in national, religious or cultural codes. They are in flux to greater or lesser degrees, contested and shaped by human interaction (Rao and Walton, 2004). Maintaining the status quo may serve the interests of particular groups over others, and can result in inequitable and discriminatory family codes.

Family codes in nationally based legal systems relate to issues such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and ownership duties and rights regarding children. Although human rights conventions have an influence on such laws (for example, the internationally recognised age of first marriage), there is huge variety both in national law and in customary norms and practices.

Family law or codes exist within wider national legal systems which, in terms of political entities, can be generalised into five types:<sup>1</sup> civil law, common law, customary law, Muslim law and mixed law systems, the latter referring not to a single system but to a combination of systems. All of these also carry particular characteristics according to the territories and populations they serve. Within countries, regions and peoples may use a range of other systems, which may not feature as key in the national system but which carry authority, such as

aboriginal law. There are also legal systems based on religion,<sup>2</sup> but which have lost their character and distinct status, having been absorbed into customary or other national law and being accepted by people irrespective of faith. Muslim law is argued to be the exception, because of its permanent broad-based nature<sup>3</sup> and direct links to religious faith (Glenn, 2000) (see Box 1).

Muslim law is not necessarily seen as monolithic, although in many Islamic countries it has remained the main reference in matters to do with the family and personal law<sup>4</sup> (Marcotte, 2003). There is a tendency to allow Muslim law to dominate in family codes. Aslam and Kazmi (2009) argue that Islam has provided ‘clear cut strategies’ for empowering women, based on case study countries that practise Sharia of varying schools. Interpretations of religious codes also vary, however, and are argued to often fit pre-existing traditions or to suit existing inequitable power relations between men and women (Morrisson and Friedrich, 2004). The promotion of women’s rights through Islamic discourse is still emerging, and in every country across the Islamic world the role and status of women are contested. Among feminists, the merits of Islamic versus secular feminism are also widely debated (Coleman, 2010).

Where customary and statutory legal systems exist, they often run in parallel. In Malaysia and Singapore, Sharia law applies to Islamic communities, for example allowing polygamy and affecting inheritance laws (Glenn, 2000).<sup>5</sup> In Singapore, civil law grants equal inheritance rights to men and women, whereas Sharia favours male heirs. Differences between parallel legal systems can also be seen in the minimum legal age for marriage. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago national law states that men and women should be 18 to marry, whereas Sharia law sets the minimum age at 12 for women and 16 for men. Hindu law sets the minimum age for marriage at 14 for women and 18 for men; in communities in Orissa the minimum age is 16 for women and 18 for men; and Indian national law allows minors to marry with parental consent as long as the minimum age required by the community has been reached.<sup>6</sup>

### Harmonisation of law

A major challenge has been the harmonisation of legislation to remove discriminatory practices and to enable accordance with human rights legislation. Most sub-Saharan African countries, for example, operate under a dual or tripartite system of law, with civil, traditional/customary and religious codes operating in parallel. For example, in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia, three forms of marriage exist – statutory, customary and religious – each of which condones different practices. However, the man is usually considered the head of the household – which can negatively impact women’s inheritance and ownership rights.<sup>7</sup> In Algeria, although the Constitution guarantees the principle of equality between men

### Box 1: Changing family inheritance practices in Africa

At the first International Conference on Bride Price in Africa, which took place in 2004, a declaration calling for the abolition of the practice was drafted by all participants and sent to all African presidents, the UN Secretary-General, the African Union and the Arab League of Nations (IRIN, 2005). In Uganda, there has been considerable debate over the Domestic Relations Bill, in which bride price is redefined as an optional marriage gift that cannot be refunded. Legislating against bride price and dowry will not be a conclusive solution,<sup>16</sup> but it remains an important legislative act to enable prosecution in cases of violence (ibid) and to help eliminate it where it is a harmful practice.

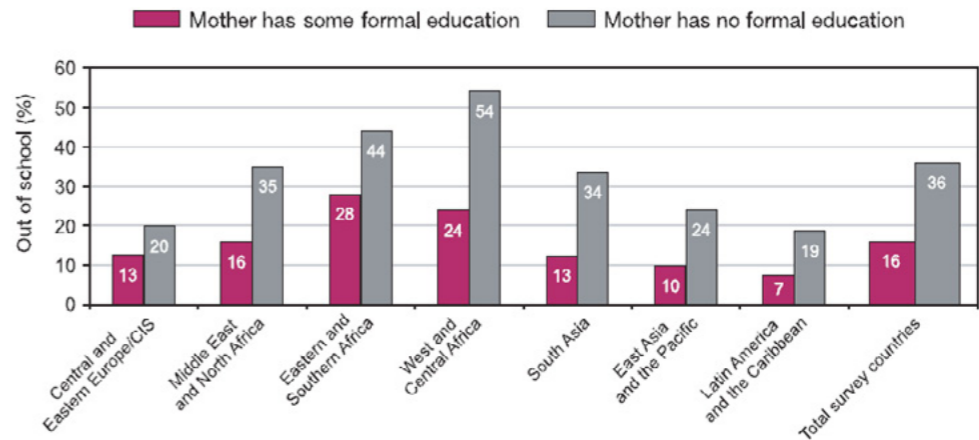
and women, harmonisation of law within the family code is unclear, since the latter states clearly that men and women are not equal within marriage. It is ‘the duty of the wife [...] to obey her husband.’ Wives are considered minors under the authority of the husband and need a husband’s permission to work or travel, although this does not reflect reality, especially in urban areas. Men can divorce without any justification, but women only under certain conditions. Men who obtain divorce keep the house and can evict their wife and children. In these cases, men are required to pay child support – but this does not always happen. The husband retains control of children’s upbringing. Inheritance legally falls under Sharia law, with women inheriting half as much as men (OECD, 2009).

Enforcement of laws related to family codes is subject to much variance. This owes in part to: the continuous process of harmonisation in mixed law systems; the bargaining power of women within the household and the wider community; and women’s education and knowledge of their legal rights, including their capacity to take action.

Constantly evolving legal systems that influence the family code were illustrated in Kenyan case law from 2005 when, following the death of a male head of household, the sons claimed a greater share of the inheritance than the daughters, with the widow arguing that, according to Keiyo tradition (and customary law), girls have no right to the inheritance of their father’s estate. The court found that, where discrimination arises, the national Constitution and international human rights standards must prevail. This decision influenced the Kenyan High Court in 2008, which ruled that CEDAW and international human rights law took precedence and that women’s inheritance rights should be recognised.<sup>8</sup>

In Ghana, however, in a similar case in 2006, customary law held sway: the Supreme Court recognised that married daughters do not inherit their father’s estate and that this may be ‘injurious to personal well-being,’ but felt that it had no power to change customary law, which could be done only

Figure 1: Primary school-age children out of school by mother’s education and region, 1996–2003



Note: Data based on household surveys conducted in 80 countries  
Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2005)

by ‘Parliament, the President and the people who practise the custom.’ The Supreme Court has since issued an editorial note stating that its does have the power to abolish customs.<sup>9</sup>

### Women and girl’s decision-making power

Recognised legal systems play an important role in determining women’s and girls’ capabilities within the family. However, informal bargaining within the household is also very important. The Constitution of Uzbekistan, for example, prohibits all forms of discrimination and provides for equal rights for men and women. However, fewer than three-quarters of Uzbek women believe that they have the same rights as men (OECD, 2009). Bargaining power within the household is influenced by generational and family status (including status related to polygamy and age differentials), control of income and assets, age at marriage, level of education (UNICEF, 2006) and informal norms and practices. Frequently, unquestioning submission to male authority is internalised and reproduced by mothers and daughters alike, as this young Hausa women explains:

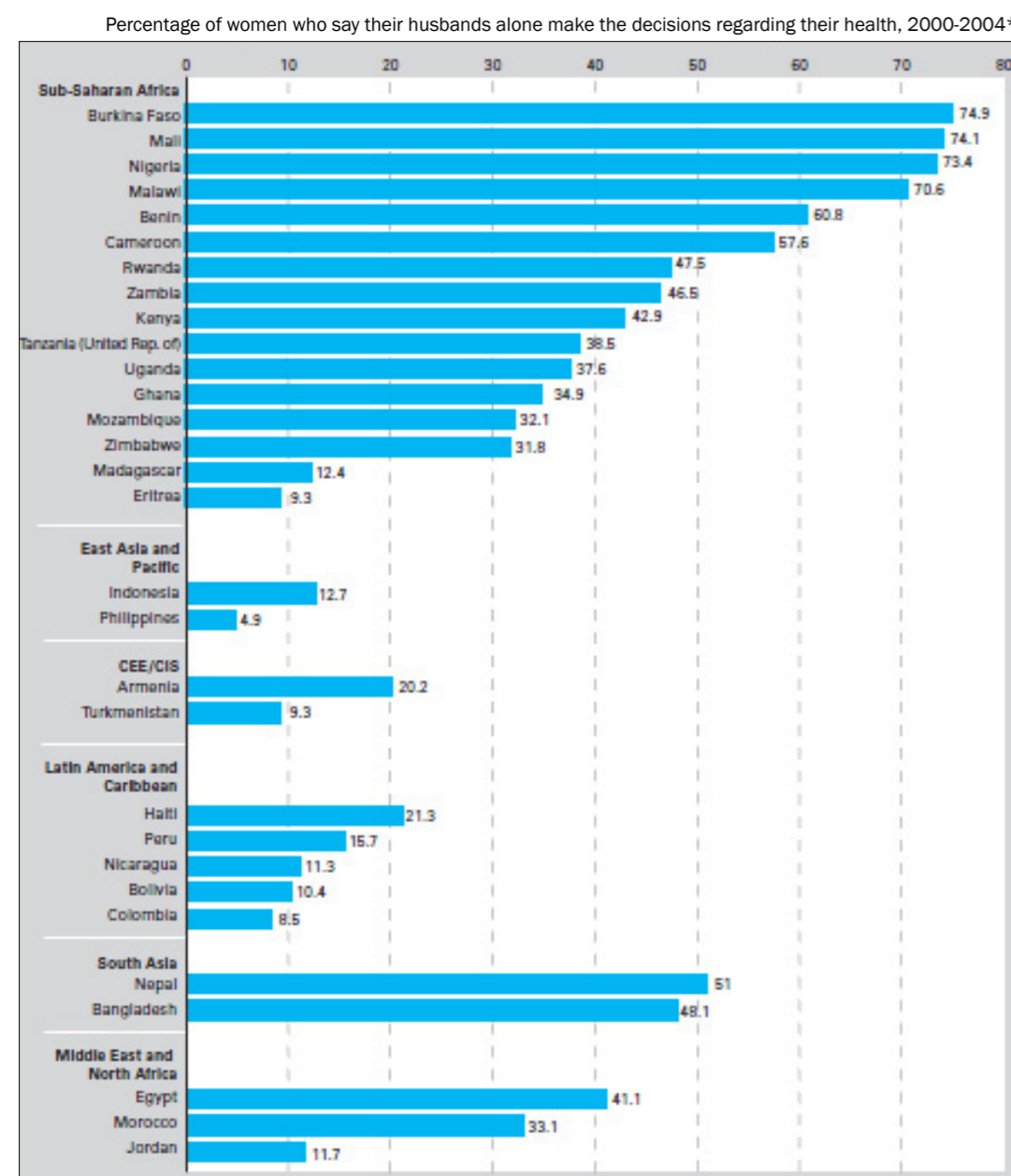
‘It is very important to always obey your husband’s instructions. This will go a long way to help them benefit from the marriage. Married women can only go to heaven on the heels of the husband. A married woman should not complain – only at the point of death – and even then you should exercise patience [...] So I just want to appeal to all that no matter what your husband asks you to do, please do it and you will be rewarded by Allah’ (married woman, 22, married at 15, polygamous, pregnant with fourth child, Nigeria, in Erulkar and Bello, 2007).

Nevertheless, female bargaining power is vital in determining well-being outcomes for women and children, in particular girls, irrespective of formal legal systems.

Education increases women’s role in household decision-making and their control over family assets. It also influences investment decisions in relation to daughter’s education, thereby also enhancing daughter’s future potential negotiating power in the household (Agarwal, 1997; Lloyd and Young, 2009; Khandkar, 1998; Pitt and Khandkar, 1998). Girls who continue their education into the secondary years tend to delay both marriage and sexual initiation (Lloyd and Young, 2009; Mathur et al., 2003; Morrison and Sabarwal, 2008). In one study, it was found that young women with ten years of education were likely to marry up to six years later than their peers without schooling (Martin, 1995)<sup>10</sup>. Children with uneducated mothers in a sample of countries<sup>10</sup> were found to be twice as likely to be out of primary school than children whose mothers attended primary school. A survey in 18 sub-Saharan African countries found that 73 percent of children with educated mothers were in school, compared with only 51 percent of children with uneducated mothers. In addition, children whose primary caregiver had received formal education were less likely to leave school early or to repeat a grade (UNICEF, 2006).

A survey in 30 developing countries (half in Latin America) revealed that in only ten of these countries do half or more women participate in all household decision making; according to relevant Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data, in the other 20 countries women are not allowed to decide on (or are excluded from decisions about) their own health care, major household purchases and their visits with family or friends outside the household (UNICEF, 2006). In many South Asian and sub-Saharan African households, women have very limited participation in health-related decisions. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria, almost 75 percent of women

**Figure 2: Husbands making decisions about their wife's health**



\*Data refer to the most recent available during the period specified. All countries with available data are presented in the chart.  
Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2006)

said that their husbands alone decided on women's health care; in Bangladesh and Nepal, the rate was about 50 percent. Women's exclusion has negative implications not only for them but also for their family's health and well-being and especially their children. In Gujarat, India, almost 50 percent of interviewed women reported feeling unable to take their sick child to a doctor without the approval of their husband or the responsible parent-in-law (ibid).

In seven out of 15 countries examined in sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, 2006) over 40 percent of women reported that husbands alone decided about daily household expenditures. Similarly, in the countries surveyed in North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, around 30 percent of women said that

they were excluded from the daily household management. Their husbands were also responsible for major household purchases. In Nigeria, 78 percent of women, in Egypt 60 percent and in Bangladesh and Nepal over 30 percent felt excluded from decisions on large expenditures. In contrast, in both the two countries examined in East Asia and the Pacific – Indonesia and the Philippines – less than 18 percent of women reported that their husbands had exclusive control over household expenditures, indicating greater female participation in decision-making processes.

It is clear that women's decision-making power is in some cases severely restricted, as this young Nigerian girl describes:

*'[What is the difference between when you were unmarried and with your parents, and now that you are married?] There is a vast difference [...] at your husband's house, there is nobody apart from your husband. With your husband, you have to ask permission before you do anything at all' (married woman, 22, married at 15, polygamous, Nigeria, in Erlkar and Bello, 2007).*

Women's mobility can also be compromised, and such restrictions on movement also compromise their children's health and access to emergency care by preventing women from visiting pharmacies or hospitals alone and from contacting male health professionals. A third of Bangladeshi women reported that their husbands control all their movements outside the household. In Burkina Faso and Mali, almost 60 percent of women said that their visits to family and relatives depend totally on their husbands' decision (UNICEF, 2006). In Nicaragua, 18 percent of women need male permission to leave the home and visit friends or relatives. Importantly, it is increasingly being realised that fathers are centrally involved or make decisions regarding their children's health. Campaigns have tended to target women but are now starting to include men.

Indeed, according to a study conducted in three developing regions by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) (Smith *et al.*, 2003), if men and women had equal status (or were equally involved in decision making), the rate of underweight children under three in South Asia would decline by approximately 12 percentage points, reducing the number of malnourished children by 13.4 million. In sub-Saharan Africa, child malnutrition would decline by almost 3 percentage points, resulting in 1.7 million fewer malnourished children under three years old.

### 3. Gendered dimensions of discriminatory family codes

The effect of formal and informal laws, norms and practices on girls' capabilities and well-being is determined by the realities of parental authority, inheritance and marriage choices. Other well-being outcomes are also determined in part by the family code, including practices of FGM/C, 'permitted' domestic violence, servitude and son preference, as well as civil liberties and asset rights, all of which are detailed in the following chapters. All are also related to the above-described informal bargaining power of women and girls within the household and community.

#### Parental authority and custody

Formal and informal laws, norms and practices regarding parental duties, authority and responsibilities determine decisions regarding children. Norms which favour sons or cause harm to girls can be reinforced by both mothers and fathers. This is discussed further in the Son Bias and Physical Insecurity chapters (Chapters 2 and 4). Here, we concentrate

on family codes and norms which give greater authority and custody to fathers and thus disempower women and girls in their choices and capabilities. This bias may be also codified in national law which is discriminatory.

In Senegal,<sup>11</sup> for example, Article 152 of the Family Code (1972) states that the husband is the head of the family, with authority over the household and children: 'During the marriage [parental authority] is exercised by the father as head of the family.' The husband has the choice of family residence; the wife is obliged to live there with him and he is obliged to take her in (Article 153). In Sierra Leone, the husband has custodial rights over children, who are handed over to the husband's family head on his death. Under Muslim law, the mother has the right to care for a boy child until the age of nine

and a girl child until she comes of age (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

Meanwhile, in Egypt a husband can file a complaint against his wife under 'obedience laws.' A wife's obedience allows her to access basic necessities such as shelter, food and financial support from her husband. On

**If men and women had equal status, the rate of underweight children under three in South Asia would decline by approximately 12 percentage points, reducing the number of malnourished children by 13.4 million.**

- Smith *et al.* (2003)

divorce, as Egyptian law limits a woman's right to adequate housing to the period for which she has the custody of the children, women without children or those who no longer have custody of their children face the risk of homelessness. By law, Egyptian women cannot obtain a share of, or legal title to, the marital house and, although a home must be provided for a mother while she has custody of the children, custody is transferred to the father when boys are aged 10 and girls reach 12. In fact, women with custody of the children are usually denied their right to live in the marital house, and husbands can also deny them any custody rights without legal proceedings (Human Rights Watch, 2004).

In Saudi Arabia, fathers always retain legal custody of the children and have the right to make all decisions for them. Both married and divorced women do not have the right to open a bank account for their children, enrol them in schools, access their school files or travel with them without first obtaining written permission from their father (Human Rights Watch, 2008). In Gabon, Kenya, Morocco, Pakistan and many other countries, fathers have greater or total parental authority (OECD, 2009).

Bias towards male parental authority very much affects the well-being of children. Girls in particular may be affected regarding decisions on their schooling, health care and

marriage, as detailed above regarding the lack of women's decision-making authority. This may be influenced by son preference.

This lack of authority is extended to pre and postnatal decisions. In Sierra Leone (Amnesty International, 2009; Ministry of Health and Sanitation Sierra Leone, 2008), 68 percent of mothers reported that the decision on where to deliver a child was usually made by the husband at the beginning of labour. The high incidence of maternal death is assumed to be 'normal or inevitable.' A widespread belief in rural areas is that obstructed labour (a cause of 15 percent of maternal deaths (UNICEF Sierra Leone, 2006)) is caused by a woman's infidelity, with time and energy often wasted in trying to obtain her confession.

Women are often reluctant to practise family planning because they are afraid of being abandoned or rejected by their families. In several cases, women stated that they did not want to tell their husband that they should not have another child and that, when they mentioned family planning practices, their partner was not in favour and refused to use them. Discussions with men revealed that they were unaware of women's health risks resulting from repeated and frequent pregnancies.

Girls' well-being and their capabilities are thus influenced directly and indirectly by the type of parental authority experienced. Health care in particular can be compromised where maternal influence is lacking. Educational and marriage choices may be reinforced by both mothers and fathers, or by other kin. However, where women have more control over parental decisions, there is good evidence that educated women will choose education for their daughters. The links to poverty descents occur through parental decision making which does not optimise the potential for girls to develop capabilities. As such, maternal influence, especially when women have some education, enhances girls' capabilities.

## Inheritance

We are concerned here with the inheritance rights of girls related to their family status. Discussion of land and other property ownership is to be found in Chapter 3 (Limited Resource Rights and Entitlements). Although an inheritance transfer is in principle determined by the asset holder, if assets are not owned by women<sup>12</sup> (even if they have contributed

to them) they have no say on their transfer. Additionally, if discriminatory practice is codified in national or customary laws, this sets a precedent for unfair asset transfer.

Authority over assets in the household is determined by formal and informal laws, norms and practices pertaining to assets and inheritance rights, but also by the married status of women and girls and the effect on their rights as acquired through the transfer of assets on marriage. Widowed and divorced women and orphaned girls acquire very variable asset rights, as do girls after marriage and within their natal families. When a girl marries, the widespread practice of bride price and dowry payments, involving the transfer of assets between families, is regarded as important to their status and the way they are received by their husband's family. For many girls, especially in South Asia, the majority of assets they receive are acquired on marriage, even if they do not necessarily have control over them. There is evidence from Bangladesh that, when a woman's share of pre-wedding assets is higher than that of her husband, her influence in household decisions is greater and levels of sickness among her daughters decrease (UNICEF, 2006).

It is argued, however, that in general these payments are small compared with the value of assets and capabilities potentially to be gained from inheritance or from education (Quisumbing, 2008), which are assets and capabilities often denied to women and girls. Although bride price and dowry remain common across societies, and men and women alike profess to the value that they confer on women and girls, there have been many calls to end the practices, not least because of the family violence that they engender in disputes over payments.<sup>13</sup> In India, it is estimated that 25,000 brides are killed or maimed each year as a result of dowry disputes.<sup>14</sup> South African women who testified at hearings on violence against women stated that bride price, especially when delivered in cash, constituted 'buying a wife.'

Human rights declarations, conventions and charters are clear on non-discrimination in relation to inheritance rights,<sup>15</sup> although these are not necessarily legally binding. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa is the only treaty that protects girls' inheritance rights: 'Women and men shall have the right to inherit, in equitable shares, their parents' properties' (Article 21(2)). Despite these provisions, girls and women in many countries do not have equal inheritance rights to boys and men. For example, in Algeria and Pakistan, under Sharia law women inherit half as much as men; in Morocco, girls inherit half as much as boys (OECD, 2009). A 2009 CEDAW recommendation (Halperin-Kaddari, 2009) notes that changing laws around property and inheritance has happened very slowly. Unsurprisingly, there are many court cases challenging inheritance practice and examples of evolving law as a result.

**'Children have the right to be protected from prematurely assuming the responsibilities of adulthood, especially marriage and childbearing.'**

- IAC (1993)



© Robert Wallis / Panos Pictures (2010)

India, Jharkhand. Shanti Kumar, 16, a bride-to-be from the Santhal Adivasi tribe, sweeps the courtyard of her house, in Jorakath village.

Very little research has been devoted to children's inheritance rights (Cooper, 2008). Children have particularly insecure property rights, which are usually subsumed under the mother's rights. Some countries, including Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa and Zambia, provide children with a proportion of the estate in the event that a person dies without a will (Cooper, 2010), and important law harmonisation efforts in Rwanda (1992) gave girls the right to inherit property, enshrining equal rights to inheritance and succession in 2001 (Plan International, 2009). However, the intersection of customary, national and other law most frequently holds sway to deny children and women any inheritance.

For example, although Zambian statutory law partially protects women's inheritance and property rights, such protection is being undermined by a failure to prevent discriminatory customary law taking precedence over statutory law. A widow should receive 20 percent of her husband's estate (according to the Intestate Succession Act), but the right to inherit is customarily with the deceased husband's family of birth. The inability of women and girls to enforce their property rights in the area of inheritance can also

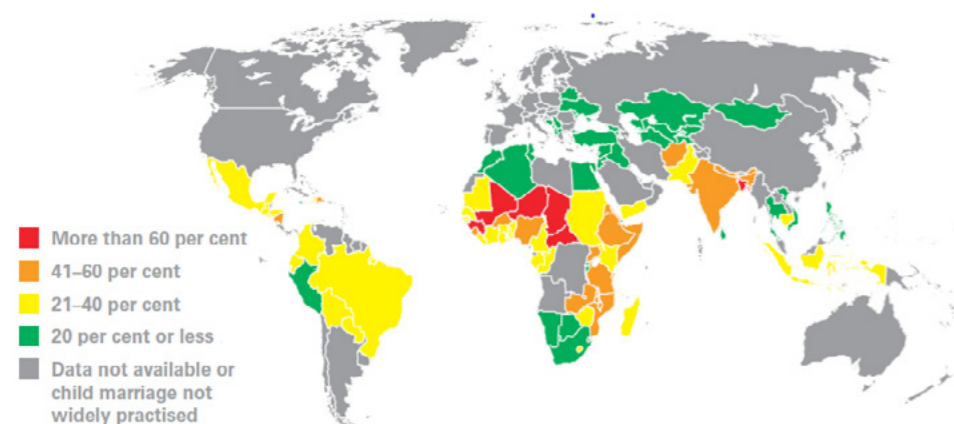
be seen in the case of HIV-positive widows: in-laws sometimes threaten women who insist on keeping the property that they will not care for the children if the women fall sick or die<sup>17</sup> (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

Inheritance assets, alongside important capabilities such as education, are noted to play a role in preventing descent into poverty (Quisumbing, 2008). The effect of denied inheritance is seen most acutely in the more highly profiled situations, where HIV/AIDS widows and orphans are denied assets by relatives and left destitute (Cooper, 2008; Nakray, 2010).

## Early marriage

The Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC) defines child marriage as 'any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years, before the girl is physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing.' An array of international instruments – including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1979's CEDAW and the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child – echoes the perspective

**Figure 3: Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 married or in union before age 18 (1987–2006)**



Source: UNICEF global databases (2007) based on data from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), DHS and other national surveys

of the IAC: that marriage decisions should be the preserve of consenting adults. Children have the right to be protected from prematurely assuming the responsibilities of adulthood, especially marriage and childbearing (IAC, 1993).

Even when legal protections against child marriage exist, they may be ambiguous, allow for dual existence of customary and civil law and have limited enforcement mechanisms. The national laws of Cameroon, Jordan, Morocco, Uganda and Yemen do not specifically accord women the right to consent to marriage. Among the majority of countries around the world that have codified a woman's equal right to choose a marriage partner, legal provisions are often not enforced, or are subject to wide exceptions. Legislative provisions in many countries allow for child marriage with parental consent, which in the context of some traditional societies does little to preserve the rights of girl children (IRIN, 2005).

Analysis of early marriage in development contexts and under the age of 18 overwhelmingly concludes that it is detrimental to girls. Assessments must, of course, be placed in local context, and not all practices are the same. However, the motivations for early marriage in general do not consider the health and developmental considerations of girls. In some cases, the lack of protection in law remains a significant problem. In Algeria, Chad, Costa Rica, Lebanon, Libya, Romania and Uruguay, the law does not prosecute but pardons the perpetrator of rape, even if the victim is a minor, on the condition that he marries her (Aliou, 2000; Bruce, 2000; Center for Reproductive Law and Policy and Society for Feminist Analyses, 2000; IRIN, 2005; UNICEF, 2001). In some rural areas of Ethiopia, it is reported that men unable to pay the bride price abduct and rape adolescent girls in order to marry them. This is commonly driven by the prohibitive costs of bride price for impoverished men. Although the Ethiopian Constitution

bans early marriage, in a survey of 227 married women, 60 percent reported having been abducted before the age of 15, and 93 percent before the age of 20 (IRIN, 2005; Segni, 2002, in Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 2003a; 2003b). It is unclear how many of these abductions were either violent or controversial.

Early marriage is often seen by parents as a strategy for economic survival, may be perceived as a way to protect girls<sup>18</sup> in unsafe environments and can be related to parental status, financial and labour gains and acquiring reproductive rights. Virilocal residence (residence with the husband's family) compounds the problem, with parents sometimes unwilling to 'invest' in a child who will leave the natal home early, making returns on their investments low. Thus, parents may not send daughters to school. Polygynous marriages are often characterised by large age differences and generally perpetuate girls' powerlessness, lack of assets and servitude. In the Gambia, for example, almost 40 percent of marriages are polygynous (GCEDAW 2006, in Chant, forthcoming), and age gaps are often at least ten years, with men deliberately seeking younger women in order to be able to 'teach them how to be a good wife' (ibid). Parental and spousal authority, as discussed above, often results in early marriage, particularly where there is a lack of mothers' say in children's lives, although mothers also support early marriage and mothers-in-law often exercise considerable control over young brides (Chant, forthcoming), as described by this young Pakistani girl:

'If one decides oneself on whom to marry, then one does not have the support of the parents. You are bound to like the husband chosen for you by your parents. If one decides oneself and does not like the husband later then parents say it was your choice and you lose [...] you are alone [...] have no one to turn to and no support from the family and no security anywhere' (in Hamid et al., 2010).

Early marriage thus becomes considered a norm, as one young Hausa girl describes:

'Every parent would like to see the daughter married. It's normal practice among the Hausa that, at the age of 15 or so, one should get married. This reduces the burden on the family and brings peace to the family' (married women, 22, married at 15, polygamous, Nigeria, in Erulkar and Bello, 2007).

These characteristics of early marriage, along with lack of inheritance, lead to poor development, lack of agency and, sometimes, in the case of adolescent widows or daughters, destitution.

Most countries have declared 18 as the minimum legal age of marriage. Despite the sanctions on child marriage, and a slowly declining trend, more than 100 million girls are expected to marry between 2005 and 2015.<sup>19</sup> Recent UNICEF data indicate that, in 34 of 55 countries with comparable data, there has been no significant change in the percentage of women aged 20 to 24 married by 18, and only five countries have experienced a decrease of more than 10 percent (UNICEF, 2007). Other reports similarly stress that, even in areas that have seen a decline, there are regions and/or sub-regions where high rates of child marriage are resistant to change (Levine et al., 2009). Regional averages (UNFPA, 2004) for young women (aged 15 to 24) who were married before the age of 18 are alarming.<sup>20</sup> In Southern Asia, 48 percent of young women (nearly 10 million) are married before the age of 18, in Africa 42 percent and in Latin America and the Caribbean 29 percent, although regional averages often mask wide variations among countries (see Figure 4).

### Box 2: The pain of early marriage: voices of young Hausa girls in Africa

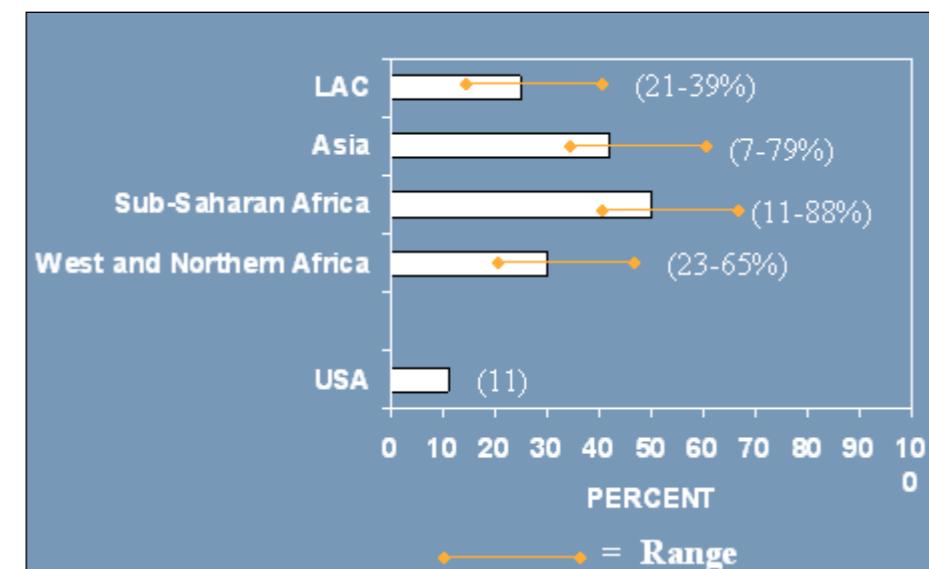
'They [co-wives] give me very little food and warn me not to tell our husband. Whatever I want, I have to ask for it from home [parents' house] and even right now I am sick with headaches and if I ask for money or medicine they will say they don't have any' (married girl, 14, married at 13, two pregnancies, first child died, two co-wives, Nigeria, in Erulkar and Bello, 2007).

'The first time I had sex with my husband, I felt serious pains and was bleeding. I had to tell my auntie and she gave me some medicine then I told her that I will never allow him to do that to me again. My auntie told me that if I stop after the first time, the wound will never heal. At that time my husband was a stubborn man and anytime he came to have sex with me, I just started crying. He would tell me that Allah is blessing and rewarding me so I should not be crying' (married girl, 14, married at 13, two pregnancies, first child died, two co-wives, Nigeria, in Erulkar and Bello, 2007).

In some countries, more than half of all girls under 18 are married. Specifically, the percentage of girls (aged 15 to 19) married by age 18 is 76 percent in Niger, 74 percent in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 54 percent in Afghanistan, 51 percent in Bangladesh and 50 percent in India (UNFPA, 2004). Although age at marriage is generally increasing, it is not uncommon to find girls married before the

**Figure 4: Child marriage – substantial variation within regions**

Proportion of girls married before 18



Source: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2004)

age of 15. In Ethiopia and some areas of West Africa, some girls get married as early as age seven.<sup>21</sup> In Bangladesh, 45 percent of young women between 25 and 29 were married by age 15.<sup>22</sup> A 1998 survey in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh found that nearly 14 percent of girls were married between the ages of 10 and 14.<sup>23</sup> And in Kebbi state of northern Nigeria, the average age of marriage for girls is just over 11 years, compared with the national average of 17.<sup>24</sup>

According to UNFPA (2004), married adolescents are typified by: large spousal age gaps; limited social support as a result of social isolation; limited educational attainment and no schooling options; intense pressure to become pregnant; increased risk of maternal and infant mortality; increased vulnerability to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs); restricted social mobility/freedom of movement; little access to modern media (TV, radio, newspapers); and lack of skills for the labour market. Additionally, gendered social norms of duty, obedience and altruism may result in girls disowning themselves (Brickell and Chant, 2010). All of these factors reduce girls' capabilities and development. This is exacerbated by both their physical immaturity and their lack of relative power and autonomy, leading to the potential for abuse and exploitation and physical and emotional distress (see Box 2).

Between the ages of 15 and 21 or so, young people are still maturing biologically. Neurological development continues during adolescence and into early adulthood (World Bank, 2006). Girls continue to develop and gain body strength, and nutrition is especially important if girls are to become pregnant. These processes of maturation are one reason why childbearing is very hazardous for young women under 20,

and why maternal mortality rates in this age group are so much higher than for women aged 20 to 39 (Marcus and Gavrilovic, 2010; Temin *et al.*, 2010) and why health complications are also more prevalent (Canning *et al.*, 2009, in Temin *et al.*, 2010).

Pregnancy-related mortality is a leading cause of death for girls aged 15 to 19 (WHO *et al.*, 2003). Women under 20 giving birth face double the risk of dying in childbirth compared with women over 20, and girls under age 15 are five times as likely to die as those in their 20s.<sup>25</sup> This leads to 60,000 to 70,000 girls aged 15 to 19 dying from complications of pregnancy and childbirth every year (WHO, 2008d, in Temin *et al.*, 2010). For each woman who dies, about 20 women survive but suffer from serious disease, disability or physical damage caused by complications of pregnancy or childbirth. Thus, adolescents account for just over 10 percent of births but 23 percent of the

**Women under 20 giving birth face double the risk of dying in childbirth compared with women over 20, and girls under age 15 are five times as likely to die as those in their 20s.**

- www.wpf.org

burden of disease from maternal conditions.<sup>26</sup> Compounding the reproductive problems they face, married adolescents have been neglected from the global adolescent reproductive health agenda because of the incorrect assumption that their married status ensures them a safe passage to adulthood.

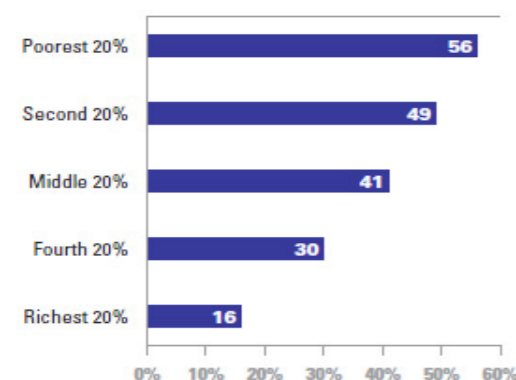
Meanwhile, a million or more children are left motherless each year as a result of maternal mortality. These children are three to ten times more likely to die within two years than children who live with both parents.<sup>27</sup>

Also of significance for girls are the mortality and health implications of abortion. In Mexico, early pregnancy is a significant problem, and there are considerable risks to girls' and adolescents' health in the absence of adequate reproductive health care and the illegality of abortions. Because of this, there are over 500,000 illegal abortions every year in Mexico, putting women's health at considerable risk. Fostering a national debate about the role of the state in preventing early and unwanted pregnancy has often been actively opposed by the Catholic Church. This has been a political issue that has been left unresolved, despite increases in political pluralism and growing awareness surrounding abortion. Although there has been no policy change in Mexico, the government has made improvements to the provision of contraceptives and post-abortion care, which has reduced health risks and abortion incidence (Kulczycki, 2007).

These deprivations, which affect young mothers and also their infants and children as they grow to adulthood, have

**Figure 5: Likelihood of child marriage by wealth quintile**

Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married or in union before age 18, by wealth index quintile (1987-2006).



Source: UNICEF global databases (2007) based on data from MICS, DHS and other national surveys



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Malawi, Dickson village, Nr. Kasiya. Zeneti Julias (22) at home with her son; she moved to her husband's village after they married, to discover that she had become his second wife.

intergenerational implications, with social and economic costs. The links to poverty are clear. Child marriage is most common among the poorest 20 percent of the population (UNICEF, 2005). Maternal mortality rates are around 20 to 50 percent higher for the poorest 20 percent of households than for the richest quintile (UNICEF, 2009).

Early marriage is thus intimately linked to a lack of girls' agency and capabilities. Girls' powerlessness to make a choice regarding age of marriage leads to early pregnancy, deprives them of education and can leave them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Lack of agency also contributes to their assetlessness both within and after marriage.

#### 4. Addressing discriminatory family codes: Initiatives and challenges

In order to tackle discriminatory family codes, a combination of approaches is necessary, focusing on reforming formal and informal legal codes alongside efforts to promote legal literacy among a wide range of state and non-state actors. Complementary initiatives to empower girls and young

women, and to raise awareness among their male counterparts of the potentially harmful effects of unequal family codes, are also essential.

#### Harmonising laws

As already discussed, legal harmonisation efforts are in process in multiple countries to address discrimination within family codes. Changing and harmonising law is a vital first step. In Sierra Leone in 2007, Parliament passed the Registration of Customary Marriages and Divorce Act, the Domestic Violence Act and the Devolution of Estates Act. These acts address inequalities in family relations, inheritance and ownership, and bring customary law closer towards alignment with international human rights standards. The laws entitle women to acquire and dispose of property in their own name. The minimum age for customary marriages is raised to 18, and consent is now required by both parties. Customary marriages and divorces have to be registered with the state. Dowries do not need to be returned on divorce and mothers are able to apply for child maintenance when a father

Box 3: Girls’ education as a tool to counter discriminatory family codes

The Female Stipend Programme (FSP) in Bangladesh was launched nationwide in 1994. It targets rural girls aged 11 to 14 with a stipend that is conditional on 75 percent attendance and a 45 percent score in end-of-year tests, as well as on the girls remaining unmarried until sitting the Secondary School Certificate or reaching the age of 18. The project originally aimed to keep girls in school in order to delay marriage and motherhood; over time, the objectives have shifted to include access to paid employment and broader empowerment of women.

The annual stipend ranges from \$12 for Grade 6 to \$36 for Grade 10 and is awarded directly to the girls through their own bank account. This feature aims to teach girls about banking practices and to teach them saving habits. Each recipient is allowed to withdraw cash from the bank independently. In addition to covering full tuition, exam costs, text books, school supplies, uniforms and transport for the girls, programme measures have: 1) increased the number of female teachers in secondary schools; 2) educated communities on the importance of girls’ education and encouraged parents to get involved through parent education committees; 3) improved school infrastructure; and 4) reformed curricula, adding occupational skills training for immediate application in labour markets.

Impacts have been significant. In 1991/92, only 27 percent of girls were enrolled in secondary school and only 5 percent of those completed the cycle. In 2002, girls accounted for 54 percent of all secondary school enrolments in the programme areas, with attendance (91 percent) and achievement (89 percent) surpassing those of boys. Overall, the programme claims to have tripled female enrolments in secondary school: 3.9 million girls were enrolled in secondary schools in 2005 compared with 1.1 million in 1995. Meanwhile, between 1994 and 2000, the proportion of married girls dropped from 29 to 14 percent among girls aged 13 to 15 and from 72 to 64 percent among girls aged 16 to 19.

The number of girls receiving scholarships has steadily increased. Some 875,858 girls were receiving scholarships by 1999, and the programme has reached 121 of Bangladesh’s 507 sub-districts. The programme is funded by multiple donors, with a focus also on providing teacher training and performance incentives to schools and improving facilities, especially latrines for girls. A rigorous impact evaluation is being planned for the second phase of activities to more clearly determine causal attribution for observed changes.

Source: Grown (2006); Herz and Sperling (2004); World Bank (2003; 2006)

is not forthcoming on this. Under the Devolution of Estates Act, wives and children under customary law as well as co-habiting partners have a legal right to inheritance. When a husband dies intestate, the majority of the estate will revert to the wife and children instead of the parents and brothers.<sup>28</sup> CEDAW has played a hugely important role in supporting these and other changes in many countries.<sup>29</sup>

Legal harmonisation efforts sometimes meet opposition. In Mali, a new Family Code was adopted in 2009, setting the legal minimum age for marriage at 18, recognising only secular marriages and expanding inheritance rights to girls. Muslims appeared divided on the issue.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, according to the secretary of Mali’s highest ruling Islamic Council, the latter was going to block its enforcement: ‘This code is a shame, treason [for Muslims] [...] We are not against the spirit of the code, but we want a code appropriate for Mali that is adapted to its societal values. We will fight with all our resources so that this code is not promulgated or enacted’ (IRIN, 2010). The secretary went on to say that Parliament ignored religious leaders’ suggestions and bowed to donor wishes. By contrast, the president of a national women’s association of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) said that the Family Code was ‘a constitutional and democratic demand’ that promotes social justice (ibid).

**Promoting legal literacy among officials and communities**

After legal reforms have been secured, supporting officials and communities to effectively utilise these new legal tools is the next critical challenge. As such, a range of legal literacy programmes has been developed. One key example is the work by the Commonwealth Secretariat which, drawing on the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 to 2015, aims to create active dialogue between national women’s machineries, law ministries, the judiciary, legal practitioners, academics, traditional chiefs, religious and community leaders and adjudicators of customary law and practices. This has been achieved through a series of regional colloquia that aim to provide training and raise awareness, as well as to equip key actors with the information and skills they need to facilitate change.

In Kenya, for instance, legal literacy efforts undertaken by the Umoja Uaso Women’s Group in Samburu have focused on facilitating women’s understanding of their land rights in both statutory and customary law, in the context of grazing land for cattle and owning land and livestock in their own name for social protection. Similarly, in India, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funds the training of lawyers and counsellors in two Indian states on various women’s issues, including the legal age of marriage.

Within networks of women’s self-help groups, these legal professionals also conduct workshops for local police and religious leaders on the issue of child marriage. The network also successfully encouraged the government of one Indian state to amend its Child Marriage Restraint Act and to create a provision to appoint child marriage prevention officers (USAID, n.d.).

**Empowerment and awareness-raising programmes for girls**

There are, however, significant gaps between law and actual practice, and changes in law need to be reinforced by a wide variety of other actions. These include supporting girls’ education, which is linked to improving girls’ and women’s power in the household and improving their income-earning potential. There is good evidence that girls’ and women’s increased income generation and waged employment can lead to positive changes in their lives, such as improved bargaining power within the household, increased access to information and support networks and increased self-confidence (Salway *et al.*, 2005). Evidence from Bangladesh shows much greater mobility and intra-household bargaining power among women with independent incomes, although violence is high and women and girls still carry high levels of unwaged domestic labour alongside waged labour (ibid), an issue which is discussed further in Chapter 2 on Son Bias. Women’s waged labour additionally needs much better conditions in terms of opportunities, wages and safety.

Actions to empower girls through education also have the intention of delaying marriage and are another promising approach to addressing discriminatory family codes. In Ethiopia, for instance, girls’ advisory committees have been established in more than 3,700 public schools in eight regions of the country, to prevent child marriages and encourage both unmarried and married girls to attend school. The committees communicate with parents, teachers and religious leaders about the dangers of child marriage and the importance of girls continuing their education. They have been responsible for stopping more than 4,000 child marriages and keeping many more girls in school (USAID, n.d.) (see also Box 3).

Ethiopia’s Berhane Hewan (‘Light for Eve’) programme also seeks to delay marriage for girls by incentivising families to keep girls in school. Run by the Ethiopian Ministry of Youth and Sport and Amhara Regional Bureau of Youth and Sport, the programme targets unmarried girls between 10 and 19. Parents agree that daughters will not be married for two years in exchange for the benefits of formal or informal education. On completion, a goat is presented to the family. Alongside this, community dialogues are held every two weeks with elder members of the community to discuss harmful practices and their effects. The full impact of the programme is not clear, but an endline survey found that significantly more girls

were in school (96 percent compared with 89 percent at the project start); none of the Mosebo girls had got married in the previous year; girls’ knowledge of STIs had improved; and girls were more likely to use contraceptives (three-quarters of sexually experienced girls in Mosebo had used a method of contraception by the end of the study). Girls from Mosebo were much less likely than girls at the control site to have married, suggesting that the programme may have delayed marriage (Erulkar and Muthengi, 2009).

In the Gambia, Mothers Clubs aim at supporting girls’ education and thereby delaying marriage. In some poor regions, girls account for only 19 percent of students in primary schools. Supported by UNICEF and the Forum for African Women Educationalists, mothers undertake a range of income-generating activities and have been provided with labour-saving devices to release girls from work and pay for educational costs. Since the programme’s inception, women have established 65 Mothers Clubs in three regions of the Gambia. The movement is having a visible impact on girls’ education. Girls’ enrolment rates have increased by on average 34 percent, and incidence of girls withdrawing from school owing to early marriage has diminished sharply (UNICEF, 2006).

Other programmes focus on reproductive health information provision and services. In India, for instance, the Population Council is piloting an initiative to strengthen the reproductive health of adolescent married girls. The project provides health information to adolescent married girls, young husbands and influential family members as well as setting up a network among adolescents. Through these networks, girls establish groups to deal with certain issues, such as savings funds for health costs, etc. Initial evaluations have shown positive results in improving reproductive health and practice and girls’ autonomy and relationships (Haberland, 2007). Similarly, the Mères-Educatrices Project in Burkina Faso involves raising awareness on reproductive health and sex education among married adolescent girls. Girls are visited by young mothers who have been trained by the project to provide information and discuss issues of reproductive health and pregnancy. Additionally, they provide vitamin A and iron supplements. The project has expanded its outreach and increased married adolescent girls’ access to community resources as well as raising awareness on reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and FGM/C (Haberland, 2007).

And in Yemen, where approximately half of all girls are married by age 17 and 14 percent are married by age 14, USAID supports the Ministry of Health to increase the age of marriage in the rural Amran governorate. Trained male and female outreach educators inform community members about the negative health and social consequences of child marriage. Activities include mobile clinics, community awareness sessions in schools involving parents, teachers and parents

Box 4: Engaging with men around family planning

In Mali, with funding from USAID, an initiative of the Ministry of Health engages Malian authorities and religious leaders to promote family planning, birth spacing and a focus on men in family planning decisions, since men are the primary decision makers on the use of family planning methods. The engagement of religious leaders who are respected and influential is crucial. Subsequent to their training, religious leaders have started speaking openly in public and in mosques about the importance of dialogue between husbands and wives and men’s engagement to increase women’s access to family planning services (USAID, 2005; 2008). Also in Mali, the Network of Religious Leaders in West Africa, supported by the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), has sent a message that women’s participation in politics is not contrary to Islam. In the communal elections in 2009, there was a 4.3 percent increase in the number of female candidates and a 1.7 percent increase in the number of seats won by women (UNIFEM, 2010). In Cameroon, traditional chiefs were provided with UNIFEM-supported training on women’s human rights based on CEDAW. In 2009, 25 tribal chiefdoms abolished harmful widowhood rites. In another part of the country, 16 tribal chiefs banned discriminatory practices through a signed declaration that ensures that women can inherit property and that women have greater flexibility in their interactions with family members after widowhood. In a few chiefdoms, women have also been included in the traditional councils (ibid).

and engagement of religious leaders. The Ministry of Religious Affairs in Amran has issued a directive that all religious leaders publicly address the negative social and health consequences of child marriage in Friday sermons. Momentum generated by this project has also contributed to the Parliament putting forth a policy to increase the legal age of marriage to 17, which is now awaiting the President’s signature (USAID, n.d.).

Involving men

Legal and educational initiatives (both girls’ schooling and education of communities in relation to harmful practices) are making progress in changing discriminatory family codes, through improving women’s capabilities and earning capacity. However, there is a need also to address the incentives for change among those who have vested interests in the status quo. Development agencies are increasingly targeting men as part of the problem and as an important part of its solution: they are involved in income-generating activities, in anti-FGM/C campaigns, in anti-violence and in improved sexual and reproductive health initiatives. Indeed, there is a growing body of research and action on socialisation processes and the versions of manhood they produce, and serious interest in promoting less aggressive masculinities in regions with high prevalence of public and domestic violence, with a particular focus on young males and male peer cultures (Bannon and Correia, 2006). Actions related to family codes include clinic-based efforts to engage men in primary health care and specialised sexual health clinics. There is also growing emphasis on men’s role as fathers (Barker and Ricardo, 2006) (see also Box 4). Engaging men more fully in promoting the health and development of their children is pursued through educational sessions, group discussions and support groups for adult and adolescent fathers. There are also media campaigns to promote more positive images of men through their active involvement in their children’s lives. Also, many HIV/AIDS programmes

in sub-Saharan Africa are engaging men to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the disease. Some NGOs also target HIV-positive fathers to provide them with medical care and encourage them to support their partners and children. These actions are part of wider strategies providing alternative positive masculine models to young men (Barker, 2006a). It is clear that education on gendered roles and fatherhood needs to begin in schools and men and boys need to be part of sexual and reproductive health programmes typically aimed at girls and women. Importantly, though, boys and young men also need positive roles in communities, and this is typically linked to gainful employment to improve male identity and behaviour. Issues of gender equality should be included in the workplace and in workforce training, and a focus should be on changing peer group and community norms and making gender visible to young men, not limiting it to women and girls (Barker, 2006b). In Maputo, Mozambique, in September 2009, at Machava Soccer Stadium, where Mozambique competed against Kenya for World Cup qualification, the REDE HOPEM (Men for Change Network) marched wearing T-shirts and carrying banners with anti-violence messages such as ‘kick the ball, NOT the women.’ This network is the first male network in the country to work on violence prevention and HIV/AIDS, by organising public debates and training sessions on masculinities and rights with UNIFEM support. UNIFEM also sponsored the Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys, which urged UN agencies, NGOs and governments to increase their efforts and resources to engage boys and men in overcoming gender inequalities.

5. Lessons learnt and policy implications

A 2009 CEDAW recommendation (Halperin-Kaddari, 2009) notes that changing laws around property and inheritance has happened very slowly and that: ‘inequality in the family is

the most damaging of all forces in women’s lives, underlying all other aspects of discrimination and disadvantage, and is sheltered by ideologies and cultures.’ It also notes that that there has been ‘limited engagement by state parties with the issue of family law, and many measure which have been taken fall short in addressing discriminatory family laws, traditional or customary patterns of marriage and marital behaviour, courts and tribunals that deal with the family.’ Discriminatory family codes are changing, however, in part as a result of political leadership and a wide range of policy and programme initiatives intended to improve women’s and girls’ capabilities. The success of reforms depends very much on the willingness of governments and communities to challenge longstanding traditions. Where they make this commitment, change follows. The challenges cannot be underestimated, not least those that lie in changing existing vested interests and harmful male attitudes. But a growing number of examples exist of programmes and policies that do make this change a reality. These include:

- Initiatives which promote the harmonisation of customary and formal legal codes so as to eradicate discriminatory family code provisions;

- Legal literacy programmes for officials, especially judicial personnel, and communities which aim to sensitise a range of state and non-state actors as to gender-sensitive family code reforms;
- Complementary empowerment and awareness-raising programmes for girls, including those that promote their retention in school, prevent early marriage and enable access to reproductive health education and services and economic empowerment initiatives;
- Initiatives which engage with men to promote more gender-egalitarian family planning decision-making processes and parenting practices.

The results for girls and young women are: later marriage; decreased fertility; far fewer maternal and infant deaths; improved health of girls; reductions in physical harm against girls and in linked poverty and health costs; increased educational attainment and linked capabilities; increased asset accumulation; and increased income-earning potential. This all leads to gains in terms of poverty status and reductions in life-course and intergenerational poverty transfers. Non-discriminatory family codes are ultimately a win-win situation for all in the household, men and women, boys and girls alike.

Notes

1

There are many ways to classify global legal systems. This suggestion is taken from JuriGlobe, based at the University of Ottawa ([www.juriglobe.ca/eng/sys-juri/intro.php](http://www.juriglobe.ca/eng/sys-juri/intro.php)).

2

Much of this law is based on Judeo-Christian law.

3

[www.juriglobe.ca/eng/sys-juri/intro.php](http://www.juriglobe.ca/eng/sys-juri/intro.php).

4

Most newly created Islamic states have turned to European codes of law, retaining Muslim law for family and personal matters (Marcotte, 2003).

5

See also [www.juriglobe.ca/eng/sys-juri/intro.php](http://www.juriglobe.ca/eng/sys-juri/intro.php).

6

[www.juriglobe.ca/eng/sys-juri/intro.php](http://www.juriglobe.ca/eng/sys-juri/intro.php).

7

[www.juriglobe.ca/eng/sys-juri/intro.php](http://www.juriglobe.ca/eng/sys-juri/intro.php). and Atlas of Gender and Development (OECD, 2009).

8

[www.unifem.org/cedaw30/success\\_stories](http://www.unifem.org/cedaw30/success_stories); [www.kenyalawreports.or.ke/family/case\\_download.php?go=29580681357579819795393](http://www.kenyalawreports.or.ke/family/case_download.php?go=29580681357579819795393);

9

[www.kenyalaw.org/Downloads\\_FreeCases/SUCCESSION\\_CAUSE\\_No\\_1263%20OF%202000.pdf](http://www.kenyalaw.org/Downloads_FreeCases/SUCCESSION_CAUSE_No_1263%20OF%202000.pdf).

10

[www.interights.org/showdoc/index.htm?keywords=Mami&dir=databases&refid=3253](http://www.interights.org/showdoc/index.htm?keywords=Mami&dir=databases&refid=3253).

11

In a United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) survey of selected countries across Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa □ including Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, India and Suriname.

12

[http://africa4womensrights.org/public/Dossier\\_of\\_Claims/SenegalENG.pdf](http://africa4womensrights.org/public/Dossier_of_Claims/SenegalENG.pdf).

13

Despite global activism, women’s landholding remains low, at 1 to 2 percent of titled land worldwide (USAID, 2003, in Cooper, 2010).

14

Evidence from Bangladesh suggests that marriages without dowry arrangements in fact see reduced incidence of violence: ‘Paying no dowry is just as protective, if not more so, in terms of preventing abuse, as the largest dowry payments’ (IRIN, 2005).

15

In 1999, by the founder of the International Society against Dowry and Bride Burning in India.

16

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that: ‘Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others’ (Article 17(1)), but this is not legally binding. The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights is clear that every child has a right to protection without discrimination based on sex (Article 24(1)) and the Human Rights Committee has stated that this protection must include measures to remove discrimination in inheritance. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child asserts (2003) that: ‘State parties are particularly reminded to ensure that both law and practice support the inheritance and property rights of orphans, with particular attention to underlying gender-based discrimination as it may interfere with the fulfillment of these rights.’

17

India outlawed the modern dowry system in 1961.

18

In-laws can also insist that a widow should undergo sexual ‘cleansing’ from her deceased husband’s evil spirits by having sexual intercourse with a male of lower social status chosen by them. In order to avoid the practice, widows decide to give up all their legal rights to property (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

19

Early marriage is also seen to protect girls against HIV, although this assumption is erroneous. In India, 75 percent of people living with HIV are married. Married couples exhibit low condom use and low safe sex practices. See [www.childinfo.org/marriage.html](http://www.childinfo.org/marriage.html).

20

Based on girls aged 10 to 19 in developing countries, excluding China, projected to marry before their 18th birthday (Clark, 2004, in [www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts\\_child\\_marriage.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm)).

21

[www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts\\_child\\_marriage.htm#ftn4](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm#ftn4).

22

[www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts\\_child\\_marriage.htm#ftn6](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm#ftn6).

23

[www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts\\_child\\_marriage.htm#ftn7](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm#ftn7).

24

[www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts\\_child\\_marriage.htm#ftn8](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm#ftn8).

- 24 [www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts\\_child\\_marriage.htm#ftn9](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm#ftn9).
- 25 [www.wpf.org/reproductive\\_rights\\_article/facts](http://www.wpf.org/reproductive_rights_article/facts).
- 26 The social norms and practices that result in early marriage also influence other aspects of girls' choices, or lack of them, outside of the institution of marriage. Because of social stigma (and illegality in some countries), women having unsafe abortions in much of the world are predominantly young and unmarried. In sub-Saharan Africa, 60 percent of women who have unsafe abortions are 15 to 24 years old; in Latin America and the Caribbean, the corresponding figure is 43 percent (World Bank, 2006).
- 27 [www.wpf.org/reproductive\\_rights\\_article/facts](http://www.wpf.org/reproductive_rights_article/facts).
- 28 [www.unifem.org/news/story\\_detail.php?StoryID=606](http://www.unifem.org/news/story_detail.php?StoryID=606) and [www.unifem.org/cedaw30/success\\_stories/](http://www.unifem.org/cedaw30/success_stories/).
- 29 These bills were before Parliament at the time of Sierra Leone's last report to the CEDAW Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2007), which urged the state to place the highest priority on the enactment of these bills (Para 11). The committee remained concerned about provisions in the Constitution which mean that the principle of equal rights does not apply to matters of family law, and urged the repeal of this section of the Constitution (Para 13).
- 30 One stated: 'We cannot ban traditional marriages' and asked followers to 'curse government officials who voted yes to the family code.' One of five Parliament members who voted against the code said that he could not risk upsetting his constituents: 'I cannot go before my voters and tell them that religious marriages are not legal [...] that a woman should no longer obey her husband and that they should respect one another equally [...] If I do this, voters will punish me in the next elections.' Yet another Muslim leader, based in the capital, said that the code contained necessary changes: 'Women have always been considered second rank here, which is not normal. We are all equal. I do not see any problem with the article that women and men should have mutual respect. If women have the money to contribute to family finances, I would not be against that' (IRIN, 2010). The reaction was similar in Uganda.

# 2

## Son bias



# Son bias

## 1. Son bias and poverty dynamics

The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) Son Preference Sub-Index draws on Amartya Sen’s 1990 work on ‘missing women,’ or the number of women who could have been expected had girls received equal health care, medicine and nutrition. Sen hypothesised that international distortions in sex ratios equate to as many as 100 million missing women and can be explained by female foeticide and ‘gendercide’ – the systematic and often lethal neglect of and underinvestment in girls and women. Klasen and Wink (2003) further developed this approach to estimate sex ratio<sup>1</sup> differences over time and space, and it is their methodology that underpins the country assessments in the SIGI rankings.

In this chapter, however, we conceptualise intra-household gender biases more broadly. We include differential investments in and care and nurture of boys and girls from conception, which encompass a spectrum of negative developmental outcomes, from mortality through to human capital development deficits, time poverty and psychosocial ill-being. To signal this broader understanding of unequal treatment between sons and daughters, we refer to the social institution as ‘son bias.’ It is important to note from the outset that imbalanced sex ratios tend to be limited to certain geographical regions (Asia and the Middle East and North Africa region). However, our argument is that general intra-household differentials between sons and daughters are more widespread and that there is good evidence on a number of indicators of this gender bias across regions.

The chapter begins by reviewing the factors that underpin son bias, and then turns to a discussion of the multidimensional impacts of such practices on girls’ experiences of poverty and vulnerability. We recognise that son bias is not shaped by poverty alone, and indeed is found among upper wealth quintile groups in some countries and communities,<sup>2</sup> but we focus our discussion here on linkages between poverty, vulnerability and son bias over the life-course and in intergenerational terms. The chapter also focuses on promising initiatives aimed at challenging the norms and practices that underpin son bias.

## The patterning of son bias

The most typical demonstration of son preference is the relative neglect of daughters, although the most extreme form is female infanticide<sup>3</sup> – the intentional killing of baby girls. In many cases, however, female infanticide has been supplanted by sex identification testing and sex-selective abortion, shifting postnatal discrimination to prenatal discrimination (Klasen and Wink, 2003). A 2008 World Bank study drawing on Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data estimated son preference based on the likelihood of families having another child if they have only daughters (Filmer *et al.*, 2008). It found that, in Europe and Central Asia, families are 9.4 percentage points more likely to have an additional child if they have only daughters. In South Asia, they are 7.8 percentage points more likely, in the Middle East and North Africa 5.8 percentage points more likely and in East Asia/Pacific 3.7 percentage points more likely. They found no evidence of son preference by this measure in sub-Saharan Africa (surveys did find a subjective preference for sons but this did not translate into demographic ratios) or Latin America (where there seems to be a preference expressed for daughters).

This is largely borne out by SIGI findings (with the exception of Europe and Central Asia), as Table 1 indicates. Latin America and the Caribbean, and sub-Saharan Africa have considerably smaller scores, indicating lower prevalence of son preference. These regional trends do, however, hide significantly higher ratios in a small subset of countries, especially India and China.<sup>4</sup> Presence of other siblings and sibling order also have a strong effect on measures taken to ensure that future children are girls. For example, in India the first child is much less likely to be aborted for being a girl than subsequent children (Jackson, 2010). Overall, neglect of girls is generally more severe for later-born girls and for girls with elder sisters, and this is particularly the case in rural areas (Klasen and Wink, 2003). In India, the sex ratio of second-born children has been estimated at 716 to 1,000 boys in the incidence of the first child being a girl, compared with an excess of girls – 1,140 girls to 1,000 boys – if the first-born is a boy and 910 girls to 1,000 boys for first born children (Sahni *et al.*, 2008).

Table 1: SIGI son preference scores by geographical region

	Overall average
Latin America and Caribbean	0.01
Europe and Central Asia	0.03
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.04
East Asia and Pacific	0.19
Middle East and North Africa	0.38

Source: <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=GID2>.

2. Accounting for son bias

A substantial body of evidence shows that son bias is shaped by a complex interplay of economic, socio-cultural and demographic factors. Adding to this complexity is the fact that intra-household attitudes and behaviours intersect with societal-level gender biases and in turn perpetuate both ‘private’ and ‘public’ sphere discriminatory norms and practices. In this section, we provide an overview of the key explanations for the survival and malleability of this social institution, and the ways in which these intersect with poverty dynamics.

Economic factors

The Economist noted in its March 2010 Leader on the perils of son preference that gendercide affects rich and poor alike, but that there is a substantial body of evidence highlighting the economic rationale for son bias. Arguments centre around the economic contributions that sons are able to make over their lifetime to the family on the one hand, and the costs daughters exact on the other (see Box 1). Sons are expected to maintain financial and social ties to the household throughout their lives and, in developing country contexts, where social security systems are underdeveloped, many parents rely on their sons’ future earnings for their old-age security (Jayaraman *et al.*, 2009; Wang, 2005). Indeed, 51 percent of respondents in a fertility survey in Hubei province identified the primary motivation for a son as the desire for old-age support, with continuation of the family line a distant second (20 percent) (Ding and Zhang, 2009). Moreover, county-level pension programmes in rural China have been found to lower the sex ratio at birth by 9 percent (Ebenstein and Leung, 2010).<sup>5</sup> Patrilineal inheritance systems spanning a wide range of cultural and religious traditions (from Confucianism to Islam, from Hindu law to Kenyan inheritance customs) also mean that sons inherit property,<sup>6</sup> exacerbating discrimination against girls and women and motivating prioritised investments in boys (Jackson, 2010; Quisumbing, 2007) (Chapter 1 on Discriminatory Family Codes).

The economic ‘rationality’ of these practices is often reinforced by the fact that daughters are only transitory members of their natal families before their marriage, upon

which they move to and contribute to the families of parents-in-laws, typically becoming physically and psychologically isolated from their birth home (Chu *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, female employment is often undervalued, making men potentially more productive future ‘assets.’ This is especially the case in rural areas, if, as discussed in Chapter 3 on Limited Resource Rights and Entitlements, women are not involved in commercial agriculture and/or do not have property rights (Gupta and Dubey, 2006). In other contexts, however, parents may seek to mobilise resources from older unmarried daughters to improve the family budget in general and the educational outcomes of sons in particular. This can be paid work (often unskilled or semi-skilled factory work in urban areas) or household work, which frees parents up to work longer hours (Chu *et al.*, 2006).

In cultures which practise dowry payments, daughters are often also seen as an economic liability on account of the high cost of weddings, as highlighted by adverts for mobile abortion clinics in India which cry ‘Pay 50 rupees now to save 50,000 rupees later’ (Basu and Jong, 1999). Diamond-Smith *et al.* (2008) note that one-fifth of women surveyed identified dowry payments as the reason they did not want daughters. Rather than declining with the onset of modernity, these costs are escalating over time, and dowry payments may equate to as much as two-thirds of a household’s assets (Nolan, 2009) or several times more than total annual household income (Anderson, 2007). This owes in part to expectations that girls will be educated, with associated costs; the increasing demands that a consumer-oriented culture exerts; new economic trends, especially increasing international remittances, which are inflating dowry demands; as well as the potential opportunity for social mobility which marriage represents, especially for poor low-caste families (Diamond-Smith *et al.*, 2008; Pande and Astone, 2007). It is important to note that this is particularly burdensome in households where, because of parental desire for a son, there are multiple daughters, as parents continue to have children in an effort to have sons (Bélanger, 2010; Lundberg, 2005).

Finally, it is important to point out the linkages between female income and education (Fuse, 2008). Qian (2006) found that increasing female income, holding male income

Box 1: Links between son bias and changing economic systems

Although son bias is often referred to as an ancient practice, it is also a dynamic one, often influenced by changing economic structures. Incidence of infanticide declined in Maoist China, except during for the famine period of 1959 to 1961, but is thought to have intensified under the economic reform policies of the 1980s. Decollectivisation restored the family as the locus of social and economic security for rural Chinese. It increased the value of male labour by designating the rural household as the basic unit of agricultural production, and this was also reflected in smaller land allocations to families with daughters during the 1980s land reforms.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, declining social support and services in rural areas have strengthened the need for sons to provide such support.

In India, some analysts argue that the lower prevalence of son bias in the rice-growing areas in the east and south compared with the predominantly wheat-growing areas of the west and north is related to the relative value of women’s agricultural labour in these two cultivation systems: high in the former and low in the latter. Accordingly, as a result of the green revolution of the 1970s, which reduced dependence on female agricultural labour, women’s economic value declined, arguably strengthening son bias proclivities.

Source: Chen and Summerfield (2007); Diamond-Smith *et al.* (2008); Li (2007); Pande and Astone (2007); Srinivasan (2005).

constant, improves survival rates for girls, whereas increasing male income, holding female income constant, worsens survival rates for girls. Increasing female income increases educational attainment of all children, whereas increasing male income decreases educational attainment for girls and has no effect on boys’ educational attainment. However, this can

change with birth order: Wang (2005) noted that the deficit in the number of girls born as second children was more than twice as high among educated as among illiterate mothers, and may indicate easier access to and greater affordability of prenatal ultrasound in educated individuals.

Social factors

As highlighted by the perpetuation of son bias practices in some immigrant communities in high-income Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (e.g. Almond *et al.*, 2009),<sup>8</sup> intra-household gender discrimination is also strongly influenced by socio-cultural factors, especially in Asia and the Middle East and North Africa. Social prestige and the fear of social stigma are key reasons (see Box 2). Jin *et al.* (2007) noted that, in China, because the power structure of the community favours men, having a son in the family provides a sense of security and higher social status, whereas families without a son may be subject to community ridicule. Similarly, Gupta and Dubey (2006) noted that, in India, even though female offspring may

Among women, even though there is recognition that daughters may provide greater affection and emotional support, the ‘ability’ to produce a son is a critical determinant of her status within the family.

- Diamond-Smith *et al.* (2008)

be just as capable of offering support, there may be stigma associated with receiving such support from daughters.

Sons also confer a sense of living up to culturally sanctioned gender expectations. A survey in Vietnam, for instance, found that, for some male respondents, having a son was associated with masculinity (being a ‘real man’) and with being blessed (UNFPA and ISDS, 2007). Among women, even though there is recognition that daughters may provide greater affection and emotional support, the ‘ability’ to produce a son is a critical determinant of her status within the family (Diamond-Smith *et al.*, 2008). Indeed, in many societies men and women who lack a male heir are often looked down on as ‘failed reproducers’ (Bélanger, 2010). Osaranen (2008) notes that, in Africa, sons are preferred in order to perpetuate the family name, with communities carrying out prayers for fecundity to wish young couples sons or ‘sons and daughters, with sons taking precedence over daughters,’ as a girl loses her identity with marriage. In Latin America, there appears to be less evidence of son preference, as reflected in demographic ratios. Some research suggests that mothers have a slight preference for daughters (Filmer *et al.*, 2008); other studies suggest mixed preferences between countries and children, depending on order and siblings (Cruces and Galiani, 2007). However, there has been little research on social factors behind the sex preferences for children in Latin America. In China, research indicates that the most serious perceived gender inequality for many women is that they anticipate they will be deeply discriminated against if they fail to have a son (Argnani *et al.*, 2004; Dubuc and Coleman, 2007; IRIN, 2005).

Son bias is also reinforced by religious and cultural traditions in a number of societies (see Box 3). Such beliefs can be deeply entrenched, as highlighted by anthropological evidence from Vietnam where the *Doi Moi* market-oriented reforms in the 1980s brought about a return of pre-socialist funeral and cult rituals that demand a male heir, thereby reinforcing the desire for sons (UNFPA and ISDS, 2007).

Box 2: Traditional proverbs about son bias

‘With one son you have a descendant, with 10 daughters you have nothing’ (Vietnamese proverb)

‘Raising a daughter is like watering your neighbour’s garden’ (Punjabi proverb)

‘She is a true wife who has borne a son’ (Indian scripture – Manu Smriti)

‘The birth of a girl grant elsewhere, here grant a son’ (Indian ancient text – Atharva Veda)

‘The birth of a boy is welcomed with shouts of joys and firecrackers but when a girl is born the neighbours say nothing’ (Chinese saying)

‘When a son is born, Let him sleep on the bed, Clothe him with fine clothes, And give him jade to play [...] When a daughter is born, Let her sleep on the ground, Wrap her in common wrappings, And give broken tiles to play’ (China Book of Songs, 1000-700 BC?)

‘Oh God I beg of you, I touch your feet time and again, Next birth don’t give me a daughter, Give me Hell instead’ (Uttar Pradesh folk song)

‘*Abu-banat* [father of daughters]’ (Arabic insult)

‘May you die’ (approximate translation for an ‘endearment’ in parts of Pakistan)

Societal gender inequities also play an important role in perpetuating son bias. Osaranen (2008) notes that female foeticide is perceived by many women as a ‘sober acknowledgement of the miseries they suffer in oppressive patriarchal societies’ and can even be seen as a positive deed. ‘It is better they die than live like me’ or, as one reproductive health professional in India noted: ‘You can’t wish away centuries of thinking by saying boys and girls are equals ... It is better to get rid of an unwanted child than to make it suffer all its life.’

Demographic variables also shape son bias practices. Education appears to play an important role (Fuse, 2008). Mothers married to illiterate husbands are approximately 10 times more likely to prefer a son compared with those married to highly educated husbands; women’s education and access to media at individual and village levels are strongly associated with weaker son preference (Pande and Astone, 2007). There is also some limited evidence that son bias is more prevalent in rural areas (except in Latin America). Pande and Astone (2007) argue that, in spatially disadvantaged locales, such as remote mountainous villages, there is likely to be a greater need for sons as a source of physical protection, given the likely absence of public authorities that can protect them from violent attackers.

Box 3: Religious underpinnings of son bias

According to Confucian belief, family lineage can be continued only through a male child. One of the three grave unfilial acts is to fail to have a son (UNFPA and ISDS, 2007). When a Hindu or Sikh parent dies, a son must carry out the last rites; if not, the very devout believe they will not reach heaven. And although girls have some importance in Hinduism – giving away a daughter in marriage (*kanyadaan*) is considered meritorious – sons are perceived to carry on family lineage in a way daughters cannot (Pande and Astone, 2007). In the case of Islam, although Ebenstein and Leung (2010) note that there is evidence in the theological literature of lower degrees of daughter aversion than in Hinduism, Muslim law does sanction inheritances for sons which are doubly as large as those of daughters (IRIN, 2005). In parts of Africa, sons are also preferred in order to perpetuate the family name and perform their parents’ burial rites, whereas a girl loses her identity with marriage (Ebenstein and Leung, 2010).<sup>9</sup>

3. Impacts of son preference on poverty dynamics

Son preference can have a range of impacts on gendered poverty dynamics. The best-researched are those on mortality and sex ratios, but a number of other effects also shape the poverty and vulnerability trajectories of girls across their life-course, and potentially those of their offspring. These include nutrition and health status, educational status, time use, involvement in child labour and psychosocial well-being. We discuss each of these in turn below, drawing on a range of quantitative and qualitative evidence from global studies.

Mortality and biased sex ratios

In a number of countries (largely in Asia and North Africa), girls face discrimination even before birth, evidenced by high rates of abortions and orphaned girls as a result of the preference to raise sons rather than daughters.<sup>10</sup> Since Sen’s 100 million missing women estimate, other studies have found that this figure (calculated on the basis of the number of sex-specific abortions or foeticide combined with the number of female deaths owing to inadequate health provision as a result of sex discrimination) has increased in absolute terms, although it has remained the same as a proportion of the population, matching population growth between 1990 and 2000 (Klasen and Wink, 2003).<sup>11</sup> Increased mortality rates between 1990 and 2000 owing to sex-selective abortions and unequal access to health services were found to be more significant than mortality resulting from under-nutrition (ibid).<sup>12</sup> The resultant effects of increasing sex ratios (calculated as the number of males divided by the number of females in a given population)

Table 2: SIGI son preference scores by country income level

	Son preference (2009)
High-income countries	0.28
Upper-middle-income countries	0.10
Low-middle-income countries	0.14
Other low-income countries	0.13
Middle East and North Africa	0.38

Source: <http://genderindex.org/>

have seen projections of 30 to 40 million more men than women in China alone by 2020 (The Economist, 2010). In India, 2001 Census data indicate a national sex ratio of 933 women per 1,000 men, which is even lower in some states, such as Rajasthan, where the ratio is 921 women to 1,000 men (ibid).

It is important to note that, despite substantial evidence that poverty increases the likelihood of sex-specific abortions and reduces provision of health care to young girls (see below), there is also evidence that son bias among higher-income families is prevalent in some contexts (Klasen and Wink, 2003). This is especially the case in China, India, Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam, where a combination of fertility control policies, the importance of securing a male heir for economic and culturo-religious reasons (see above) and the ability to access often expensive new reproductive technologies have fuelled highly unequal sex ratios (see Table 2).

Health and nutritional biases

Although the figures for female infanticide are alarming, and are arguably especially linked to poverty (as better-off households are able to afford high-tech solutions), underinvestment in

girls’ health and nutrition during childhood is also of critical concern, given potential life-course and intergenerational impacts. Pande (2003) argues that gender bias may be: ‘The result of “active” bias (e.g. “intentional choice to provide health care to a sick boy but not to a sick girl”), “passive” neglect (e.g. “discovering that a girl is sick later than would be the case for a boy, simply because girls may be more neglected in day-to-day interactions than are boys”) and “selective favouritism” (“choices made by resource constrained families that favour those children that the family can ill afford to lose”).’ See Box 4 on immunisation and gender bias.

Save the Children (2010), for example, argues that gender is an important dimension of child survival inequality in India. Whereas male neonatal mortality is higher than female neonatal mortality, reflecting physiological differences between the sexes, this trend is reversed for under-five mortality, reflecting differences in the care male and female children receive. Females have 36 percent higher mortality than males in the post-neonatal period, and 61 percent higher mortality than males at ages one to four (IIPS, 2007).<sup>13</sup> In the same vein, Arnold *et al.* (1998) found that son preference led to particularly high levels of discrimination against girls in

Box 4: Immunisation and gender bias

Evidence of immunisation rates favouring sons or daughters within households varies. Socioeconomic status appears to play a key role in the decisions that households have to make. Poorer households appear to have to choose more frequently between children in terms of vaccinations. Although increased maternal education increases household investments in health, decisions still display gender preferences.

Regional differences exist in how sex differentials are manifested. South and Southeast Asia show a bias against girls’ coverage, ranging from a 13.4 percent gap in India to 4.3 percent in Nepal. Pakistan has a 7.8 percent gap and Cambodia shows a 4.3 percent difference. However, coverage depends on household composition: girls with at least two older brothers and no sisters are as likely to be vaccinated as siblings. Girls who have at least two older sisters are 1.72 times less likely to be vaccinated compared with boys (Pande and Malhotra, 2006).

Sub-Saharan Africa shows variation between countries. In Gabon and the Gambia, there is also a bias against girls, with a gender gap of 7.2 percent and 6.7 percent, respectively. However, in Madagascar, Nigeria and Namibia, there is a bias against boys of 12 percent, 7.9 percent and 5.6 percent, respectively. It is suggested that this bias against boys owes to fears that vaccinations may reduce male fertility.

Source: Jones *et al.* (2008)



© Sanjit Das / Panos Pictures (2008)  
India, Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab. In a male dominated society, women and young girls are advised to stay indoors all the time.

medical treatment and in the quality of food consumed in a number of Indian states where son preference was prevalent.<sup>14</sup>

There also appears to be a gender gap in breastfeeding, as a result of parents' greater investment in sons. As breastfeeding reduces postnatal fertility, girls are weaned early so mothers can become pregnant in the hope of conceiving a son (Jayachandran and Kuziemko, 2010). This is especially the case for girls who do not have an older brother, putting them at greater risk of disease from reduced immunity from breast milk and greater exposure to dirty water or food (ibid).<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Fikree and Pasha (2004) argue that the effects of discriminatory social practices contribute to higher death rates of female infants, such that, in Pakistan and India, a girl has a 30 to 50 percent higher chance of dying than a boy between the ages of one and five.<sup>16</sup> And in China, Li and Lavelly (2003) found an even stronger association between attitudinal bias towards sons and sex-specific infant death, with female infants whose mothers reported it important to have a son almost twice as likely to die than their male counterparts (11.5 versus 6.1 percent). Female infants whose mothers expected a son to be a source of financial support also had a higher risk of death than male infants (9.1 versus 5.2 percent). This bias is often higher in resource-constrained households. Choe *et al.*

(1998) found that, in Egypt and Bangladesh, where parents were constrained by limited family resources, the preference for sons caused parents to allocate nutrition and health care preferentially to them.

### Reduced educational opportunities

Although there is broad recognition in development circles that girls' education provides a high return for investment for current and future generations (Quisumbing, 2007),<sup>17</sup> and is critical to poverty reduction (UNICEF, 2001), gender disparities in education persist, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia.<sup>18</sup> Substantial progress has been made over the past two decades in gender parity in primary education, but 28 countries still have fewer than 90 girls in primary school per 100 boys, 18 of these in sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2010). The disparities are much higher again at the secondary school level (ibid). In other regions, although national-level gender disparities in education are much lower, gender gaps do persist among some vulnerable communities, for example among indigenous communities in Latin America. In Mexico, over 90 percent of all male and female children complete at least three years of secondary education but the

### Box 5: 'A girl never finishes her journey' – bias against daughters' education in rural Ethiopia

The Young Lives project, an international longitudinal study on childhood poverty over the course of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), has found strong bias against girls' education in rural Ethiopia:

'We prefer to send boys to school. A girl never finishes her journey. She humiliates her parents. When you try to keep sending her to school, she does not progress beyond grade 7 or 8. She remains useless; she does not make plans for her future. Secondly, if she is weak at school, she gets close to boys and loses her virginity. She loses both her education and her virginity' (community leader, Ethiopia, in Tafere and Camfield, 2009).

'Education was also seen as risking girls' reproductive and economic future because if you keep a girl in school rejecting marriage; either she gets a boyfriend or gets too old so nobody will ask you to marry her. Then she remains idle at home and parents start cursing her as useless, leading to conflict [...] Parents prefer to marry her at earlier age when she is demanded by boys to clear her way by giving [her] some resources' (focus group, Ethiopia, in Tafere and Camfield, 2009).

'Many of the children who do daily labour discontinue their education [and] most of them are young girls. These girls are mainly from the poor families – they help their families by doing daily work. During the summer season [school vacation] most of the daily work is reduced because the irrigated lands are converted into cereal production, but the cash production will start again in the spring, which directly coincides with the time of education. As a result many of them are either absent [from school] or discontinue it. Sometimes the work may be heavy and becomes beyond the capacity of the girls to perform' (focus group, Ethiopia, in Tafere and Camfield, 2009).

rates are substantially lower among indigenous groups. For children aged 12 to 14, 84.5 percent of boys go to school versus 80.5 percent of girls; for the 15 to 19 age range, 41.3 percent of boys go to school versus 33.3 percent of girls (INEGI and INMUJERES, 2008).<sup>19</sup> Indigenous girls in Guatemala are the least likely of any group to be enrolled in school. At age seven, 54 percent of indigenous girls are in school, compared with 71 percent of indigenous boys and 75 percent of non-indigenous girls. By the age of 16, only 25 percent of indigenous girls are enrolled in school, compared with 45 percent of indigenous boys and around 50 percent of non-indigenous boys and girls (Hallman *et al.*, 2007).

Differential parental support for educating boys versus girls plays an important role in perpetuating this inequity. Analysts have identified a number of explanations for this, including expectations about labour market returns and remittances, marriage market dictates, concerns about controlling girls' reproductive health and preserving family honour, the probability of school success and continuation and intra-household resource constraints (see also boxes 5 and 6). In the case of China, for instance, Wang (2005) argues that a combination of economic and socio-cultural factors is at play. In semi-rural and rural areas, where the One Child Policy allows for two children if the first born is a daughter, girls with brothers are often subject to the highest risks of dropping out of school because of limited family finances. This is exacerbated by an absence of retirement pensions, which means that parents perceive that better-educated sons are likely to get better jobs and to be able to provide greater financial support in their old age. This gender gap tends to be less pronounced in urban areas, where the One Child Policy is more firmly enforced, old-age pensions are more common and

education levels are higher, indicating that parents are less likely to discriminate against daughters.

Himaz (2009) argues that, in India, although attitudes towards girls' schooling are changing rapidly, the possibility for bias towards investing in boys' education needs to be considered at two levels: first, in the decision whether to enrol a child in school or not; second, in education-related expenditure once the general commitment to school attendance has been made. Findings from a sample of almost 1,000 rural households in Andhra Pradesh state found that parents were more likely to invest in private school fees and extra tuition fees for their sons than for their daughters, although the outlay for uniforms, books and transport was equal. This suggests that, even if parents decide to support the education of male and female children, they tend to place greater importance on ensuring quality education for their sons.

### Time poverty

Children's time use and the extent to which they can shape decisions about how their time is allocated between education, work and leisure have a significant impact on their material, relational and subjective well-being (Vogler *et al.*, 2009). Cross-country data are limited and uneven at best, but existing evidence suggests that time allocation patterns are highly gendered globally, especially in impoverished households (Blackden and Wodon, 2006). Although there are important context variations, overall research findings point to girls' greater involvement in domestic and care work activities and lower levels of participation in schooling and leisure. Boys are more likely to be engaged in paid market-based work, schooling and leisure, with significantly less time spent on

### Box 6: ‘Fate favours me and plays big jokes on my sister’

‘Three years ago, [my younger sister and I] went through the high school entrance examinations together. She had higher overall grades than mine and she could go to an outstanding high school. However [...] my family couldn’t afford the high tuition fees for both of us at the same time. In our county, male preference is quite popular in parents’ minds [...] and [parents] do not think investment in daughters’ education will benefit them much. As a result, I was sent to one of the outstanding high schools and my sister was sent to an ordinary high school [...] When we applied to universities, I applied to Zhongshan University. Because my sister graduated from the ordinary high school, my parents told her to apply for a small local college called Train and Railroad College in order to save money for my education. On the announcement date, the news shocked administrators in the county examination centre: my sister’s overall grades were the number one among all of the applicants in the entire county! However, when my sister learned about this she ran into the room and cried and cried, and after a while she became quiet and kept silent. Now I got the university acceptance letter and my sister hasn’t [...] However, it is not her wish but my parents’ idea. She is a very smart person, and in the past three years she studied just as much as me, but the results were very different. How can I face my sister without feeling guilty? Fate favours me and plays big jokes on my sister’ (in Wang, 2005).

domestic chores (Delap, 2000; Hsin, 2005; Kabubo-Mariara and Mwabu, 2007). The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2009) estimates that, globally, 10 percent of girls aged 5 to 14 years old perform household chores for 28 hours a week or more, and that this is approximately double that of the proportion of boys expected to undertake the same amount of domestic work. Regional variations between the burdens of household chores are pronounced, however: the difference between girls and boys work is greatest in Africa, at 44 percent, followed by Latin America at 29 percent and lastly Asia and the Pacific at 8 percent (see also Box 7).

Domestic chores can have a considerable impact on the time girls have available to undertake other activities, such as school and after school studies. Girls who perform 28 hours or more a week of domestic chores attend school 25 percent less than girls who do fewer than 14 hours per week (ILO, 2009). However, the impact on girls is highly context specific and depends on cultural norms (Doane, 2007), particularly on age, household size and age structure (Ilahi, 2001), as well as on the type of shock (e.g. economic, health, energy) to which households and communities are vulnerable.

The main reason identified in the literature for this imbalance between sons and daughters is the ‘mother substitute’ role that girls often play.<sup>20</sup> On account of the unequal gendered distribution of labour within the household, when women take on paid employment outside the home in the absence of alternative affordable child care options,<sup>21</sup> or in times of household-level shock (e.g. loss of income or illness of a family member), daughters are often expected to shoulder additional traditional gender responsibilities, usually at the expense of their education.<sup>22</sup> This substitute effect is especially strong in poor households: there is a close association between households that rank as poor on a consumption metric and those where women have high work burdens (Ilahi 2001).<sup>23</sup> Moreover, girls tend to serve as critical shock absorbers for poor households as they adjust to crisis and intensified

poverty. For example, in contexts of declining access to energy (for instance through deforestation or drought), girls, as women’s main helpers in water and fuel collection, are often compelled to devote additional time to such domestic tasks (Nankhuni, 2004).

Sickness in families also sees a greater care burden placed on girls rather than boys in terms of taking responsibility for tending to other household members. The effect varies, however, depending on whether the sick family member is a child or an adult. In the case of the former, Pitt *et al.* (1990) found sex-differentiated effects of infant sickness on intra-household time use in Indonesia. Teenage daughters were significantly more likely to increase participation in household care

activities, to decrease participation in market activities and to drop out of school in response to sibling illness, compared with their male counterparts. Ilahi (2001) and Guarcello *et al.* (2006) found similar disproportionate care burdens for daughters in Latin America and resulting negative effects on their level of schooling, although the effect was generally stronger in urban areas.

In the case of adult illness, Ilahi (1999) found that this did not affect child time use in urban areas, but in rural Peru adult sickness had strong gender-differentiated effects. Here, girls tend to compensate for lost household income by increasing their participation in income-generating work, although there is no effect on the time use of boys. Similarly, Yamano and

**Globally, 10 percent of girls aged 5 to 14 years old perform household chores for 28 hours a week or more, this is approximately double that of the proportion of boys expected to undertake the same amount of domestic work.**

- ILO (2009)

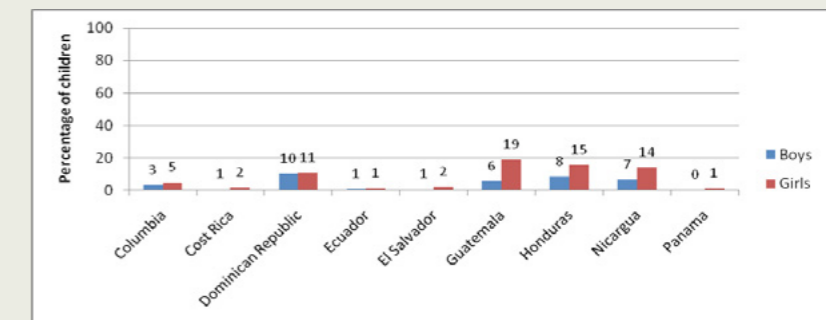
### Box 7: Existing evidence on gender differences in children’s time use

Gender-disaggregated data on children’s time use are still in a fledgling state globally. Based on fragmented evidence, however, a picture of girls’ relative time poverty emerges. Evidence from Mexico, for instance, shows that girls spend 175 percent more time on household tasks than boys (Brunnich *et al.*, 2005). Similarly an Understanding Children’s Work (UCW) study in 2006 found that, in El Salvador, three times as many girls as boys undertook 28 hours or more of household chores per week; in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama, at least twice as many girls as boys did so. In the case of economic activities, more boys than girls were found to be engaged in such work, although the measure used was one hour of economic activity for every 14 hours of household chores, suggesting that economic activity in the region is considerably more valued than household labour.

In Africa, several studies have focused on the different opportunity costs of investing in girls and boys within households as an explanation for gender disparities and son preference. If opportunity costs are measured according to the lost labour to a household as a result of sending children to school, households often lose more by sending girls to school. In Tanzania, for example, the opportunity cost of sending 13- to 15-year-old girls to school is significantly higher than that of sending 13- to 15-year-old boys, for whom the cost is 25 hours of work per week compared with 37 hours per week for girls (World Bank, 1999). Further studies have confirmed that this effect is consistent across all ages (Mason and Khandher, in Ritchie *et al.*, 2004). In Uganda, girls work 21.6 hours per week compared with 18.8 hours per week for boys; in Guinea, rural girls work 22.9 hours compared with boys’ 17.4 hours; and a cross-country study of Kenya and South Africa showed that girls spend more time on household work compared with boys, representing a greater opportunity cost to households if girls engage in non-domestic work activities (in Ritchie *et al.*, 2004).

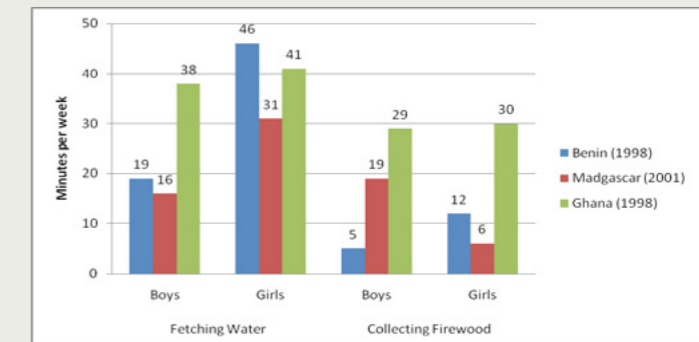
Pörtner (2009) shows that age and gender often intersect in important ways with regard to shaping time use. Older girls (14 to 16 years) in the Philippines have more demands on their time than boys and younger girls in terms of both housework and market activities.

Percentage of children in household chores for at least 28 hours per week, 7 to 14 years



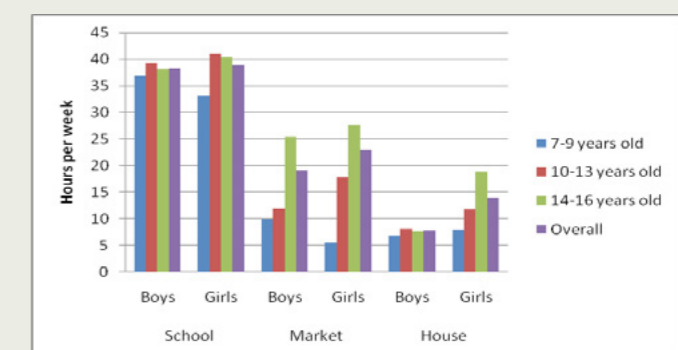
Source: UCW (2006)

Time spent per day collecting water and firewood in minutes, boys and girls aged 6 to 14 for Benin and Madagascar and 7 to 14 for Ghana



Source: Charmes (2006, in Blackden and Wodon, 2006)

Time use in hours per week of children in the Philippines, by age



Source: Pörtner (2009)

Box 8: Daughters disproportionately shoulder the care of relatives living with HIV/AIDS

In his 2004 address on International Women’s Day, Kofi Annan emphasised that: ‘As AIDS forces girls to drop out of school, whether they are forced to take care of a sick relative, run the household, or help support the family, they fall deeper into poverty. Their own children in turn are less likely to attend school, and more likely to become infected’ (in Plan International, 2009).

The Girls’ Education Monitoring System found that children’s participation in formal schooling was decreasing in African countries with the highest prevalence of HIV (11 percent or greater). Within these high prevalence countries, girls are most affected and in some cases their enrolment has decreased (Chesterfield *et al.*, 2001). In Swaziland, for instance, school enrolment is estimated to have fallen by 36 percent as a result of AIDS, with girls the most affected.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in a study exploring the ways in which households cope with HIV/AIDS in South Africa, Steinberg *et al.* (2002) found that the majority of caregivers in the home were women or girls (68 percent) and that, of these, 7 percent were less than 18 years of age.

Jayne (2004) (in Blackden and Wodon, 2006) found evidence of intergenerational impacts of adult illness, with particularly negative effects on girls, owing to their care-giving burdens. They estimated that the probability that girls from relatively poor households would attend school in the one- to two-year period before the death of an adult declined from 90 to 62 percent. These effects are particularly prevalent in high HIV/AIDS-incidence contexts (see Box 8).

Involvement in child labour

Although it is generally assumed that boys are more likely to be engaged in child labour, according to the ILO (2009) 100 million girls between 5 and 17 years are involved in child labour worldwide. Girls account for 46 percent of all child workers, and 53 million are estimated to be in hazardous or worst forms of child labour. Moreover, child labour activities for girls, combined with household and domestic duties, mean that daughters are often expected to work many more hours per week than boys (see above). In many contexts, girls are often discriminated against, with parents valuing boys’ schooling over that of girls, such that girls may have to work to supplement household income and school costs as well as undertake unpaid household chores, enduring a double burden of work. For instance, in Guatemala and Nicaragua, in poorer households older sisters are expected to work as domestic workers to support the family and the education of younger siblings (Dammert, 2010).

Gender discrimination against girls and parents’ son preferences often represent a vicious circle of poverty for girls, who receive fewer years of schooling owing to an expectation that they will work (Budlender, 2008). Girls are often more susceptible to abuse in the workplace and are less able to defend their rights. In cases of bonded labour, girls can be particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse (ILO, 2009). It is estimated that girls under 16 involved in providing domestic services away from their own households constitute the largest section of child labourers (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Working as domestic workers can leave girls particularly vulnerable, as in many developing countries there is inadequate protection and labour laws often do not apply. Given the nature of the work, they are often ‘invisible,’ and girls are thought to make up 80 to 90 percent of child domestic workers (Pflug, 2002). Households that allow their children to become domestic workers are often poor and of particular caste or socioeconomic status (ibid). In Asia, working as a domestic worker is often desired and preferred over agricultural work, but such work often renders girls and young women vulnerable to physical, emotional and sexual abuse (Human Rights Watch, 2006), with those who run away particularly vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation (Pflug, 2002). Similarly, in sub-Saharan Africa girls from poor rural areas are often considered not worthy of education by their parents and are sent to live and work with families in urban areas (see Box 9).

Child domestic workers frequently find that even food is wielded as a tool of power by employers, with many girls going desperately hungry on a regular basis. Some girls reported being so hungry that they engaged in sex for money or stole money from their host families to buy food.

Box 9: The invisibility of girl domestic workers in West Africa

Sending children to grow up with relatives – child fostering, or conflation – is a common social practice across Africa. Child domestic workers often work in the house of a relative, acquaintance or even stranger, where they have been sent by their parents at an age as young as five. If a host family treats a girl well, sends her to school and allows her to be in contact with her parents, she might have a better future than she will at home. Parents often send their children to the city because they think they will suffer less from hunger and the hard living conditions found in rural areas. However, many adults employing girl domestic workers violate their role as guardians or employers, and instead exploit and abuse them. It is difficult for the victims to seek redress, as abuse occurs in the home and is hidden from public scrutiny. Many child domestic workers are isolated in their employers’ homes and are unable to access any information or assistance from outside.

Source: Human Rights Watch, 2006



© Sven Torfinn / Panos Pictures (2009)  
Bangladesh, Tangail. 10 year old Argina works as a house girl for a family in Tangail.

‘I had no right to eat breakfast. Instead I had to prepare the sandwiches for the children at school. I so wanted to devour them. But I had no choice. My aunt beat me, with shoes or other things. Sometimes she beat me very early in the morning. Once I revolted against this all. I did not want to go sell things on the street. I had not even had breakfast yet. She forced me to go anyway. I cried [...] I was with a man, he did garbage disposal. He wanted sex but I refused. But I was too hungry, so in the end I gave in. I ate well that day. He gave me GNF500 or 1,000, I cannot remember. I was six or seven years old. I did not feel OK about it, I did it against my will’ (in Human Rights Watch, 2006).

Psychosocial impacts

The impacts of son bias on girls’ psychosocial well-being are not well researched, but fragmented findings suggest that this is an area of concern, and one that requires further analytical attention. First, evidence from a range of contexts emphasises that daughters face a much higher degree of control over their behaviour than boys. In Confucian cultures in East Asia, whereas boys are perceived to have intrinsic worth from birth, girls are seen as ‘blank slates,’ with their value depending on socialisation and tight restrictions on their behaviour (Rydstrom, 2003). Similarly, Reynolds (1991, in Vogler *et al.*, 2009) notes that, in Zimbabwe, for instance, there is much greater control of girls’ time use, especially after puberty, owing to concerns about controlling girls’ reproductive behaviour. A Population Council study in Pakistan found

that parents not only allowed sons much greater mobility (see also Chapter 5 on Restricted Civil Liberties) but also accorded sons considerably greater decision-making freedom relating to work, education and marriage (Ul Haque, n.d.).

In order to escape strict parental control, adolescent girls in Latin America often opt for early marriage and/or pregnancy, not only as a result of a desire to engage in sexual relationships but also as a means to leave the family home and especially fathers’ control (Pereznieto and Campos, 2010).

‘I started to work because I did not want to stay at home as my father treated me badly [...] no, it is not that they treated me badly, it is just that I don’t like to stay at home because he beats me, he tells me off, I can’t even have a rest. He is a carpenter you see and he asks us to do all kinds of things, I have to help him with sanding [...] I don’t even have the time to do my homework’ (female child domestic worker, 14, Peru, in Vargas, 2010).

However, such ‘choices’ often result in reduced opportunities for future development. Teenage mothers are often compelled to leave school without completing a basic education and are forced to acquire new responsibilities with which they are unfamiliar.

‘Well, I was studying. I finished second year of secondary and I gave birth just after I finished. After a few months I started third year but I was unable to finish because it was very difficult to leave the baby with someone all the time. Back then the Estancias programme hadn’t yet started’ (single adolescent mother, Mexico, in Pereznieto and Campos, 2010).

A second important psychosocial impact relates to girls' general relegation to domestic work responsibilities. This gendered division of labour in favour of sons not only has negative implications for daughters' human capital development and future income-generating potential (see above) but also, because of the too-often invisible and undervalued social construction of domestic work activities, may lead to girls' lower levels of self-esteem and confidence (see Box 10).

#### 4. Promising policy and programme initiatives

In order to tackle son bias and the negative impacts it has on girls and their vulnerability to development deficits and life-course poverty, a multipronged approach is required, one which addresses the complex mix of economic and socio-cultural factors underpinning intra-household gender discrimination. Initiatives designed to influence legal frameworks, attitudes and behaviour directly relating to son bias need to be complemented by efforts to enhance girls' human capital development opportunities, to prevent and protect girls from abuse and exploitation and to reduce girls' time poverty. In this section, we review promising policy and programme initiatives covering three of these four broad areas from a range of country contexts, in order to highlight initiatives that could contribute to altering norms and practices that perpetuate son bias and help stem life-course and intergenerational poverty transfers. Issues relating to prevention and protection of girls from abuse and exploitation are discussed in Chapter 4 on Physical Insecurity.

##### Directly targeting son bias

As discussed in the previous section, son bias is not only the product of cultural and religious traditions. It is also a rational response to pervasive societal gender discrimination and exclusion, on the one hand, and underinvestment in social protection systems, which often leaves families solely responsible for their life-course security, on the other. In order to challenge intra-household inequalities, an important starting point is to ensure that legal frameworks are in place to prohibit sex-selective abortion and female infanticide. Legislation banning sex-selective abortions has been introduced in a number of countries (India in 1983, South Korea in 1987,<sup>25</sup> China in 1989, Nepal in 2002), but legislation is often only weakly enforced (see Box 11).

Legal action by itself, however, is not enough to eliminate harmful traditional practices. To be effective, legislation needs to be part of a broader integrated public education campaign that involves opinion makers and cultural leaders. Several promising approaches have been undertaken in China and India. India's Save the Girl Campaign aims to lessen son preference by highlighting the achievements of young girls

#### Box 10: Links between the value of work and girls' self-esteem

Children negotiate personal freedom in a number of ways, including through work refusal. This can constitute a powerful statement, given that involvement in work activities is highly valued in many cultures (Vogler *et al.*, 2009). Nieuwenhuys (1994), in her study of children's daily activities and routines in a village in Kerala, India, emphasises that, for the poor, gender and age are crucial in the household's division of labour and are closely linked to the perceived value of a member's contribution. 'It is their being allotted tasks that are not valued in monetary terms that makes for children's work, and in particular girls', to be held in low esteem' (ibid).

#### Box 11: The challenges of legal enforcement

In India, enforcement of legislation outlawing sex pre-selection technologies has proven challenging. In 1994, the Prenatal Diagnostics Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act was passed, becoming operational in 1996. Although this ended advertising about pre-birth sex selection, the act was difficult to enforce, partly because of a lack of political will and limited engagement from the public and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (UNFPA, 2004). However, in 2000 health activists filed public interest litigation on the non-enforcement of the act in the Supreme Court, which led to the government issuing directives and incorporating the act into various public health programmes to try and improve enforcement. In 2002, the bill was amended to expand the definition of 'prenatal diagnostic techniques' to include preconception techniques, as well as the imposition of a fine of up to \$2,000 and threat of the cancellation of licence for health care practitioners who divulged the sex of a foetus. By 2006, 300 doctors had been prosecuted in accordance with the law (Mudur, 2006); however, only 37 cases have been filed for communicating the sex of the foetus and 27 for advertising sex selection. The first conviction with a prison term was ordered on 28 March 2006, when a doctor and his assistant were sentenced to two years in prison and a Rs 5,000 fine in Palwal, Haryana. Until this, only one case had resulted in successful prosecution, but even that person received an insignificant punishment.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, a 2008 report demonstrated that practitioners who are willing to disclose the sex of a foetus are still easily found, with the practice justified as a 'social duty' which prevents the ill-treatment of unwanted daughters (ActionAid and IDRC, 2008).

in India. The campaign was launched in 2005 on International Women's Day and has involved a series of activities, including: working with *anganwadis* (public child care workers), women

#### Save the Girl Campaign image



Source: [www.bellelevision.com/index.php?action=topnews&type=129](http://www.bellelevision.com/index.php?action=topnews&type=129)

and community and spiritual leaders to raise awareness that female foeticide is a crime; rallies focusing on the need to stop sex determination tests and discrimination against girls; and encouraging people to take oaths against female foeticide.

A similar multipronged initiative has been undertaken in China by the Care for Girls programme, which was undertaken in 24 counties on a pilot basis between 2003 and 2005. The programme sought to reduce the imbalanced sex ratio by: promoting government leadership and ownership of the programme at all levels; cracking down on the non-medical use of prenatal sex determination and sex-selective abortion; improving reproductive health services for women; supporting girl-only families by offering special benefits (including housing support for poor households, support for girls' education and pensions); launching public awareness campaigns; and strengthening data management and evaluation systems related to birth registration, abortion and infant and child mortality by sex. Significantly, the programme contributed to a reduction in the sex ratio at birth from 133.8 in 2003 to 119.6 in 2005, as a result of which it was extended nationally (Li, 2007).

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in partnership with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), works through integrated multiple interventions. These include legal aid, advocacy, public information, training and research, to support and build change through the Dignity for the Girl Child programme, which brings together local and international organisations. In India, the programme has led workshops on the high sex ratio with community leaders, in order to raise awareness of the problem. In response to the training, one participant from the Sikh community began community groups, in which women discussed the issue of foeticide in their communities. This inspired mass weddings where couples took an oath against foeticide (IFES, 2007).

Harnessing the power of the media has been another effective approach. In India, for example, a government-NGO partnership involving Plan International, the Edward Green Charity (and later IFES and USAID) and the government of India developed and broadcast a soap opera series to highlight the problems of sex-selective abortion to the general public. The soap used a Bollywood-style approach to examine issues such as the law against prenatal tests, gender poverty, anti-dowry laws, violence against women and potential social problems stemming from a biased sex ratio. An audience assessment by the New Delhi-based Centre for Advocacy Research (CAR) found that the drama resonated strongly with young women (see Box 12) but that, to reach older women and men, a more interactive approach to the development of the storyline would be required, so that they did not feel alienated by the programme. Overall, however, CAR concluded that there was considerable scope for serials to tackle such issues and for producers to do so while seeking regular viewer feedback.<sup>27</sup>

Another important part of public education includes school curriculum reforms and especially the development of gender-sensitive materials. This entails, for example, the inclusion of examples and images that show women and girls in positive roles, apply role reversal, increase the portrayal of women in public spheres and men in the private domain and avoid stereotypical family scenes, occupations and activities. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2006) documents a range of positive examples from Brazil, the Maldives and Vietnam which show men actively involved in infant and child care, young children involved in non-stereotypical gender activities (e.g. boys in the kitchen, girls playing with

#### Box 12: The power of the media in reshaping gender-biased attitudes

A BBC news story noted the following viewer impressions of the soap opera on sex-selective abortion:

'I wish my mother-in-law could see this film. Anyway now I have got a little strength to protest if this happens to me' (Arundhuti, 25-year-old housewife with one son)

'We never thought that aborting female fetuses was a crime. I thought it was something very common [...] this film made me realise about the seriousness of killing female fetuses' (Neha Masti, 34-year-old housewife with two sons)

'Surprisingly, I did not know about the law at all. Being a husband, at times we don't understand our wives. This film made me understand never to force wives for such things. I need to discuss it with her' (Santosh Kumar Singh, 31-year-old father of a boy and girl)

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4173597.stm>.

construction toys) and non sex-segregated family interactions in Vietnam (see the images below). The Beijing + 15<sup>28</sup> Regional Report for Asia and the Pacific<sup>29</sup> also noted good practices from Singapore, where public education work was being carried out in conjunction with the Association of Devoted and Active Family Men and the Centre for Fathering, and from Hong Kong, where the Education Bureau is embarking on an ‘equal opportunities for all subjects’ initiative, rejecting the practice of streaming girls and boys.

As discussed, traditional attitudes towards boys and girls account for only part of the entrenched nature of son bias. Taking action to address parental economic concerns is also vital. Part of parental reasoning against investing in a daughter’s education is that male earning power is likely to be considerably higher. Even if a daughter does not marry early, and contributes to the household income while she is single, lower investments in girls’ education, gender-segmented labour markets and wage differentials mean that on average she will probably be less well remunerated than her brothers

(Wang, 2005). Accordingly, promoting gender parity in schools and the enforcement of equal employment legislation are critical to tackle the broader structural discrimination that girls and women face outside the family, and in this way to enhance their intra-household status.

In many societies the elderly in poor communities are often especially vulnerable; in order to reduce their reliance on their children (typically sons) for old-age support, advocacy around strengthening public investment in social protection systems is another important longer-term strategy. Wenjuan and Dan (2008) argue that old-age pensions are affordable even in middle- and low-income countries (as evidenced by examples in Shaanxi province in China,<sup>30</sup> Lesotho, Mauritius and Nepal) and that they can play a critical role in reducing poverty and vulnerability at this stage in the lifecycle. Indeed, most older people live and share resources with children and, as such, pensions have a positive impact on child welfare as well, contributing to the interruption of the intergenerational cycle of poverty transmission. Pensions free up income to be spent

### School textbook images from Brazil, the Maldives and Vietnam



Source: UNICEF (2006)

on health, education and nutrition, often with particularly valuable impacts for girls. In South Africa, for instance, girls in pension-recipient households are on average 3 to 4 cm taller than girls in non-recipient households (Duflo, 2000, in Palacios and Sluchynsky, 2006).

### Improving girls’ human capital development opportunities

In order to minimise the negative effects of son bias on girls’ experiences of poverty and vulnerability, policy approaches which improve their human capital development opportunities are also essential. We consider three broad categories: reducing opportunity costs of girls’ schooling; enhancing capacity building and training opportunities for adolescent girls; and social health protection. First, there is a growing range of promising policy initiatives that aim to reduce the opportunity costs poor families face in investing in girls’ education. Glick (2008) argues that two types of policies could improve girls’ educational access: ‘those that are “gender neutral,” that is, that do not specifically target female (or male) schooling returns or costs; and those that are gender-targeted, that is, that attempt to alter the costs or benefits of girls’ schooling relative to boys.’ In the first case, demand for girls’ schooling is often more responsive than boys’ to gender-neutral changes in school distance, price and quality, which can be explained

by perceptions about differential costs and returns of girls’ and boys’ schooling. Increasing the availability of local schooling to reduce distances travelled and demand-side interventions that subsidise households’ schooling costs, such as cash transfer programmes and school feeding programmes, are other good examples (see Box 13).

In some contexts, however, where gender imbalances are significant and/or cultural barriers are strong, approaches which directly target girls’ schooling can be more expedient. Glick (2008) notes robust evaluation evidence that households respond to incentives in the form of subsidies for enrolling girls (see also Chapter 1 on Discriminatory Family Codes). India’s Balika Samridhi Yojana programme, which is designed to change attitudes towards the girl child at birth, improve enrolment and retention at school, raise the age of marriage and assist girls to undertake income-generating activities, is one such case. The government makes ‘periodical deposits’ of money for the first two girls in a family from birth until the age of 18, with payments conditional on school attendance and remaining unmarried. The scheme was redesigned in 1999 to 2000 to ensure that the dividend went directly to the girl child (Ramesh, 2008). Other promising initiatives on the supply side which are supported by randomised programme evaluation evidence include financial incentives to teachers and school managers to attract or retain female students (Glick, 2008). Informal assessments also suggest that the provision

### Box 13: Strengthening demand for education

Cash for education approaches reduce the cost of sending children to school by providing additional income to the family and offsetting losses if school replaces paid work for a child. In the case of conditional cash transfers – those programmes that make participation dependent on compliance with the use of basic services for children – they may also increase the benefits of attending school and reduce health and nutrition constraints. The earliest and most famous cash transfer programme is Mexico’s Oportunidades (‘Opportunities’), initiated in 1995, which now reaches 25 million low-income Mexicans (World Bank, 2008). Oportunidades offers a higher monthly cash transfer to support girls’ secondary education and has been shown to increase secondary school enrolments by 20 percent for girls and 10 percent for boys (Adelman et al., 2008). In the case of Brazil’s Bolsa Família (‘Family Grant’), a similar initiative reaching 12.4 million households, aggregate school attendance by boys and girls has risen by 4.4 percentage points (ibid). The largest gains have occurred in the historically disadvantaged northeast, where enrolments have risen by 11.7 percentage points. Importantly, children and especially girls aged 15 to 17 who are at greatest risk of dropping out are more likely to progress from one grade to the next. Bolsa Família increases the likelihood that a 15-year-old girl will remain in school by 19 percentage points.

School feeding programmes are another important demand-side approach: although there is insufficient evidence that they address malnutrition, they have the potential to improve school participation and learning outcomes through the consumption of nutritious food (Adelman et al., 2008). In World Food Programme (WFP)-assisted schools, there is on average only a very small gender gap (78 percent boys’ to 76 percent girls’ net enrolment rate). In cases where there are significant gaps in access to and completion of basic education, WFP programmes include take home rations for girls which are conditional on their attendance rate. These can contribute to increasing enrolment rates: for example, in Pakistan the provision of take home rations to girls attending school for at least 20 days a month resulted in a 135 percent increase in enrolment between 1998 to 1999 and 2003 to 2004 (WFP, 2010). In Afghanistan, WFP helped to increase girls’ enrolment and attendance rates by distributing a monthly ration of 3.7 litres of vegetable oil (an important component of the local diet) to girls, conditional on a minimum attendance of 22 days per month (ibid). In India, which has a long history of school feeding programmes (since 1925), a 2001 Supreme Court ruling declared a constitutional right to food, and school feeding programmes now feed approximately 120 million girls each day (Winch, 2009). This has been found to be especially effective in improving school enrolment, especially among girls (WFP, 2010).

of separate school toilet facilities for girls and boys, flexible school schedules, the redesign of teacher training to change attitudes or behaviour towards female students and campaigns to promote girls’ education can serve to reverse aspects of the school environment that effectively favour boys’ learning, or can make schools more acceptable environments for daughters in the eyes of parents. However, more systematic evaluation work is required to understand the causal mechanisms at work (ibid).

A second important cluster of promising policy and programme approaches focuses on capacity strengthening and empowerment for adolescent girls. Such programmes aim to increase girls’ capabilities so that their opportunities can be broadened, their self-esteem and social status enhanced and gender discriminatory attitudes undermined. Although the goal to lower son preference is not explicit, empowering adolescent girls and young women is important, given the generally positive relationship between female education and reduced son bias (see Box 14).

The Abriendo Oportunidades (‘Opening up Opportunities’) programme in Guatemala was launched in 2004 and is led by the Population Council. It targets poor Mayan girls in remote rural areas who suffer from chronic poverty, lack of schooling, high rates of early marriage and social isolation. The programme aims to increase Mayan girls’ social support networks, to connect them with role models and mentors

Box 14: The multiplier effects of empowering adolescent girls

A number of innovative adolescent girl empowerment initiatives offer valuable models. The Better Life Options programme in India trains low-income married and unmarried adolescent girls aged 12 to 20 in literacy, vocational skills, health and reproductive care. A 1999 evaluation found that programme participants scored better on a wide range of indicators. On average, they married later, were more likely to use contraceptives, had better nutrition, received professional obstetric care and postnatal care, had an institutional delivery, had fewer children and fewer infant deaths, enjoyed increased control over resources and felt more confident speaking in front of elders (Boender *et al.*, 2004; CEDPA, 2001).

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) Adolescent Education Centres in Bangladesh were created in 1993 to encourage adolescent girls to retain their maths and literacy skills, and later added a life skills training element where emerging adolescents leaders were trained to provide training to their peers. There is also training on business skills, which has doubled participating girls’ involvement in income-generating activities, including microfinance groups (Plan International, 2009).

and to build a base of life skills and professional experience using a model of mentoring and creating safe spaces. The programme reaches more than 40 communities and has worked with more than 3,000 girls aged between 8 and 18, and has proved a significant vehicle for change for both girls and their communities. Age-appropriate girls’ clubs are led by a peer mentor who conducts workshops with mothers and daughters on topics like self-esteem, life skills and developing plans for the future. Situated close to their homes, the clubs offer: weekly sessions in life and leadership skills; sexual and reproductive health information; a space to voice ideas and aspirations; peers who become role models and friends whom girls can visit and have fun with; and stipends to help them learn money management. Girls who have participated in the project remain connected through a national network (the Indigenous Resource and Empowerment Network) and the organisation provides internship and employment opportunities.

Evaluation findings suggest that girls have become more confident about their skills and participate in public activities, with many aiming to continue school, delay marriage and lead a productive life. Girl club leaders in particular are changing community attitudes about gender restrictions. As one girl leader explained: ‘After my personal and professional training, I began organising girls’ clubs in my community to teach groups of girls the subjects I had learned, to share my experience with them, to motivate them to dream about what they would like to be, and to work hard in order to reach their goals’ (Catino *et al.*, 2009). Many girls have been able to continue their schooling and find paying jobs in the private and public sectors or have been employed in the programme, which is now expanding to more communities.

A third key area involves the promotion of social health protection. It is increasingly recognised that costs are a critical barrier to the uptake of health services and that removing user fees can have a powerful effect on service usage (ILO, 2008). Given gendered barriers in accessing health services (discussed in the previous section), supporting health fee exemptions for

Box 15: Engendering energy policy and investment priorities

A study in Mbale, eastern Uganda, and in Kasama, Zambia, highlights the time-saving effects of better infrastructure for girls and women. It estimated that, if woodlots are within 30 minutes of the homestead and if the water source is within 400 metres, Mbale women and girls will save more than 900 hours per year: around 240 hours in firewood collection and 660 hours in water collection. Similarly, in Kasama, Zambia, they would save 125 to 664 hours per year in water collection and 119 to 610 hours per year in firewood collection.

Source: Barwell (1996, in Blackden and Wodon, 2006)



© Mark Henley / Panos Pictures (2000)  
China, Guangxi province. Peasant girl carrying water for crops with her mother in Li River karst limestone landscape.

poor households and/or social health insurance constitutes an important first step in minimising hurdles that daughters face in securing equal health care (e.g. Sen and Ostlin, 2010; Walsh and Jones, 2009). Moreover, given emerging evidence that women often bear the brunt of the burden of coping with health shocks in the household (e.g. through the distress sale of female-owned assets to cover catastrophic health costs) (e.g. Baulch and Quisumbing, 2009), promoting more equitable social health protection for the poor and vulnerable is especially important. Although it is often argued that such schemes are beyond the realm of the possible for low-income countries, the example of Ghana’s National Health Insurance Scheme, introduced five years ago and now covering around 60 percent of the population, highlights that, with strong political will, such a system is both affordable and feasible (Jones *et al.*, 2009).

Reducing girls’ time poverty

In order to reduce time poverty, which is a key manifestation of bias against daughters in the intra-household distribution of labour, resources and power, efforts to reduce girls’ time

outlays in housework and care work roles are critical. In terms of the former, a growing number of initiatives seek to minimise the time girls spend on water and fuelwood collection, one of the most time-consuming activities that millions of girls undertake on a daily basis (see Box 15). These typically seek to integrate the development of time-saving infrastructure into the objectives of broader poverty reduction programmes (see also Chapter 1 on Discriminatory Family Codes). They may include the promotion of technologies such as energy-saving stoves to reduce the daily task of firewood collection; promotion of donkeys, especially for women and children, to ease the burden of transporting drinking water and other goods; introduction of water harvesting techniques and agricultural practices that are less labour intensive, such as lighter and better-quality hand tools; management of soil cover in order to suppress weeds; or introducing crops that are less labour intensive (Hartl, 2006). Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), for instance, includes infrastructure to help reduce women and girls’ time poverty (such as the construction of water and fuelwood collection points within the proximity of the community) in the definition of community

assets undertaken through its public works component (Jones *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, in Morocco, an International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)-supported project has acted as a catalyst for women’s and girls’ integration into development activities by providing community investments in potable water networks and electricity, which have reduced female workloads, particularly in water fetching and manual labour. Moreover, the project has raised awareness of the role they play, on an equal basis with men and boys, in household and community development (Hartl, 2006).

The second critical approach to alleviating girls’ time poverty concerns child care services. Much of the literature on early child development and crèche services focuses on the importance of such facilities to support women’s involvement in paid work. There is surprisingly little attention to the potential role that these can have on reducing the time burden of sibling care. For example, as the 2007 Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report notes: ‘When young children attend ECCE [early childhood care and education] programmes, their older sisters or other female kin are relieved of care responsibilities, a common barrier to girls’ enrolment in primary school’ (UNESCO, 2007). Moreover, early child care and education services can help tackle gender discriminatory attitudes that perpetuate son bias, by providing ‘an opportunity to reduce stereotypes about traditional gender roles and to foster gender equality at an age when young children are developing understandings of identity, empathy, tolerance and morality’ (ibid).

A variety of promising approaches recognise the key linkages between girls’ education and the provision of early childhood care. India is the front runner in this regard: not only are its ECCE programmes both widespread and longstanding, dating to the 1975 creation of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme, but also, for more than two decades, national ECCE policy has specifically acknowledged the impact of ECCE on girls’ primary education. In 1986, the National Policy on Education acknowledged that the universalisation of primary education would require the provision of day care centres in order to free girls from their child care duties. The District Primary Education Programme works closely with ICDS to ensure that primary school locations and schedules closely match those of ECCE centres.

India also pioneered the mobile crèche movement.

Son bias often results in deficits in terms of girls’ health and nutrition status, educational opportunities and attainment, time use, self-esteem and protection from exploitative and/or abusive forms of labour.

Mumbai Mobile Crèche has worked for over 30 years to free children from the burden of looking after their younger siblings, enabling girls to stay in school. Another NGO that recognises the ties between girls and their younger siblings is Room to Read. Serving nearly 10,000 girls in Southeast Asia and Africa, Room to Read offers a variety of support to keep girls in school. In addition to supplying course fees and female teachers, the programme offers flexible classes that allow girls to bring their younger siblings with them and to return home at lunch to cook for their family (Room to Read, 2009). The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), also working in Africa, is following two paths for the provision of ECCE, both with the goal of relieving ‘school-age girls of the burden of caring for very young children’ (MCC, 2005). In Burkina Faso, the MCC is working to construct girl-friendly schools that jointly house day care centres; in Liberia, the grant will cover the construction of community-managed child care centres.

5. Lessons learnt and policy implications

Overall, this chapter has highlighted the importance of understanding both the underlying economic and social factors that underpin intra-household gender biases and the gendered patterning of the impacts of differential treatment of sons and daughters and resulting linkages to poverty dynamics.

We recognise that son bias is not caused by poverty alone, although there is evidence that it is often intensified as a result of it. This is especially the case where income poverty intersects with low levels of education and literacy (among women as well as men) and in rural areas, where inheritance practices and agricultural labour demands play a particularly important role in shaping a preference for male offspring.

However, the impacts of son bias on girls and young women do have strong links with girls’ experiences of poverty and vulnerability in childhood and adulthood, and often in intergenerational terms. Son bias often results in deficits in terms of girls’ health and nutrition status, educational opportunities and attainment, time use, self-esteem and protection from exploitative and/or abusive forms of labour.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the culturally specific patterning of social institutions, there are significant differences across regions. There is considerable evidence that son bias is especially severe and entrenched in parts of Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, as reflected in alarmingly high sex ratio imbalances. In this part of the world, son bias may entail female foeticide or significantly different investments in girls’ health and nutrition, as reflected in gender-unequal child mortality rates as well as a range of other human capital and psychosocial deficits. In sub-Saharan African and Latin America, although demographic trends do not reflect any significant son preference, there is nevertheless ample evidence that daughters in impoverished and marginalised communities in particular suffer from unequal investments in

their education, higher levels of time poverty and heightened vulnerability to abusive forms of work. All of these can in turn contribute to negative psychosocial impacts in childhood, adolescence and beyond.

In order to address these discriminatory norms and practices, a multipronged approach supported by partners across a range of organisations at the international, national and sub-national levels is required, buttressed by strong political will. This should include:

- Harmonising legal provisions with international conventions and commitments and, most importantly, enforcing them, including through legal sensitisation and community outreach initiatives;
- Investing in public education efforts, including through curriculum reforms and innovative use of multimedia approaches, to mobilise support for investing in daughters;
- Incentivising and supporting families through a range of social protection interventions for education and health, including conditional cash transfers, school feeding programmes, scholarship programmes for girls and social health insurance;

Notes

- 1 This is calculated based on the number of males in the population divided by the number of females.
- 2 In some cases, poverty actually may protect some girls, especially in settings where they participate in subsistence agriculture and therefore are valued as producers (Pande and Astone, 2007). Wealth, on the other hand, poses a significant risk: imbalances in sex ratios are most acute among the higher classes in India. In the Punjab region, one of India’s more economically advanced states, approximately one in five female foetuses is thought to be aborted following sex identification testing (IRIN, 2005).
- 3 Infanticide of either sex, whether for economic, social or other reasons, has been prevalent across cultures throughout history. Even in the 1990s, infants under one year of age in the UK were ‘four times as likely to be victims of homicide as any other age group – almost all killed by their parents’ (Marks and Kumar, 1993).
- 4 In the case of China in particular, sex ratio disparities may also be reflected in international adoption of girl babies, as well as the high number of ‘orphaned girls’ assigned to state institutions (IRIN, 2005).
- 5 Chen and Summerfield (2007) also note that, in 2004, the Chinese government initiated an old-age security project for those who complied with the birth control policy in selected rural areas in order to help address the sex ratio imbalance. In 2005, the Liaoning provincial government launched a pilot version whereby families who had either one child or two daughters were entitled to receive 600 yuan per year per person after they reached age 60.
- 6 El-Gilany and Shady (2007); Nasir and Kalla (2006); Kiriti and Tisdell (2005); Yueh (2006).
- 7 Although overt gender discrimination reduced in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Chinese women’s rights have become less secure, particularly because, with the end of land reallocations, marriage has become a source of landlessness for women. In 1998, contracts were extended to 30 years, and redistributions could be made only when two-thirds of the villagers voted in their favour (Chen and Summerfield, 2007). These changes have particular implications for women in the lowest income group, who are typically heavily dependent on agriculture as their income source (Hare *et al.*, 2007).
- 8 Almond *et al.* (2009) considered 2001 and 2006 census data in Canada to analyse sex ratios among Asian immigrants. Higher sex ratios were found among first generation immigrants and stronger preferences for sons when all other children were girls. The authors found that Sikh families were more likely to use sex-selective abortion whereas Christian and Muslim families were more likely to keep having children until they had a son. Argnani *et al.* (2004) considered a group of Chinese immigrant women in Italy and found no particular sex ratio imbalance, but a preference for sons was expressed by survey participants owing to a desire to carry on the family name. However, abnormal variations in sex ratios were seen after the birth of the first child. Dubuc and Coleman (2007) considered sex ratios among Indian-born mothers in the UK. There has been a four-point increase in sex ratio among Indian-born mothers, which they argued is consistent with changes seen in India. Higher sex ratios are particularly evident later in the birth order and significant only above the third child.
- 9 Ebenstein and Leung (2010)’s conclusion that, although there is support for son preference in Islamic scriptures, there is a lower degree of daughter aversion, is also supported by quantitative analysis.
- 10 Plan International (2007) identifies Algeria, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Egypt, India, Jordan, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Morocco, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey as countries with a strong son bias, as well as Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay in Latin America.
- 11 Trends over the same period highlight important regional differences, with sharp reductions in sex discrimination mortality in North Africa and South Asia. However, overall numbers have remained constant globally owing to a dramatic rise in mortality in China (Klasen and Wink, 2003).
- 12 Recent research shows that boys are 60 percent more likely to be born prematurely and have problems breathing, and face higher risks of birth injury, because of their larger body and head size. But although girls benefit from their physiology at birth, this inherent resilience quickly gets overshadowed by gender discrimination – and in many countries girls swiftly become much more vulnerable than boys (World Bank, 2004, in Plan International, 2009).

# Limited resource rights and entitlements



- 13 Examples of gender-differentiated treatment are as follows: among children under age five with symptoms of acute respiratory infection (ARI), treatment was sought from a health facility or provider for 72 percent of the boys but 66 percent of the girls. Among under fives with fever, treatment was sought from a health facility or provider for 73 percent of boys but 68 percent of girls. Boys are also (7 percent) more likely than girls to be taken to a health facility for treatment in case of diarrhoea. Among last-born children, boys are 11 percent more exclusively breastfed than girls (IIPS, 2007).
- 14 Patra (2008) notes that Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh have the highest gender biases.
- 15 This has been shown to account for 11 percent of the mortality gender gap between babies aged 12 to 36 months, and could account for 14 percent of girl mortality between one and five (Jayachandran and Kuziemko, 2010).
- 16 Hazarika (2000) notes that, among young children in South Asia, sons have greater access to health care but are not better fed than daughters. This suggests that, rather than parental preference for boys (which would result in greater consumption among sons than daughters, which is not borne out by survey evidence), intra-household gender discrimination has its primary origins in higher returns to parents from investment in sons.
- 17 A robust body of evidence emphasises that girls' education promotes gender equality by minimising time use differences between boys and girls, and is positively associated with lower fertility, increased spacing between births, smaller likelihood of child marriage, improved productivity and lower levels of intergenerational transfer of poverty (e.g. Lloyd *et al.*, 2009).
- 18 In Afghanistan, there are 63 girls in school for every 100 boys (UNESCO, 2010).
- 19 In many households, men are still seen as the main breadwinners, so families perceive less value in investing in girls' education (Jusidman, 2004); some families prioritise boys' education, particularly when there are insufficient resources to finance education of both girls and boys; and some girls are not interested in continuing in school because they fail to see employment opportunities for themselves despite greater levels of education (Pereznieto and Campos, 2010).
- 20 This substitute effect is further borne out by the fact that the presence of additional adult females in the household may alleviate the housework burden of children. Ilahi (2001) found that, for Peru, the presence of adult females in the household lowered the housework time of both boys and girls but had no effect on child economic activity. It also significantly affected the educational attainment of girls, with no effect on the attainment of boys (Guarcello *et al.*, 2006).
- 21 Research from Brazil (Deutsch, 1998) and Romania (Fong and Lokshin, 1999) found that presence of children aged 6 to 15 who can serve as substitute care providers had a negative effect on the decision to use outside child care (in Ilahi, 2001). In Kenya, a 10 percent increase in child care costs reduced older girls' school enrolment rate by 3 percent, while the effect was not significant for boys (Glinskaya *et al.*, 2000, in Ilahi, 2001).
- 22 Grootaert and Patrinos (1999); Guarcello *et al.* (2006); Ilahi (2001); Skoufias (1993).
- 23 Ilahi (2001) notes an opposing income effect – as a mother's income increases her demand for child schooling increases – and substitution effect – children have to step in for a mother's forgone housework – at play here. The substitution effect dominates at least up to a certain income threshold in developing countries.
- 24 [www.unfpa.org/hiv/women/report/endnotes.htm#c4h16](http://www.unfpa.org/hiv/women/report/endnotes.htm#c4h16).
- 25 In South Korea, legislation providing for the revoking of medical practitioners' licenses has helped reduce the country's sex ratio, which fell from 116.9 in 1990 to 110 in 2004 (Hesketh and Zhu, 2006).
- 26 <http://infochangeindia.org/2006031077/Women/Analysis/Challenges-in-implementing-the-ban-on-sex-selection.html>.
- 27 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/4173597.stm>.
- 28 Note that Paragraph 83 of the Beijing Platform for Action calls for governments and education authorities to promote shared responsibilities between girls and boys vis-à-vis domestic work and family responsibilities.
- 29 [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/regional\\_review.html](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/regional_review.html).
- 30 Introduced in 2007, the New Rural Social Pension Insurance Programme provides pensions to people over 60 years on the condition that family members aged 18+ have subscribed and paid for the insurance. The aim is to reduce dependency on children for financial support in old age and the risk of conflict between family members because of the need to provide financial support. In 2007, coverage had already reached 61.3 percent of those eligible (Wenjuan and Dan, 2008).

# Limited resource rights and entitlements

## 1. Gender, resource rights and entitlements and poverty dynamics

This chapter examines the causes and consequences of girls’ lack of entitlements, rights and access to resources. The focus on this social institution derives from the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) Ownership Rights Sub-Index, which captures women’s access to several types of property. The sub-index includes three variables: *women’s access to land*, indicating whether women are allowed to and can de facto own land; *women’s access to property other than land*, particularly fixed property such as houses; and *women’s access to bank loans*, indicating whether women are allowed to and can de facto access credit.<sup>1</sup>

Here, given the complexities involved in concepts of ownership and control, which can vary according to different socio-cultural contexts, we reframe the discussion more broadly in terms of resource access rights and entitlements, adding access to natural resources other than land and focusing – where data permit – on adolescent girls and young women. We also attempt to identify explicit linkages between patterns of gender discrimination in resource rights and entitlements and poverty dynamics. Promising initiatives to overcome barriers to equal resources rights and entitlements are examined, along with ongoing challenges in this domain. A number of policy implications are highlighted as a means of advancing reflection on the way forward.

### Gendered constraints on resource rights

It is well known that women’s access to property and material assets is typically less than that of men and is often mediated through their relationships with men. The SIGI Ownership Rights Sub-Index includes data for 122 countries, 80 of which show inequalities. Most of the countries with high discrimination are in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa and South Asia. The ten worst performers are all from these regions, with the majority in sub-Saharan Africa.

Women’s ability to access, accumulate and control wealth and assets throughout the lifecycle is patterned and

conditioned by a number of institutions, including the state, the family, the community and the market (see Deere and Doss, 2006). Through civil codes and property and family law, the state sets parameters for the accumulation, control and transmission of property. Although situations vary according to context, discriminatory inheritance systems and particular practices of bride wealth and dowry, as well as legislation that defines and limits married women’s property rights have historically disadvantaged women in terms of ownership and control of assets (see Chapter 1 on Discriminatory Family Codes). Family and community norms that either underpin such systems or override attempted reforms to them may also impinge on women’s rights and entitlements, particularly if they are founded on patriarchal value systems. Girls in such systems are often doubly disadvantaged by their gender and their age (see Box 1).

Markets, particularly the labour market, significantly affect women’s ability to accumulate wealth and assets of their own. Continuing gender disparities in education for girls,

### Box 1: Gendered patterns of asset transfer in Bangladesh

In a longitudinal study of intergenerational transmissions of poverty in Bangladesh, patterns of asset transfer (exchange) are seen to be gender specific, favouring boys within the patriarchal social structure and biasing parental investment against girls. The study notes the importance of analysing inter vivo transfers, which are often overlooked. The majority of assets received by young women are acquired on marriage (jewellery and cash as dowry); however, the amounts are low and do not compensate for the asset gaps in inheritance and education, which have the most significant impact on monetary measures of well-being and poverty outcomes. Moreover, in the case of dowry (sometimes viewed as ‘female inheritance’), the assets received on marriage are often not controlled by the new wife but by her in-laws, and may be a source of intra-household gender violence.

Source: Quisumbing (2008)

## Box 2: Intertwining asset inequalities

Women not only earn less than men but also tend to own fewer assets. Smaller salaries and less control over household income constrain their ability to accumulate capital. Gender biases in property and inheritance laws and in other channels of acquiring assets – such as state-led land distribution programmes – also leave women and children at greater risk of poverty.

Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2006)

coupled with women's unequal access to and preparation for productive employment opportunities, segmented labour forces, lower wages and tensions between reproductive and productive work, impinge on women's ability to accumulate wealth and achieve economic empowerment (Ambler *et al.*, 2007; Deere and Doss, 2006; Levine *et al.*, 2009).

## Links to poverty dynamics

Gender discrimination in access to and control over resources and assets has a number of negative implications for both women and girls as well as for their households and families, with clear links to heightened vulnerabilities and poverty dynamics throughout the lifecycle. If girls, then women, fail to accumulate assets, they may pass their poverty status on to the next generation, forcing their children to battle disadvantage from the very start of their lives (Bird, 2007). Heightened vulnerabilities and poverty effects include the following:

- **Limitations on female household bargaining power**, which in turn affect the pattern of household expenditures on food, health, education and social services, with negative outcomes for the well-being of family members and the empowerment of girls and women. Assets such as land, capital and property have been demonstrated to be a crucial bargaining chip within household negotiations; without them, women's intra-household influence and voice are considerably weakened (Bird and Espey, 2010). Studies have shown that the family member who controls the greatest share of household income and assets has the strongest say in deciding how these resources will be used. Moreover, the amount of influence women have over the decisions in the household has been shown to positively impact the nutrition, health care and education of their children as well as overall empowerment in wider society.<sup>2</sup>
- Women's limited income-earning opportunities, coupled with their lack of ownership and management of assets, gives them less bargaining power and thus less influence in the decisions that will help break intergenerational transmission of poverty. A review of

Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data indicates significant proportions of households where men alone make decisions on household expenditures – up to two-thirds, for example, in Malawi (UNICEF, 2006). For young women in particular, lack of access to and control over resources severely constrains their capabilities as decision-making agents within the family and limits their empowerment in wider society.<sup>3</sup>

- **Disinvestment in girls**, including limitations in education, which diminishes their capabilities and potentialities. This often results not only from the limited household bargaining power of the mother but also from the assumption that daughters are unlikely to be economically productive (Agarwal, 1997a) and

**Girls are often considered 'temporary people' in their natal home. 'Parents lose interest in supporting somebody who will move away; why invest in someone who will leave you and who will be exchanged for property?'**

- Mehotra (2003); Kipuri and Ridgewell (2008)

from patterns of virilocal residence, such that daughters move to their in-laws' households on marriage (e.g. Haberland *et al.*, 2004). As such, parental investment in daughters is considered lost on their departure (Bayisenge, 2009) and girls are often considered 'temporary people' in their natal home (Mehotra, 2003). In Kenya, for example, women explain that: 'Parents lose interest in supporting somebody who will move away; why invest in someone who will leave you and who will be exchanged for property?' (Kipuri and Ridgewell, 2008). Such practices can perpetuate chronic poverty, as education is considered vital to women's and girls' empowerment and economic productivity – considerably heightening their chance of escaping poverty. Likewise, healthy physical and cognitive development improves a girl's future ability to work and care for future children (see also Chapter 2 on Son Bias).

- **Weakened 'poverty buffers'**, leading to heightened vulnerability in times of economic stress. Assets, particularly the control over or ownership of land and other productive resources, have been demonstrated to be pivotal in the management of economic shocks and periods of deprivation. Selling assets is a key means of supplying short-term income, and shoring up assets is integral to buffering against chronic poverty (Bird,

2007; also Deere and Doss, 2006). Social institutions that inhibit women and girls from selling and transferring assets diminish their available coping strategies. The consequences can be further asset depletion, e.g. overworking available land at the expense of long-term productivity (Scherr, 2000); recourse to borrowing leading to potential debt traps (McKay, 2009); taking on supplementary employment, often at the expense of child care (Espey *et al.*, 2010); and potentially engaging in hazardous employment such as prostitution (Harper *et al.*, 2009). Underlying gender biases may also mean that women's or female-headed households' assets are more vulnerable to erosion than those of men (Holmes *et al.*, 2009). Lower household income and asset depletion can have a prominent impact on children, but particularly girls, who may be forced to take on additional work in the home or generate a supplementary income. This can in turn compromise their ability to attend and complete school, thereby reinforcing a cycle of poverty and disadvantage.<sup>4</sup>

- **Increased vulnerability of women and children in cases of female-headed households, polygamous relationships, divorce or widowhood.** Commanding assets like land or a house provides a basis for physical and economic security, which is often denied to women. The consequences can be particularly stark when a marriage breaks down or a husband dies. The inheritance or non-inheritance of assets on marriage or death of the household head has been integrally linked to people's poverty trajectories and their likelihood of staying in or moving out of poverty (Bird and Espey, 2010). Separated or divorced women may have no rights to the family home, land or jointly acquired assets, and widows may lose assets traditionally held by them in trust for their children through 'property grabbing' by relatives (Bird, 2007; UNICEF, 2006). This can have a profound impact on women's/girls' livelihood options, their household income and their children's development.<sup>5</sup> In such cases, women and girls may resort to desperate coping strategies, such as commercial sex work or transactional sex activities, as is increasingly the case for widows and orphans in situations of deepening poverty in a number of AIDS-affected countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Hossain *et al.*, 2009; Oglethorpe and Gelman, 2008).

For women and girls in polygamous households, access to household assets can prove even more problematic, given the intensified competition between household members. The practice of polygamy can promote significant inequalities within the household, particularly between the senior wife and her fellow

wives or in cases where the husband has a favoured wife, in which case the preferred wife may be more able to access his resources than his other wives, giving rise to jealousy and conflict (Oni, 1996, in Bolt and Bird, 2003). Children can be strongly affected by these competitive relations through the unequal allocation of resources and tasks. In some instances, children from unfavoured wives are at a greater risk of mortality (Bird and Shinyekwa, 2003; Oni, 1996, in Bolt and Bird, 2003).

- **Reduced productivity and growth, particularly in the rural economy:** A number of studies provide evidence indicating that women's lack of ownership and control over land and farm planning and management both constrain agricultural productivity and weaken household consumption and nutrition.<sup>6</sup> World Bank research in some sub-Saharan African countries found that output could increase by up to 20 percent if more women had equal access to and control over farm income, agricultural services and land (in UNFPA, 2004). Household-level human capital investments would also improve (World Bank, 2008). A major land policy study concluded that 'increasing women's control over land could therefore have a strong and immediate effect on the welfare of the next generation and on the level and pace at which human and physical capital are accumulated' (Deininger, 2003).<sup>7</sup>

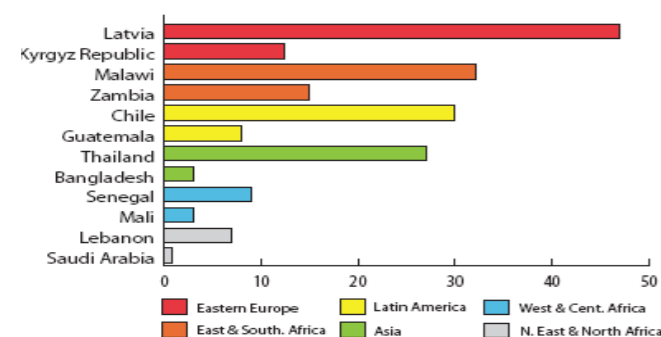
## 2. Dimensions of deprivation: Statistics and lived realities

### Land and livestock

Women and girls often provide the bulk of agricultural labour, but an international comparison of agricultural census data shows that less than 20 percent of landholders are female. Rates range from lows of less than 10 percent in West and Central Africa and the Middle East and North Africa to highs of nearly 50 percent in Central and Eastern Europe (see Figure 1). In Cameroon, although women undertake more than 75 percent of agricultural work, they own less than 10 percent of the land. Comparable disparities exist in other countries (UNICEF, 2006). As a share of land overall – beyond agricultural holdings – women's landholding remains even lower, at 1 to 2 percent of titled land worldwide (USAID, 2003).

Other assets integral to the rural economy include livestock, financial capital, modern inputs, information, extension services and labour. These also show significant gender differences which are, moreover, generally interlinked. Land ownership in particular enables women to access other assets and resources, which in turn enables investment and

**Figure 1: Percentage of agricultural land titles held by women (highest and lowest rate in selected regions)**



Source: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Gender and Land Rights Database – [www.fao.org/gender/landrights](http://www.fao.org/gender/landrights)

diversification.<sup>8</sup> This, in effect, creates a vicious ‘asset trap,’ which is reinforced by social norms and patterns of inheritance and control and the gender division of labour. Weaker property rights in Ghana, for example, are one reason women farmers are more likely to be subsistence farmers than cultivators of more profitable cash crops, such as pineapples (Desai, 2010).

Women and girls in pastoral or agro-pastoral production systems suffer similar constraints owing to systematic gender inequalities in livestock holdings, which often constitute the main vehicle for wealth accumulation, income and consumption. The situation varies by culture and context, but most data show the value of men’s livestock (normally larger animals) to be significantly higher than that of women’s

(small stock). Even joint ownership of large animals does not necessarily confer equal benefits (Anriquez *et al.*, 2010). In East Africa, pastoralist women are seen to suffer a double disadvantage: they are marginalised as pastoralists by the state and as women within their own societies. Agro-pastoral production systems have traditionally been organised around the complementary roles of men and women, but recent changes, including environmental degradation and commercialisation, have upset the balance, leading to growing vulnerability for women and difficulties in building up an independent status (Kipuri and Ridgewell, 2008). As one Maasai woman from Tanzania explains: ‘Women own no livestock and the value of their work is not appreciated. Even to sell a cow, permission has to be sought ... in fact even to sell an ear of maize that I have planted myself, I have to do it secret’ (in Kipuri and Ridgewell, 2008).

Particular vulnerabilities that arise out of the relational nature of women’s and girls’ resource rights and entitlements are illustrated in the cases in Box 3, which highlight clear linkages to downward poverty spirals in the cases of widowhood and divorce.

### Natural resources and climate change

The chronically poor often live in marginal environments and are highly dependent on access to natural resources beyond land and livestock, both for their livelihoods and daily survival and as a coping strategy in the face of hardship (Scott, 2006, in Espey, forthcoming). It is often women, assisted by their children and especially their daughters, who manage the

### Box 3: Death, divorce and poverty – stories of young women from Zimbabwe and the West Bank

**Zimbabwe:** In Chivi district, a young pregnant widow with two young children was left vulnerable by both her age and her lack of recognised entitlement to her deceased husband’s property. As a result, her husband’s family stripped her of her assets. They ‘sent her back to her parents’ with the excuse that only part of the *labolo* (bride price) had been paid and her parents might cause trouble for her in-laws. However, paying only part of the *labolo* is customary, and is used to symbolise the long-term link and trust between the two families. The young woman lost her house, land, livestock, pots, pans, tools and other assets. She returned to her parents’ house, where she had her third child. Her father allocated a small portion of his land to her, so she now scratches out a living and faces a very uncertain future (Bird, 2000, in Bird and Pratt, 2004).

**West Bank:** Mona is 27 years old, from a well-known landowning family. She married aged 15 and has three boys and one girl. When married, Mona lived in a one-room home with her family and with her mother-in-law. When her father died in 1985, her brother came from the Gulf asking her to relinquish her inheritance and to sign a paper to legalise this. She did so, but denied this to her husband, who went to her family to inquire about her inheritance. When her brother told him that she had relinquished it, he came home in anger and cracked her head against the wall, after which she spent 20 days in hospital. The police questioned her but she did not denounce her husband; instead, her brother told the police what happened and a big family fight ensued. Then her husband divorced her, taking legal custody of the children, and her mother died soon after. Mona’s brother came and took her to his house. Mona fought repeatedly with her sister-in-law about bringing her children home for visits. Finally, her sister-in-law evicted her from the house. Mona then returned to her ex-husband and offered to be his domestic servant as she had nowhere else to live. Her ex-husband took advantage and overworked her. When her brother discovered this, he beat the husband. Mona now lives in poverty with an old woman, a distant relative, and works in the olive fields. She is not permitted to see her children (Buregeya *et al.*, 2001).

natural resource needs of the household, collect water, fodder and firewood and harvest wild products (e.g. Fisher 2006).<sup>9</sup> In spite of these responsibilities, many poor women and girls have neither legal nor social control over these resources: it is estimated that women have access to only 5 percent of the concessions given worldwide to manage and use natural resources (UNDP, 2009). For the chronically poor, these gender inequalities combine with other deprivations, such as lack of access to basic services and lack of political voice.

Women and girls are rendered particularly vulnerable in the context of climate change, which jeopardises the quality or quantity of the resources on which they depend and intensifies the work, effort and energy needed to eke out a daily subsistence from those resources, thus limiting their other development options (Dankelman, 2002; Masika, 2001). In drought-prone areas affected by desertification, for example, the time absorbed by water collection will increase, as women and children (mostly girls) will have to travel greater distances to find water. Predicted heavy rainfalls and more frequent floods may also increase women’s and girls’ workloads, as they will have to devote more time to collecting water as well as to maintaining their houses after flooding (Brody *et al.*, 2008).

Further demands on the time of girls and women during periods of disaster and environmental stress may arise from additional responsibilities for caring for the aged and sick (Araujo and Quesada-Aguilar, 2007). All of this in turn limits girls’ opportunities to participate in education<sup>10</sup> and renders girls themselves prone to stress-related illnesses and exhaustion (Brody *et al.*, 2008; CIDA, 2002; VSO, 2006). Disasters and emergency situations have also been demonstrated to result in adolescent girls being more exposed to situations of sexual harassment and abuse (Bartlett, 2008).

### Financial services

Access to financial services, such as credit, low-cost loans, deposit facilities, micro savings and insurance, is vital for pursuing many livelihood options, and can be particularly important for young women seeking to generate and sustain a reliable and independent income. Having access to micro savings can enable women to accumulate assets, increase their security and reach a level at which they can diversify, behave entrepreneurially and afford to repay credit. Low-cost loans for income smoothing (rather than enterprise), for contingencies and for investment in human capital (for example school fees or medical expenses) and

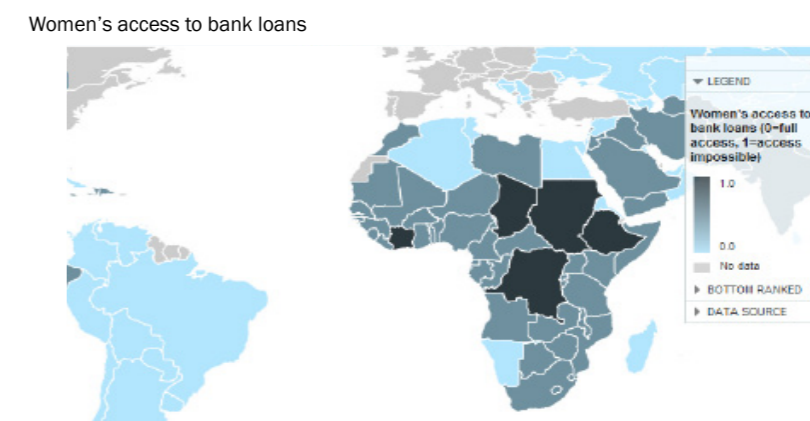
housing are also important, but rarely available.

The statistics are stark: the UN Development Programme (UNDP) reports that 75 percent of the world’s women cannot get bank loans (in CARE USA, 2009). Figure 2 shows large swathes of the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa and South Asia, where women’s access to bank loans is difficult to impossible. Although women in many countries may have the legal right to obtain credit, they frequently face restrictions, as banks may ask the written permission of a woman’s husband or require land as collateral, which women, particularly young women, frequently lack.<sup>11</sup>

With restricted access to employment, lacking control of the means of production and deprived of land and property through gendered tenure and inheritance practices, adolescent girls’ and women’s difficulties in accessing credit mechanisms through banking systems further deprive them of needed sources of capital. Households lacking adequate access to credit have been found to be on average 25 percent less economically efficient than others. Constraints on female-headed households’ access to credit are particularly important, and have a measurable negative impact on their production capabilities (Fletschner, 2008b; Snapp *et al.*, 2002, in Anriquez *et al.*, 2010.) In Uganda, female entrepreneurs face clear gender biases and receive just 1 percent of available credit in rural areas (Ellis *et al.*, 2006), and female-headed households are unable to expand their agricultural activities owing to a lack of financial capital (Dolan, 2004, in Anriquez *et al.*, 2010).

Adolescent girls are particularly disadvantaged, as a result of both gender and age. The minority status of unmarried girls renders them dependent on parents/guardians when seeking to undertake legal or financial transactions, whereas young married women have greater dependence on the support and consent of their husbands. However, early marriage is of itself a consequence of young women’s lack of alternative viable livelihood options and financial support mechanisms.

**Figure 2: Gendered access to bank loans**



Source: [www.girlsdiscovered.org/map/economic\\_opportunities/#](http://www.girlsdiscovered.org/map/economic_opportunities/#)

Research on age at marriage in a variety of settings suggests that marriage and childbearing are often the only means for young girls to secure identity and status in families and as adults in society. The more important the role of wife and mother is to women’s identities – and the fewer alternative social and economic activities that are available – the earlier girls will tend to marry (Gage, 1998; Okonofua, 1995, in Mathur *et al.*, 2003). This then creates a vicious cycle, as young married girls are the least likely to benefit from educational and economic policies and programmes, such as those that encourage primary and secondary school enrolment or expand opportunities for credit or participation in the paid workforce (Mathur *et al.*, 2003). Adolescent girls who are child heads of household responsible for the well-being of other family members face additional hurdles, as there are often no special legal provisions to address their particularly vulnerable situation.

For many young women, lack of a financial support mechanism is a hindrance not only to the generation of independent income but also to their ability to complete schooling and to care for their children. Recent research in South Africa shows that, by the age of 18, more than 30 percent of teens have given birth at least once (NRC-IOM, 2005, in Chigona and Chetty, 2007). Globally, about 16 million adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 give birth each year, accounting for more than 10 percent of all births worldwide (Mathur *et al.*, 2003). Teenage pregnancy means that many girls and young women are forced to drop out of school, often hoping to re-enrol following their pregnancy, but the need to pay for their child’s welfare and to find daytime care means that they have to work. This deprives them of continued education, thereby limiting future livelihood options. Without support for teen mothers to complete their education, many will struggle with

poverty and may even pass their poverty position on to their children (Chevalier and Viitanen, 2001; Chigona and Chetty, 2007).

In all of these cases, the relational nature of women’s and girls’ rights and entitlements and lack of collateral of their own combine to inhibit their access to needed financial resources (see Box 4).

### 3. Promising policy and programme initiatives

Research has shown that young women who are economically empowered in rural livelihoods, in decent, secure work or in successful small businesses, and who enjoy equal rights to property, land ownership, environmental resources and credit opportunities, are better equipped to create a solid future for themselves, their families and communities (Levine *et al.*, 2009; Plan International, 2009; World Bank, 2008). Investment over the lifecycle is seen to be critical.

In particular, the economic empowerment of adolescent girls to build and protect their assets has been identified by the recently created Coalition for Adolescent Girls’ as one of ten priority actions through which investment in young girls can help end chronic poverty. Recommended programmes aim to (Levine *et al.*, 2009):

- Build marketable skills by enhancing the relevance of educational curricula and developing after-school tutoring and mentoring programmes;
- Develop internships, apprenticeships and training opportunities to promote girls’ transitions to safe and productive livelihoods;
- Offer financial education and training – both formal and non-formal – for girls aged 10 to 14 to build economic assets and financial literacy early in life;

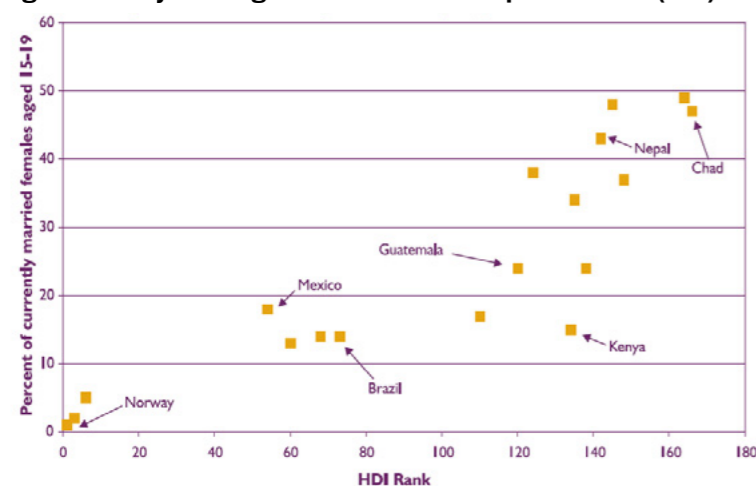
- Work with microfinance and banking institutions to design services for girls, including savings accounts, so girls can protect their assets.

Other equally important and complementary approaches stress legal reform to secure rights over land and productive resources; collective action by women and girls; and direct provision of cash and productive resources to women and girls. Below are examples of some promising initiatives.

#### Microfinance, financial literacy and skills training

Microfinance (including microcredit and micro savings) programmes have grown into one of the most popular economic strategies over the

Figure 3: Early marriage and Human Development Index (HDI) rank



Source: Mathur *et al.* (2003)



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Bangladesh, Bakerganj, Barisal. A women’s group meeting in Bakerganj to discuss small microfinance loans from group savings.

#### Box 4: Portraits of poverty for young women lacking access to credit

‘To understand the plight of poor women around the world, consider the stories of Ade, Runa, and Reina. On the outskirts of Ibadan, Nigeria, Ade cultivates a small, sparsely planted plot with a baby on her back and other visibly undernourished children nearby. Her efforts to grow an improved soybean variety, which could have fortified her children’s diet, failed because she lacked the extra time to tend the new crop, did not have a spouse who could help her, and could not afford hired labour. Runa, a young woman with boundless energy, piercing eyes and a warm smile, founded and runs the Self-Employed Women’s Association in the Indian city of Lucknow, one of the country’s most disadvantaged regions. Until a year ago, she had been unable to obtain credit from local banks for her impressively well organised business, which now employs about 5,000 women home workers who sell *chikan* embroidery in national and international markets. Reina is a former guerrilla fighter in El Salvador who is being taught how to bake bread under a post-civil war reconstruction programme. But as she says, “The only thing I have is this training and I don’t want to be just a baker. I have other dreams for my life.”

‘A farmer, an entrepreneur, and a former guerrilla – the working lives of these three women have little in common, except that they, along with most women worldwide, face similar obstacles to increasing their economic power: no “slack” time to invest in additional work that could bring in needed income; lack of access to commercial credit; and training in traditionally female – and mostly low-wage – skills.’

Source: Buvinic (1997)

past two decades to assist poor and often landless women to enter self-employment or start their own business. Certain challenges exist, and the success of microcredit has varied considerably.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, according to evidence pulled together by the World Bank, women’s access to microcredit has increased their control of non-land assets (Khandkar, 1998; Pitt and Khandkar, 1998), expanded their role in household decision making (Kabeer, 1998) and fostered greater acceptance by husbands of their participation in market-based economic

activities (Agarwal, 1997) (all in Morrison and Sabarwal, 2008). For girls, microfinance can provide a path to economic independence, can reduce consumption volatility over time and can provide collateral for further loans (e.g. Grown, 2006).

However, programmes for younger women/adolescent girls need to take into account their special needs and vulnerabilities, including: their lack of appropriate skills for productive employment or livelihoods; their frequent inability to control cash in the household; and their need for

safe spaces and mentoring to help them build social as well as financial capital.<sup>13</sup> They also increasingly take into account young women’s needs and concerns for savings as a social investment for the future. These were among the lessons learnt from Kenya’s Tap and Reposition Youth (TRY) programme, targeting out-of-school adolescent girls in Nairobi, which evolved from a minimalist savings and credit model to one that provided additional social support and individual, voluntary savings option in its second phase.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, microcredit needs to be sensitive to the fiscal management of recipient households and their susceptibility to adverse shocks. Credit for the poorest has been shown in some instances to lead to indebtedness (e.g. Burra *et al.*, 2005). Moreover, where social sanctioning (groups) are used to ensure repayment, a failure to repay can lead to social stigma and damage to a woman’s and a household’s social capital (e.g. Pelligra, 2009). In such situations, micro savings instruments and other modes of financial savings/insurance (as highlighted in Annex 2) are sometimes more appropriate mechanisms of financial support, as women are less likely to draw down on their accumulated capital and are better able to smooth consumption and undertake investment (Hulme *et al.*, 2009). A recent and ongoing study by Dupas and Robinson in rural Kenya (2009) has shown that women subject to health shocks are likely to draw down on their working capital, whereas women with access to a savings account are less likely to reduce their business investment levels when dealing with a health shock and are better able to smooth their labour supply over illness. In particular, women in the savings group are more likely to be able to afford medical expenses for more serious illness episodes.

Gender empowerment through cash transfers

Cash transfer programmes have increasingly been designed as part of social safety nets or broader social protection programmes, as a means of protecting the most vulnerable populations from the risks associated with abject poverty. In addition, with a focus on development of human capital through household welfare investments in health and education, they aim to help break the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Most cash transfer programmes, whether conditional or unconditional, channel funds directly to women, based on a large body of evidence indicating that women are more likely than men to use the cash for the health, nutrition and education needs of their children. Additionally, most funds tend to target young women, as the parents of young children. Social transfers in the hands of women, in addition to empowering women themselves, improve children’s health and nutritional status and school attendance, and can thus be an effective way of reducing hunger and intergenerational poverty (Thakur *et al.*, 2009).

These transfers can be a lifeline for women and girls without family networks and support, as indicated by numerous examples reported in Thakur *et al.* (2009). In Peru, in a region with a high density of female-headed households, abandonment is recognised as a major source of vulnerability. Young women and girls have limited control over their reproductive lives and poor access to mechanisms that grant the fulfilment of their rights (Valente, forthcoming). However, when these households are targeted effectively with cash transfers which recognise their ‘identity’ as household heads, entitled to cash, credit and resources (e.g. through the

conditional cash transfer programme Programa de Apoyo a los Más Pobres – Juntos (‘Support to the Poorest’)), there is the potential for considerable improvements in women’s and girls’ education, health and future productivity (ibid).

Social transfers provided to mothers have been demonstrated to have a positive impact on both women’s position in the household and intra-household resource allocation (Barrientos, 2008). Research from Mexico’s Oportunidades (‘Opportunities’) programme shows that giving cash only to women increases their decision-making role in household expenditure as well as their financial security, self-esteem and social status. A gender audit of Brazil’s Bolsa Família (‘Family Grant’) found that women’s domestic status increased because their income was regular, compared with other household members, whose jobs and wages were uncertain (Suarez *et al.*, 2006). Linking transfers to school attendance has had positive gender effects (Tabor, 2002), for example in Bangladesh, Brazil and South Africa, with increased educational opportunities for girls promising gender equity benefits across the lifecycle (HAI, 2008, in Thakur *et al.*, 2009). Evidence also suggests that programmes such as Bolsa Família in Brazil and the Child Support Grant in South Africa (Williams, 2007) boost women’s labour market participation.<sup>15</sup>

Well-designed programmes that link with complementary services can have a positive effect on women’s risk management and asset accumulation, for example in programmes that distribute small ruminants to agro-pastoral women in the Sahel. Social transfers, when regular and reliable, can also help alleviate constraints in access to credit, promote savings,

enable women to invest in livelihood-enhancing activities and contribute to growth (Thakur *et al.*, 2009; Holmes and Jones, 2010). Combining cash transfers with other interventions (provision of microfinance, training, livelihood support) has proven to be an effective strategy, but more research is needed on measures most conducive to the empowering effects of such transfers.

Scholarships for girls

Some cash transfers take the form of scholarships provided directly to girls to allow them to pay school fees and other associated costs of schooling. In this way, they contribute to enhancing the potential for economic empowerment through delayed marriage age and completion of schooling.

Reviewing evidence from a number of programmes and assessing the significance in a cash transfer programme in Malawi of providing transfers for schooling directly to the girl rather than to her family, the World Bank found that one-year impacts on school enrolment were higher when the size of the transfer given directly to the girl herself was increased. Moreover, the results were statistically significant when the transfers were conditional on attending school. Putting cash directly into the hands of girls and young women, therefore, can have significant payoffs (Baird *et al.*, 2009).

Gender rights in land and property

Securing land rights for women and girls is seen to have positive multiplier effects on gender equality and the reduction of poverty (see conceptual framework in Annex 3).

Box 5: Improving girls physical and economic security in a slum in Nairobi

In Kibera, the largest slum of Nairobi, poverty, lack of infrastructure and high rates of HIV make life difficult for adolescent girls. Many have lost their parents, are out of school and lack friends and safe places to socialise and learn skills. In 2007, a baseline study by the Population Council revealed that 55 percent of girls lived with one or no parents, half reported not having many friends in their neighbourhood, three-quarters lacked a safe place to meet their friends and 60 percent said they were at risk of sexual abuse. The Population Council, along with the United Kingdom (UK) Department for International Development (DFID), the Nike Foundation and the Global Financial Education Program (GFEP), supported the local Binti Pamoja (‘Daughters United’) Centre, offering health and education services, to create a programme for safe spaces and skills training for adolescent girls in Kibera. A mapping project revealed that less than 1 percent of girls had access to sex-segregated programmes running in the slum. A Safe Spaces programme was launched and ten new girls groups were initially created, targeting girls aged 10 to 19. In order to address their economic vulnerability, a financial literacy programme was included, along with a savings programme. In addition, information on sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS and skills training sessions were provided. Older girls became the leaders of the groups, teaching and supporting younger ones and providing a positive role model for them. A partnership with MicroSave, a consulting company for low-income clients, and two financial institutions helped girls to start a savings process as a group and access savings accounts, in an effort to get empowered not only socially but also economically and to be able to take charge of their lives. Thousands of girls received the necessary training and are currently involved in the Go Girls savings product offered by local banks and operating without any involvement of the girls’ parents. Thus, girls have been offered not only safe spaces, new friends and social and health activities but also savings products to ensure the best use of their money and to promote their economic independence.

Source: Williams (2004)

Box 6: Promoting adolescent girls’ livelihood skills and access to financial services

Kishori Abhijan (‘Adolescent Girls’ Adventure’) has offered livelihood skills (including life skills lessons, savings account options, access to credit and vocational training); mentoring to develop self-esteem and leadership skills; and training in health and nutrition, legislation and legal rights and gender equality to 15,000 adolescent girls in three districts of rural Bangladesh. Initiated by UNICEF in collaboration with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) in 2001 to 2002, the programme has been implemented by two national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and the Centre for Mass Education and Science. An evaluation showed the following results: increased employment; improved school enrolment; delayed marriage; improved health knowledge; and enhanced mobility reducing social isolation. The life skills component has been scaled up to enrol more than 250,000 girls in 58 districts (Amin and Suran, 2005).

A separate adolescent microcredit initiative, Employment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA), operated by BRAC with financial assistance from the Nike Foundation, covers another 230,000 girls (Amin, 2007). In addition to credit, ELA provides participants with skills training for income generation, books for extra-curricular reading, equipment for indoor games and a space to socialise to build confidence and social skills. An assessment indicated that interventions had helped reduce early marriage, promote economic activities and increase mobility and involvement in extra-curricular reading (Shahnaz and Karim, 2008). Girls who received specific skills training used their loans for income generation (poultry raising, marketing) as well as for social investment (savings for pensions, education and future marriage). Some noted ambitious plans: ‘We have plans to invest the surplus money in business and buy land and house. We have one house but want another one. We also want to save up so that we can pay for our own dowry’ (ibid). It is clear that: ‘When credit is successfully utilized girls are able to scale up self-initiated activities, invest in education, expand her area of work and exercise considerable leverage in key decisions in her own life’ (Amin, 2007).



© Adam Hinton / Panos Pictures (2005)  
Guatemala. Mother and daughter at the door of their home.

Reforming and enforcing legislation guaranteeing women’s and girls’ property, land and inheritance rights was one of the ‘quick wins’ identified for priority action for attainment of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on gender equality and women’s empowerment (UN Millennium Project, 2005a; 2005b). Ongoing efforts to move from gender-equitable law reform and policy promotion to real changes on the ground have proven a challenge, with hopes for a ‘quick win’ perhaps illusory in such a complex arena (see, for example, Bird and Espey, 2010). Nevertheless, policy changes and changes in laws and/or regulations that eliminate prohibitions of women owning land or other property have yielded positive results in a number of countries.

In Latin America between 1988 and 1995, five countries (Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua) passed agrarian legislation for joint adjudication or titling of land to couples, with women benefitting from such measures (Deere and Leone, 2003). In the wake of land reform in Costa Rica, women’s share in land titles rose from 12 to 45 percent by 1992, while land titled jointly to couples in Colombia rose from 18 to 60 percent after a ruling in 1996 (King and Mason, 2001). Many states in Africa have also recently passed family and land bills that strengthen women’s land rights (see, for example, Cooper, 2010). These are part of a wider effort to redistribute land and increase security of tenure, including

renewed emphasis on the property rights of orphans and widows in the context of AIDS (see policy priorities as highlighted in Annex 4).

A recent review in East and Southern Africa highlights examples of programmes aimed at the following (Strickland, 2004):

- Ensuring gender-sensitive legislation and frameworks: In Tanzania, the Women’s Legal Aid Centre links land legislation, economic status and equal inheritance rights; in Namibia, the Legal Assistance Centre works to analyse and reform cohabitation and marital property regimes;
- Promoting judicial capacity to uphold the delivery of women’s rights: The regional trust for Women and Law in Southern Africa supports legal aid clinics in Zambia; the Kenya section of the International Commission of Jurists works with the judiciary to domesticate the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in national jurisprudence; and
- Advancing public awareness, understanding and application of women’s rights: Women’s Voice in Malawi has conducted community sensitisation and ‘will-writing campaigns’ in rural communities.

Examples of gender-sensitive land registration efforts are provided below. Hallmarks of success for all such efforts include: a recognition of the diversity of legal traditions, customary laws and ongoing practices that both frame and impinge on women’s land rights in different contexts; inclusiveness in legal reform efforts bringing together diverse groups – from women, children and youth to elders and traditional leaders, extension workers, local government officials and representatives of faith-based groups; and appropriate measure to monitor and enforce implementation of gender-sensitive land reform policies.

Collective action around resources and assets

Efforts to promote gender equity for both women and girls have gained momentum through collective activity, social movements and networking, as a means of strengthening voice, enhancing bargaining power and securing control of resources (see also Chapter 5 on Restricted Civil Liberties for specific examples of girls’ participatory movements). Cooperatives, credit and savings groups and self-help societies have been instrumental as sources of empowerment around the world, opening up avenues to both social and economic asset creation and accumulation in a variety of settings. Some programmes have promoted women’s collective rather than individual ownership of land and assets, as for example in Andhra Pradesh, India, where poor low-caste women in groups of 5 to 15 have purchased or leased land through government schemes for subsidised credit and grants, and are now farming these lots productively in 75 villages. Such collective ownership programmes and production cooperatives have also been successful in Latin America and countries in Africa (Agarwal, 2010). Other programmes have

empowered pastoral women to exercise their rights over key household and community assets such as small livestock, as for example in Uganda, where the Karamoja Agro-Pastoral Development Programme has supported capacity building and created associations of community animal health workers, women’s goat groups, youth associations for young women and men and councils of elders (Kipuri and Ridgewell, 2008).

The move towards community-based natural resource management over the past decade has also resulted in a proliferation of programmes that impact directly on the rights and entitlements of women and girls to natural resources. Such initiatives have varied in size and scope but have essentially sought to alleviate the effects of resource depletion by empowering women and girls, recognising their intrinsic role in the day-to-day management of natural resources and as such targeting them with training, credit or supplies. Recognising girls’ role in the management of natural resources and providing them with opportunities that combine these responsibilities with income-earning or education opportunities can result in many benefits, such as reduced drudgery, greater time for schooling, higher household income and, consequently, empowerment through changing gender relations within the household (see, for example, James *et al.*, 2002).

A cross-country analysis of five community natural resource management interventions that specifically target women as community resource managers (in wetland use systems, dairy cattle raising and crop production) found evidence that environmental sustainability and economic productivity increased when women were vested with the authority to make land-use management decisions (Thomas-Slayter and Sodikoff, 2001). Both this study and others

Box 7: Gender-equitable land registration

Ethiopia’s land policy aims to provide people with a clear land title and secure tenure. The country is implementing a land titling and certification programme to provide rural households with robust land and property rights. As regional governments have considerable autonomy in this area, the programme is being implemented in four provinces: Amhara, Oromia, the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) and Tigray. In a two-year period, about 20 million land-use certificates were issued to some 6 million households. In provinces where there was no legal requirement to issue certificates jointly in the name of both spouses, most certificates were issued in the husband’s name (71 percent) or in the name of the wife (14 percent), rather than jointly (13 percent). Although there are important regional differences that require further analysis, the provisions for joint titling were found to be applied very widely when space was provided to include both spouses’ pictures on the certificate, as was the case in Amhara (under 9 percent of certificates in only the husband’s name) and the SNNPR (28 percent) but not in Oromia, where 58 percent of certificates were registered in the husband’s name. Women respondents with joint certificates almost universally pointed to this as having improved their economic and social status (Deininger *et al.*, 2007, in UNDP, 2008).

The Laxmi Mukti (‘Freeing the Goddess of Wealth’) programme in Maharashtra promoted the transfer of landholdings and assets to women or the establishment of joint ownership. Villages in which 100 families had done so were called Laxmi Mukti villages. The programme was a voluntary movement initiated by Sharad Joshi, the founder of the Shetkari Sanghatana farmers’ organisation. At least 200,000 documented transfers of land in name from husbands to wives were registered during the period from 1991 to 1996.

Sources: Agarwal (2003); Desai (2010); <http://shetkari.in/main>.

(Agarwal, 1997b; 2001; Resurreccion, 2006) also highlight a number of challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that women’s participation in collective initiatives is inclusive as well as both liberating and empowering. This is equally true for the participation of girls.

In the growing response to climate change, recent guidelines for National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) highlight the importance of gender equality. Women’s groups are taking part in the development of such programmes in a number of countries, including Bangladesh, Eritrea, Malawi and Niger, with women beneficiaries specifically targeted for support in Mauritania, Niger and Senegal (UNFPA and WEDO, 2009). Strategies of adaptation to climate change are also beginning to build on the collective power and participation of children and young people, for whom the future threat is greatest. For example, in Kenya, tree planting campaigns across the country have inspired children to engage in the management of their natural resources through schools, which play a key role in child mobilisation (Polack, 2010). See also the importance of adolescent girls in environmental management in Bangladesh (Box 8).

A project titled Life and Livelihood, implemented by Save the Children USA in the Barisal district of Bangladesh, created a group of young facilitators and provided them with the appropriate training. They were then used to make an assessment of the impact of a tropical cyclone that hit the area and participated in the relief work that followed. During the implementation of the project, community members responded better to these facilitators than to the professional personnel. Local people are usually unable to approach service-providing agencies successfully. Local facilitators with the appropriate training can create a bridge between their community and the agencies, providing information and mobilising the community to demand more efficient services. The girls’ selection was justified by their membership of the community and their ability to gain its trust and acceptance, their youth, their energy and their desire to help.

### School-to-work transition and gender equity in employment opportunities

For many young women, increased access to paid work brings with it a real rise in status and access to opportunity as well as empowerment. As with many of the other interventions discussed above, it helps increase both financial resources and control over these in the household, and enhances decision-making capacity around strategic life choices such as delaying marriage or childbearing (Kabeer, 2003, in Plan International, 2009). Vocational training, skills development and livelihood promotion programmes most suited to young women’s needs combine training in relevant and marketable skills with other services, to facilitate entry into the job market. These include provision of credit (above); building confidence through mentoring and other approaches; facilitating and accommodating child care responsibilities in recognition of women’s dual productive and reproductive roles; and allowing for flexibility in training sites and schedules. Strong public–private partnerships are also a critical element for success.<sup>16</sup> Several recent initiatives focus investments in these areas (see Box 9).

## 4. Lessons learnt and policy implications

As this chapter has sought to demonstrate, women’s and girls’ rights, entitlements and control over resources are intimately linked to their ability to improve their situation and progress out of poverty. For girls and young women specifically, having access to and control over physical assets can strengthen their intra-household bargaining power, affecting their ability to influence the distribution and expenditure of household income (with knock-on effects for children’s well-being). Socio-cultural traditions that discourage girls’ inheritance or ownership of assets can result in parental disinvestment, limiting girls’ educational opportunities and long-term livelihood options, with negative repercussions experienced over the lifecycle.

### Box 8: Girls carving out a role as ambassadors against climate change

Qulsum Nipun (2010) argues that adolescent girls are capable of playing important roles within their communities, even when it comes to climate change challenges. In general, adolescent girls are more vulnerable to natural disasters, owing to the limitations they experience. Yet they have the potential to make positive contributions in the survival and the recovery of their communities, as well as in the adaptation to the impact of climate change. Given its geographical location, Bangladesh is extremely vulnerable to floods and cyclones, and climate change and the associated natural disasters are expected to create serious problems, especially in the coastal areas. Yet rural communities do not have proper knowledge on disaster risk reduction and community-based adaptation to climate change. Illiteracy and misinterpretation impede people from understanding early warnings and preparing effectively. Adolescent girls can be used as a ‘knowledge transfer group’ able to contribute effectively to early warning dissemination at family and community level and to identify successfully the needs of different age and gender groups during the disaster.

For both women and girls, access to and some degree of control over land, natural resources, physical property and other productive assets is essential for the management and smoothing over of covariant shocks. For women and girls without fixed assets, financial services, such as microcredit and savings, can be a lifeline, enabling the accumulation of assets, increased financial security and eventual diversification, entrepreneurial activity and credit repayment.

Women’s ability to access, accumulate and control wealth and assets throughout the lifecycle is patterned and conditioned by a number of institutions, including the state, the family, the community and the market. As a result, policies and programmes seeking to overcome systematic gender discrimination in resource holding need to operate at a variety of levels.

**Women’s and girls’ rights, entitlements and control over resources are intimately linked to their ability to improve their situation and progress out of poverty.**

This chapter has identified a range of interventions that show promise, including legal reform, microfinance (including credit and savings), social protection mechanisms (such as cash transfers), education and employment preparation (complemented by financial support) and collective mobilisation. Each of these measures should be seen as a mutually reinforcing part of longer-term systemic change. To better facilitate the implementation and effectiveness of these measures, five complementary domains need to be addressed:

- Gaps in the data and information base on the specific asset rights and entitlements of girls and young women hamper the development of appropriate programmes to enhance their preparation for and access to control and utilisation of resources of all sorts. Current

international efforts to strengthen research, data collection and analysis around adolescent girls, such as those promoted by the Coalition for Adolescent Girls and others, should be encouraged and expanded, and all data and information should be disaggregated by age as well as gender in order to enable a fuller understanding of the interconnections between changing life stages and gender disparities.

- Legal frameworks and reform programmes that seek to establish gender equality in control of assets and resources should also promote more integrated approaches to safeguarding the specific rights of girls and women (such as harmonisation of land reform programmes with marriage and family code revisions). They should also reinforce legal protection for the most vulnerable categories of women and children (in particular widows, orphans, female and child heads of households and populations affected by economic crisis, conflict, climate change and other situations that enhance vulnerability in both rural and urban zones).
- Stronger measures are needed to ensure de facto implementation of existing legal provisions, policies and programmes aimed at overcoming obstacles to gender-equitable access to resources. This would include, among other things, development of stronger monitoring and evaluation frameworks as well as reinforcement of mechanisms and entities charged with enforcement of compliance with national and international standards. Long-term commitment is needed to ensure that gender-equitable ideals on paper are translated into actual empowerment of women and girls in practice.
- Strategic partnerships are critical for the success of all efforts to ensure gender-equitable distribution of and control over resources and assets. This includes: key

### Box 9: The World Bank Adolescent Girls’ Initiative

The Adolescent Girls’ Initiative (AGI) was launched in 2008 as part of the World Bank Group’s Gender Action Plan – Gender Equality as Smart Economics – aiming to increase women’s economic opportunities by improving their access to the labour market, agricultural land and technology, credit and infrastructure services. It promotes transition from school to productive employment for girls and young women aged 16 to 24 by helping them complete their education, build skills that match market demand and find mentors and job placements as well as access to microfinance. Programmes are undertaken in partnership with governments, donors, foundations and the private sector, and are designed to test a core set of promising approaches to overcoming critical barriers to the development of adolescent girls. Countries involved in the initiative include Afghanistan, Jordan, Laos, Liberia, Nepal, Rwanda and Southern Sudan.

The Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls & Young Women (EPAG) project is the pilot in Liberia, focused on nine target communities, where it will provide skills training and other support services to some 2,500 adolescent girls and young women with the goal of increasing their employment and incomes. By testing and refining best practices, the project partners hope eventually to see the work expanded in Liberia and replicated in other countries.

Source: Katz (2008); <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTGENDER/0,,contentMDK:21914520~menuPK:336874~pagePK:64020865~piPK:51164185~theSitePK:336868,00.html>

- national ministries in multi-sectoral domains; local government and community leaders – both male and female; the private sector; national and international research institutes and think-tanks and development partners; as well as children and young people and the men and women in their communities and in organised constituencies or social movements.

  - Particular efforts are needed to strengthen the voice and participation of women and girls in all phases of programmes of support, encompassing: analysis and articulation of the situation in various contexts; identification of key problems and accompanying definition of priorities for action; and ongoing monitoring and evaluation, including assessment of lessons learnt. The gender and age dimensions of such participation need to be taken fully into account, and appropriate processes to facilitate participation should be foreseen from the outset.

Notes

1

<http://genderindex.org/content/social-institutions-variables>.

2

Deere and Doss (2006) cite evidence to show that household expenditures differ depending on the assets brought to marriage by each spouse (Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2003); that the current asset distribution by gender affects household expenditure patterns on food, health, education and household services (Doss, 2006a; Katz and Chamorro 2003; Thomas, 1999); and that women’s asset ownership may increase the anthropometric status of children (Duflo, 2000) as well as the incidence of prenatal care (Beegle *et al.*, 2001), and reduce domestic violence (Friedemann-Sánchez, 2006; Panda and Agarwal, 2005). Evidence has also shown that, when women own assets and have greater control over household decision making, children’s welfare improves, particularly for daughters (Quisumbing, 2003), and that gender equality in household decision making in South Asia could reduce the incidence of underweight children by up to 13 percentage points (Smith, 2003).

3

There is growing consensus that women’s empowerment involves both control over resources (physical as well as intellectual) and enhanced agency (right to make both practical and strategic choices and decisions) (Desai, 2010; Grown, 2006).

4

Bird (2007); Harper *et al.* (2009); Mendoza (2009); among others)

5

In Botswana, evidence shows that most women and their children experience economic hardship following divorce (Maundeni, 2000). In Bangladesh, divorce has been shown to increase infant and child mortality (Bhuiya and Chowdhury, 1997, in Bird, 2007).

6

Anriquez *et al.* (2010); Cooper (2010); Kabeer (2003); Rural Development Institute (2009); UN Development Programme (UNDP, 2008); World Bank (2005).

7

A study in Burkina Faso suggested that, if women farmers were given equal access to quality agricultural inputs and education, agricultural productivity could rise by as much as 20 percent; one in Bangladesh showed that targeting low-income women with specific inputs for agriculture and fish farming had a greater impact on poverty reduction than untargeted technology dissemination (Alderman *et al.*, 1995; Hallman *et al.*, 2003; IFPRI, 2005).

8

Anriquez *et al.* (2010); Dolan (2002, in Bird and Espey, 2010); Desai (2010).

9

Women in sub-Saharan Africa already spend an estimated 40 billion hours per year collecting water (equivalent to a year’s worth of labour by the entire workforce in France) and an additional two to nine hours per day collecting firewood and other biomass products (UNDP, 2009).

10

A key reason girls cannot attend school is that they are responsible for collecting water and firewood (UNDP, 2009). In Morocco, a World Bank Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project has demonstrated the correlation between natural resource management and educational attendance. The project succeeded in increasing girls’ school attendance by 20 percent over four years, in part by reducing the traditional burden on them to fetch water (Fisher, 2006). Similarly, the National Adaptation Plan of Action for Tuvalu Island reported that the reduction in the literacy rate and in girls attending school is correlated with more time being needed to collect water and firewood (UNDP, 2009).

11

<http://genderindex.org/>. Qualitative and anecdotal evidence suggests that girls’ and women’s access to associated financial services such as micro savings and insurance is similarly limited (e.g. Vonderlack and Schreiner, 2002). However, substantial quantitative evidence on access and user rates for micro savings are difficult to come by, as 1) the poverty status of clients is often unclear, even within microfinance institutions; 2) although the average deposit or account size is important, the extent to which it indicates how ‘micro’ the account is, is nationally context dependent; and 3) most institutions report accounts, not clients (Hulme *et al.*, 2009).

12

These include, for women, the potentially hazardous effects on intra-household relations and increased violence (Schuler *et al.*, 1998); the inability of women to control the use of credit received (Goetz and Sen Gupta, 1996); and the marginality of some of the income generation potential mobilised by such schemes. Additionally, experiences of microcredit are highly differentiated according to region. Microcredit has demonstrated much less success in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, than in Asia, in part because of lower population densities, thinner markets, higher degrees of population mobility and heterogeneity, with subsequent lower levels of trust which have hampered levels of repayment, resulting in much lower levels of credit extension, particularly into rural areas (Kate Bird, personal communication).

13

Amin (2008); Plan International (2009); Ruiz Abril (2008, in Morrison and Sabarwal, 2008).

14

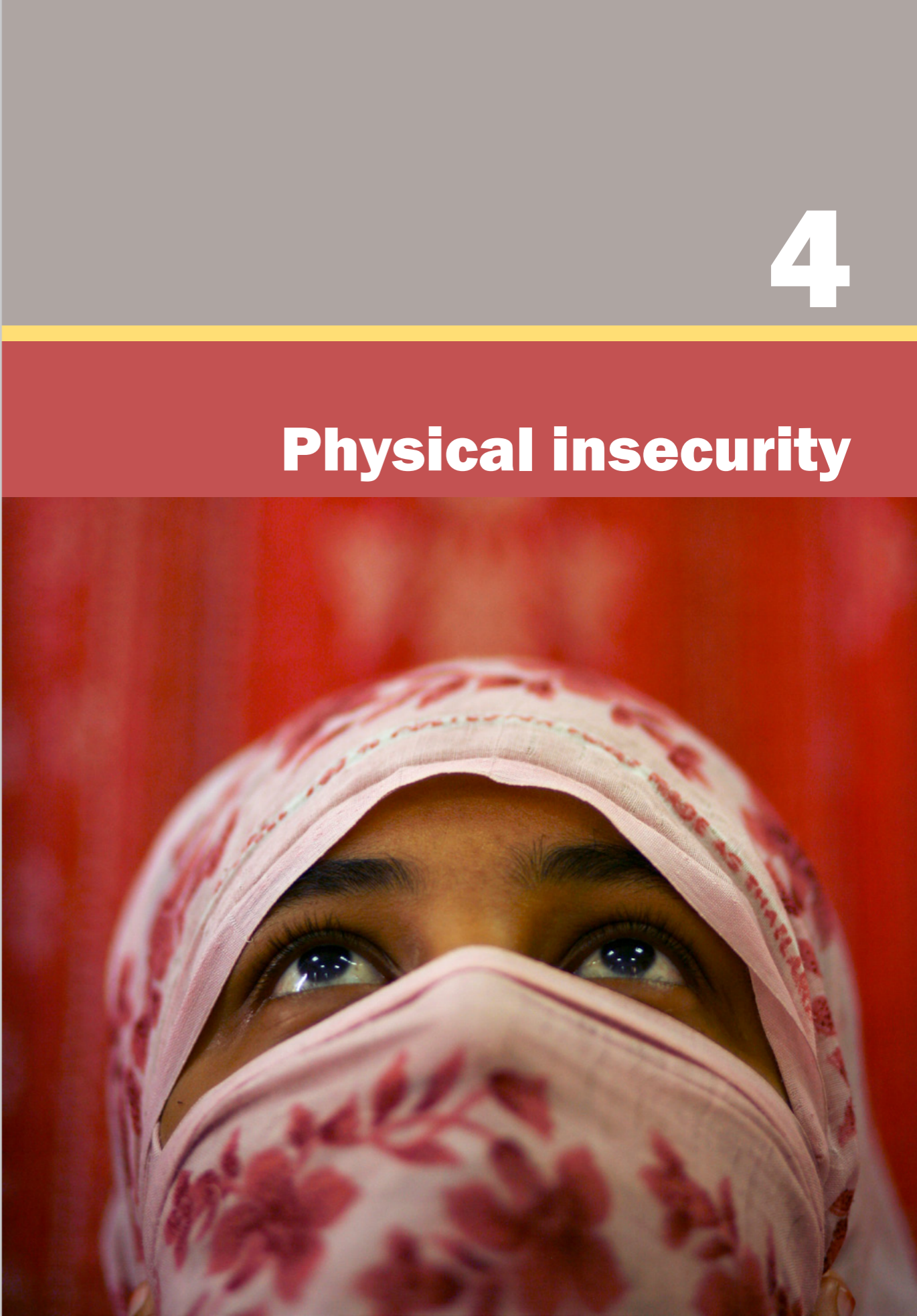
The experience of TRY, evaluated over a ten-year period, offers an unusual opportunity to learn lessons about how to adapt programme models to the specific needs and constraints of adolescent girls and young women. It was found that, in urban Kenya, entrepreneurship and repeated borrowing were not primary concerns for the majority of young women, whose fundamental needs were related more specifically to: acquiring social capital (including accessing support groups and mentors); maintaining physical safety; and having opportunities to save their money in a safe, accessible place. When these needs are met, entrepreneurship and use of credit opportunities may follow (Erulkar and Chong, 2005; Erulkar *et al.*, 2006).

15

In Brazil, the participation rate of beneficiary women is 16 percent greater than for women in similar non-participating households. The programme has also reduced the probability of employed women leaving their jobs by 8 percent (Veras Soares *et al.*, 2007).

16

See, for example, the work of the Nike Foundation in support of the United Nations Foundation and the Coalition for Adolescent Girls; the Girl Effect (a shared initiative of Nike and the NoVo Foundation); and country-level programmes in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Malawi.



# Physical insecurity

# Physical insecurity

## 1. Introduction

Physical insecurity is a harrowing reality for millions of girls, of all ages, ethnicities and religions. There are specific laws, norms and practices which condone or fail to challenge gender-based violence in the household, school, workplace and community. Physical insecurity as a consequence of gender-based violence is also a particular risk in times of conflict and social upheaval (UNFPA, 2007).

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2010) estimates that between 100 and 140 million women and girls have undergone some form of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), and one in five women reports having experienced sexual abuse during childhood. Every year, around 5,000 women and girls are murdered by family members in the name of ‘honour.’ In many countries in the Middle East and North Africa, women and girls are offered no protection by the penal code from such ‘honour crimes’ and sexual assault (OECD, 2009). ‘Femicide’ has reached alarming proportions in Central America, the result of systematic gender discrimination and inequality, a dominant aggressive masculinity (machismo) and economic disempowerment (Prieto-Carron *et al.*, 2007). Guatemala has the highest number of femicides in Central America (Mexico included), but increasing numbers of women are being killed in Costa Rica, Honduras and San Salvador (ibid). And, as discussed in Chapter 2 on Son Bias, millions more girls and women are missing because of the practice of female foeticide, especially in Asia and the Middle East and North Africa region.

Violence against girls is a fundamental violation of human rights. As the architects of the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) highlight, it causes long-term and often irreversible physical and psychological harm and has

**Gender-based violence is a harrowing reality that marks the everyday lives of millions of girls, of all ages, ethnicities and religions.**

- UNFPA (2007)

detrimental consequences for development and economic growth (Jutting *et al.*, 2008). Gender-based violence poses a significant obstacle to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and increases a girl’s risk of sliding into, and remaining trapped in, chronic poverty. It deprives girls both of their human capabilities as well as of their agency – suppressing their voices, constraining their choices and denying control over their physical integrity and future.

In this chapter, we discuss the threat and experience of violence that girls and young women endure within the home, school and community environments, including heightened vulnerability in conflict and post-conflict environments, linkages to chronic poverty and the social institutions which encourage or condone such violence. We argue that, while poverty can be a cause of physical insecurity, physical insecurity also further perpetuates chronic poverty. A girl who is subjected to violence is denied her human capabilities and often stripped of the resources necessary to cope with ‘shocks,’ thereby increasing her vulnerability to chronic poverty. Physical insecurity often undermines opportunities for girls to benefit from quality education, good health and decent work, and prevents her from engaging meaningfully with, and benefiting from, society and the economy. This, in turn, effectively blocks exit routes out of chronic poverty. It also has implications for subsequent generations by increasing the likelihood of the intergenerational transmission of chronic poverty. Indeed, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) notes a strong correlation between violence against women and against children.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Chronic poverty and physical insecurity

The SIGI includes Physical Integrity as one of its five subindices. This comprises two indicators: violence against women using two variables: *violence against women*, indicating the existence of women’s legal protection against violence; and *FGM/C*.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the SIGI, we use the term ‘physical insecurity’ rather than ‘physical integrity,’ in order to be able to conceptualise this social institution as a development challenge that urgently need to be addressed. We take the term to encompass condoned

norms or unchallenged practices of gender-based violence against girls (including sexual assault or harassment, domestic violence, threats of violence) and other harmful acts (FGM/C and other harmful gendered traditional practices) that result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering and pose a threat to physical integrity (see Table 1).

The 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women refers to violence against women and girls as ‘... a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men.’ This form of violence is not random or inevitable but serves a specific social function – that of asserting power and control over girls’ lives and futures by denying them voice, choice, independence and security and by ‘disciplining’ and constraining them. Gendered violence thereby risks reifying girls’ subordinate status in society. Physical insecurity emanates from the articulation of discriminatory social institutions (i.e. social attitudes, customs, codes of conduct, norms, traditions, value systems) and is rooted in unequal power structures, discriminatory social orders and exploitative relationships. In other words, gender-based violence against girls reflects gender discrimination and the subordinate position of women/girls in a given society.<sup>3</sup>

An understanding of the root causes of gender inequality, through its manifestation in the form of physical insecurity, can help identify the points at which a woman or girl is most at risk of being propelled into chronic poverty during her life-course. This can in turn make for more effective and targeted anti-poverty interventions that could address both the causes and the consequences of chronic poverty, and help girls avoid or overcome poverty traps.

Gender-based violence against girls remains a too often hidden phenomenon, characterised by underreporting and a lack of data and surrounded by silence, denial, fear, stigma and often impunity for perpetrators. Social attitudes, norms, traditions and customs that tolerate and even legitimise gender-based violence are largely to blame for this invisibility and the concomitant stifling of girls’ voices. For example, in societies where cultural notions of ‘sexual purity’ and ‘honour’ prevail, victims are reticent to report sexual violence. Another reason for silence is the lack of legal protection or enforcement

**Box 1: Exercising choice can be fatal for some girls**

If women/girls follow their own choices, sometimes they pay with their lives. Du’a Khalil Aswad was stoned to death in the street by a group of men in front of a large crowd on 7 April 2007 in Bashiqa, near the northern city of Mosul in Iraq. Her murder was filmed by an onlooker and the film was then circulated on the internet. The men who killed her reportedly included some of her male relatives. Her ‘crime’ in their eyes was that this 17-year-old member of the Yazidi minority had formed an attachment to a young Sunni Muslim man. Other people, including members of the local security forces, saw the murder but failed to intervene. She had sought protection from both the local police and the local office of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, but they had merely referred her to a local community leader, who accepted assurances from her family that they would not harm her.

Source: Amnesty International (2009)

**Table 1: Examples of violence against women throughout the lifecycle**

Phase	Type of violence
Pre-birth	Sex-selective abortion; effects of battering during pregnancy on birth outcomes
Infancy	Female infanticide; physical, sexual and psychological abuse
Girlhood	Child marriage; FGM/C; physical, sexual and psychological abuse; incest; child prostitution and pornography
Adolescence and adulthood	Dating and courtship violence (e.g. acid throwing and date rape); economically coerced sex (e.g. school girls having sex with ‘sugar daddies’ in return for school fees); incest; sexual abuse in the workplace; rape; sexual harassment; forced prostitution and pornography; trafficking in women; partner violence; marital rape; dowry abuse and murder; partner homicide; psychological abuse; abuse of women with disabilities; forced pregnancy
Elderly	Forced ‘suicide’ or homicide of widows for economic reasons; physical, sexual and psychological abuse

Source: WHO (2005a)

of such protection as exists. For example, in Pakistan legal frameworks provide little protection for women and girls, as there are no laws covering gender-based violence and no legislation that clearly defines sexual consent. Gender-related crimes tend to fall under the general penal code, and a clear gap exists between legislative measures and enforcement mechanisms (Jones *et al.*, 2008).

Girls face discrimination on the basis of both age and gender; other factors, such as class, caste, disability, sexuality and ethnicity, often intensify vulnerability to violence. Violence against girls is rooted in inequality and discrimination against them in both private and public spheres. Gender-based violence against girls can occur at home, in school, at the workplace and in the wider community. Perpetrators may be fathers, brothers, teachers and (particularly in the case of FGM/C) older women. We now take a more in-depth look at some specific forms of gender-based violence against girls as it manifests itself in the sphere of the home (domestic violence) and the community (school-based violence and FGM/C) and by state and non-state actors (e.g. rebel groups) in the context of violent conflict. We then discuss implications for chronic poverty before going on to look at a range of policies, programmes and strategies aimed at tackling physical insecurity. We conclude with a discussion about challenges and policy implications.

**3. Violence at home**

Domestic violence is the most common form of gender-based violence (UNFPA, 2004). Widespread acceptance (even among women themselves) of such violence as a justified disciplinary practice, leads to its acceptance in some communities as a norm. ‘Wife beating’ as punishment is widely condoned by women themselves, peaking at 89 percent in Mali (UNICEF, 2007). However, although it represents a significant violation of human rights, transcending all cultures, ethnicities, classes and ages, it is often hidden and largely ignored. Domestic violence is perpetrated by intimate partners and other family members, and manifested through (UNICEF, 2000a):

- Physical abuse such as slapping, beating, arm twisting, stabbing, strangling, burning, choking, kicking, threats with an object or weapon and murder. It also includes traditional practices harmful to women such as FGM/C;
- Sexual abuse such as coerced sex through threats, intimidation or physical force, forcing unwanted sexual acts or forcing sex with others;
- Psychological abuse, which includes behaviour that is intended to intimidate and persecute and that takes the form of threats of abandonment or abuse, confinement to the home, surveillance, threats to take away custody of the children, destruction of objects, isolation, verbal aggression and constant humiliation;

- Economic abuse, which includes acts such as denial of funds, refusal to contribute financially, denial of food and basic needs, controlling access to health care, employment, etc.

Although there is no explicit connection between the occurrence of violence against girls and women and geographic location, research indicates that there is a correlation (albeit indirect) between risk factors such as age, poverty, employment status of women, level of education, number of previous marriages, conflict and prevalence and type of domestic violence.<sup>4</sup> In a 2005 WHO study involving 24,000 women from different age ranges (15 to 19, 20 to 24 up to 45 to 49 years) in 10 countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Tanzania and Thailand), between 15 and 71 percent of women were reported to have experienced

**Gender-based violence against girls remains surrounded by silence, denial, fear, stigma and often impunity for perpetrators.**

physical or sexual assault from their partner; 56 percent of women interviewed in rural Tanzania, 61 percent in rural Peru and 62 percent in rural Bangladesh reported having experienced physical and sexual violence by an intimate partner (WHO, 2005b). Women were also asked about sexual harassment and abuse before the age of 15: in

Namibia, 21 percent reported childhood sexual abuse and 47 percent indicated that the perpetrator was a family member.

Younger girls and women are most at risk of sexual violence (Hindin *et al.*, 2008). Overall, 39.5 percent of those who have ever experienced domestic violence are aged 15 to 19 (WHO, 2005b).<sup>5</sup> For example, in urban Bangladesh, 48 percent of 15- to 19-year-old women reported physical or sexual violence, or both, by a partner within the past 12 months, versus 10 percent of 45 to 49 year olds. In urban Peru, the difference was 41 percent among 15 to 19 year olds versus 8 percent of 45 to 49 year olds. WHO argues that younger men tend to be more aggressive; that cohabitation, and not marriage, is related to higher levels of violence; and that younger women have lower status than older women and thus are more vulnerable. Also, in more than half of the settings, over 30 percent of respondents described their first sexual experience before the age of 15 as forced. In Uganda, 18 percent of girls aged 10 to 14 and 36 percent aged 15 to 19 reported being subjected to sexual violence alone, and 15 percent had experienced violence during pregnancy (UBOS, 2007). This provides a link between early marriage, maternal and infant mortality and partner violence, since between 3 and 15 percent of girls are married by the age of 15 in Asia and Africa.<sup>6</sup> The connection is increasingly evident

Box 2: Links between HIV/AIDS and domestic violence

HIV/AIDS is increasingly a ‘woman’s disease’ in sub-Saharan Africa. Regionally, 60 percent of all infected persons are female. However, this statistic hides the fact that young women are significantly more likely to be infected than young men. For example, in Kenya, girls aged 15 to 19 are three times more likely than their male peers to live with the disease; this ratio rises to 4:1 for young women aged 20 to 24. Other countries in the region report similar rates of infection (UNAIDS and WHO, 2009). A confluence of factors is influencing this trend: a longstanding tradition of younger girls marrying older men and a newly emerged belief among men that having sex with a virgin will cure HIV infections. This has left girls extremely vulnerable. In Uganda, nearly nine out of ten HIV-infected young women are married (Human Rights Watch, 2005a). With no voice either to refuse marriage or to insist on condom use, young brides are at the highest risk of infection.

when we consider that on average 30 percent of all domestic violence occurs within the first five years of marriage (Jewkes, 2002; NIPORT, 2009).

Indeed, a study of 400 villages in rural India (Maharashtra) found that maternal and infant mortality and violence during pregnancy were correlated. Of all deaths among pregnant women, 16 percent were a result of intimate partner violence. Similarly, in Nicaragua, a 2002 study found that approximately 16 percent of low birth-weight in infants was related to physical abuse of a partner during pregnancy (UN General Assembly, 2006). The reverse is true where the woman is better educated than her partner (IIPS, 2000; LISGIS, 2008; NIPORT, 2009).<sup>7</sup>

Demographic Health Survey (DHS) data provide evidence that the subordinate status of women plays a major role in all forms of domestic violence, with the main perpetrators being current or former husbands/partners (in up to 63 percent of cases), mothers/stepmothers (24 percent) and fathers/stepfathers (16 percent). This level of violence often has devastating physical and psychological consequences for women and girls, since its purpose is to reinforce culturally constructed gender roles that seek to maintain gender inequality. Women who experience such treatment may suffer a variety of health and economic problems (see Box 2 on HIV and domestic violence).

The fear and humiliation experienced by those subjected to such treatment often means that incidents are underreported. As a result of such social norms and practices, laws aimed at outlawing domestic violence are rarely implemented and are often ineffective as deterrents. For example, the Cruelty to Women (Deterrent Punishment) Ordinance (1983),<sup>8</sup> the Repression Against Women and Children (Special Enactment) Act XVII (1995)<sup>9</sup> and the Women and Children Repression

Box 3: Violence against domestic workers in Latin America

Tens of thousands of adolescent girls are employed as domestic workers across Latin America. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that there were nearly 20,000 in El Salvador alone in 2004. Maltreatment of these girls is widespread and endemic. A 2002 study found that nearly 60 percent of girls reported some form of abuse. Sexual abuse, by either the ‘patron’ or his son, is common, particularly for domestics who live on premises. Indigenous domestics are especially vulnerable, given their low status. Girls who are isolated from their families and fear being fired have little recourse to protect themselves. As one young woman noted: ‘I never reported anything, because I knew no one would believe me.’

Source: Human Rights Watch (2002; 2004)

Act (2000)<sup>10</sup> in Bangladesh and the Sierra Leone Domestic Violence Act 2007 have never been properly implemented and perpetrators are rarely punished (NIPORT, 2009).

International and civil society organisations have long agreed that violence against women and girls has a negative impact on their access to and control of resources. The effects may be far reaching, since women’s economic productivity and ability to support their children is diminished. UNICEF (2000) reported that, in many countries, women and girls, in an attempt to escape abject poverty, often have little choice but to migrate to other regions or countries to gain work as domestic servants.<sup>11</sup> This exposes them to additional risks, such as confinement/imprisonment by employers, isolation, physical and sexual assault or human trafficking and HIV/AIDS (Human Rights Watch, 2005a; Pinheiro, 2006) (See Box 3). In the case of young Filipino women, for example, having experienced sexual, physical or psychological violence by their families or partners in their country, evidence shows that some choose transnational migration and go to East Asia to work, some ending up as entertainers of American troops in locally based military bases in South Korea (Yea, 2008).

4. Violence in the community

School-based violence

Violence in schools takes many forms, from physical and sexual violence to psychological abuse. It includes bullying, corporal punishment, sexual abuse and verbal abuse, perpetrated by students, teachers or other school staff. This form of violence has significant detrimental impacts on the long-term physical, psychosocial and sexual health of the victims, and more direct negative effects on educational enrolment, attendance, attainment and health and safety overall. Research has shown that school-based violence is gendered, with girls and boys

experiencing it in different ways. For example, corporal punishment is perpetrated against both girls and boys, but is more severe among boys (UNICEF *et al.*, 2010). On the other hand, girls, especially adolescent girls, are more vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment perpetrated by male teachers and students. Each year, an estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys across the world are subjected to sexual violence, and between 20 and 65 percent of schoolchildren report being verbally or physically bullied (Plan International, 2008a). According to a UNICEF and ActionAid 2006 study of schoolgirls in Malawi, 50 percent of girls who participated said that they had been touched in a sexual manner by either their teachers or their fellow schoolboys without permission (in Amnesty International, 2008).

Disability significantly increases the risk of physical and sexual violence. The UN Study on Violence Against Children with Disabilities points out that their increased vulnerability is the combined result of their impairment and the stigma attached, making them unable to react or be believed (in Jones *et al.*, 2008). Indigenous, orphaned and refugee children, who tend to suffer from lower societal status, are also at greater risk of school violence (UNICEF *et al.*, 2010).

Violence in schools restricts girls’ freedom of movement. The ‘gendered geography’ of school environments makes certain ‘masculine’ spaces (e.g. toilets, male-dominated staff rooms) effectively no go areas for girls, as they pose a threat to their physical integrity (Jones *et al.*, 2008). The journey to school can also be a perilous experience for girls, as they may fall prey to ‘sugar daddies,’ with whom they may be forced into risky transactional sexual relations. In Zimbabwean junior secondary schools, 50 percent of girls reported unsolicited sexual contact on the way to school by strangers, and 92 percent of girls reported being propositioned by older men (Amnesty International, 2008). Similarly, in El Salvador, girls who work as domestic servants are unable to attend school during regular hours and many attend night classes available in larger cities; girls have reported feeling threatened on their way to and from school at night, especially when the distance is long, and some stop going (Human Rights Watch, 2004).

This threat is exacerbated in situations of conflict, where children must pass military checkpoints or risk being abducted

by armed groups for combat, for trafficking or for sexual enslavement (see Box 4). In Afghanistan, the Taliban has led a violent campaign to deny children – particularly girls – their right to education. They have threatened students, attacked schoolgirls with acid, killed teachers and non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff and burned down schools. At least 172 violent attacks on schools took place in the first six months of 2006 (Amnesty International, 2010). In Iraq, parents are frightened of allowing their children to travel to school, and schools have been damaged and destroyed. School attendance between 2005 and 2006 dropped from 75 to 30 percent (Save the Children, 2009). Girls are at intensified risk of violence in educational settings in refugee camps during emergencies and violent conflict. In 2002, a groundbreaking report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Save the Children UK showed teachers exploiting their positions of authority over girls in camps in West Africa, offering good grades and other privileges in return for sex (Amnesty International, 2008).

Research suggests that discriminatory social attitudes, norms and value systems, and unequal power structures (mainly based on age and gender), underpin violence against girls in schools (Jones *et al.*, 2008). Gender discrimination thereby becomes embedded in the educational culture of patriarchal societies and manifests itself in the form of threats to the physical security of girls in schools. School-based violence reflects gender discrimination in society and is linked to gendered violence in the domestic and community spheres. Patterns of gendered socialisation serve to normalise and promote male violence and aggression and encourage female passivity or submission in educational settings. Stereotypical masculine and feminine identities may be reinforced through the content and delivery of education – for example, in the way teachers communicate with children, in the way they discipline children and expect them to behave and in educational materials (Jones *et al.*, 2008; UNICEF *et al.*, 2010).

In the latter case, gender discrimination in the curriculum can encourage and reinforce gender stereotypes. In Nicaragua, a conservative religiously motivated sex education module, known as ‘catechism of sexuality,’ entrenches gender stereotypes and gender roles (CLADEM, 2005, in Jones *et al.*,

Box 4: Links between general political violence and school sexual violence

In Colombia, with almost 50 years of continuing political violence, the impact on schools has been high, with school attacks, killings of teachers and abductions and recruitment of children. School violence in the form of bullying, corporal punishment and sexual abuse. A number of studies, which used extensive student data from all over Colombia, found higher levels of aggression among children and adolescents in municipalities with high levels of violent conflict. In such violent environments, students held strong beliefs justifying aggressive behaviours, such as ‘one has to fight so that others won’t think you are a coward’ or ‘sometimes you have to threaten others to get what you want’ or ‘you play me, you pay me.’ Although verbal and physical aggression tends to be more common among boys, aggression through gossip, exclusion or other relevant forms is also evident among girls.

Source: Villar-Marquez (2010)



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Democratic Republic of Congo, Goma, North Kivu. Survivors of sexual violence at a Caritas drop-in centre.

2008). In 2003, experts prepared a manual on adolescent sexual and reproductive rights, which was attacked by traditional conservative forces as encouraging the adoption of lifestyles challenging traditional and cultural values. The manual was then prohibited by authorities and the catechism of sexuality was approved, despite promoting gender discriminatory behaviours. School-based violence against girls is not only perpetuated by such educational approaches, but also serves to recreate and reinforce these highly gendered social institutions.

School-based violence against girls, particularly sexual violence, is again largely an under-recognised phenomenon. It is surrounded by stigma, fear and even tolerance or acceptance, which results in underreporting and underestimation (see Box 5). The dearth of reliable data on the prevalence, frequency and specific physical and psychological impacts of violence in schools, combined with a lack of adequate reporting systems, makes it difficult to present an accurate picture of the extent of the problem and the numbers involved (see UNICEF *et al.*, 2010). In South Asia and Islamic Southeast Asia, where cultural notions of family 'honour,' 'sexual purity' and 'shame' provide a framework for female socialisation, a girl is less likely to report sexual violence and is thus more susceptible to abuse (Jones *et al.*, 2008).

#### Box 5: Sexual violence in schools

'It happed to me when I was in BT1. The teacher of our main subject asked me to have sex with him and I refused. It was at the time of our exams. There were more than 70 students and he put me in last place. The school head called me and asked me what was going on. I burst into tears and said I couldn't tell him [...] eventually I said this man says he wants to have sex with me and as I didn't accept he has given me a bad mark. The head said nothing. And then in class, he (the teacher) said this year was not going to be easy and there would be some people who would fail. In any case I did not accept his offer. If I hadn't been trained as a peer educator, maybe I would have given in to him as many girls do' (15-year-old girl, Mali, in Castle and Diallo, 2008).

'After the war when I was 14 years old, my mother decided to send me back to school in Kolahan town. I had to drop out one year later. The 45-year-old teacher approached me and I became pregnant. I have a baby now but apart from my mother no one helps me take care of it. The teacher denies what happened and refuses to pay for the child' (17-year-old girl, Liberia, in Castle and Diallo, 2008).

School violence leaves girls vulnerable to chronic poverty but conversely poverty can also increase the risk of being subjected to gender-based violence in schools. For example, research suggests that girls living in poverty (particularly where money is scarce and education costly) are often forced to engage in risky transactional sexual relationships with teachers, school staff or 'sugar daddies' in order to support their education (Amnesty International, 2009; UNICEF *et al.*, 2010). Heightened risk of transactional sex was also detected in a monitoring initiative on the socioeconomic impacts of the 2007 to 2010 global recession in sub-Saharan Africa (see Hossain *et al.*, 2009).

Violence, or fear of violence, also contributes to parents' reluctance to send daughters to school and to the avoidance of schools by girls themselves. Gender-based violence in schools is correlated with increased truancy, higher dropouts, poor educational attainment and low attendance. Research carried out in African, Asian and Caribbean countries shows that pregnancy

resulting from sexual assault and coercion has often forced girls to drop out of school (Amnesty International, 2008).<sup>12</sup> In South Africa, victims who reported sexual violence were met with such hostility that they were forced to leave school for a period of time, change schools or drop out of school altogether. In Tanzania, more than 14,000 primary and secondary schoolgirls were expelled from schools between 2003 and 2006 because they were pregnant. Violence in education settings also undermines trust in authority figures. A survey by Plan on school violence among secondary school students, for example, revealed that none believed that their grades reflected the quality of their work (Taylor and Conrad, 2008).

According to Jones *et al.* (2008): 'The impacts of gender-based violence in school are multiple and overlapping.' As well as causing psychological trauma and physical harm, school-based violence entails detrimental consequences for a girl's educational, health, economic and social prospects. Sexual violence exposes girls to the risks of STIs, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion and psychological trauma. Research suggests that it can also make them more vulnerable to risky sexual behaviour in later life (UNICEF *et al.*, 2010).

Finally, school-based violence also ultimately undermines economic growth and development. For instance, deprivation of education results in lower potential earnings and undermines the potential to contribute to economic growth through tax

**Girls living in poverty are often forced to engage in risky transactional sexual relationships in order to support their education.**

- Amnesty International (2009);  
UNICEF *et al.* (2010)

revenues in adulthood (see Perezniето and Harper, 2010). A study carried out by Plan showed that, each year, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Nigeria lose \$974 million, \$301 million and \$1,662 million, respectively, through failing to educate girls to the same standards as boys (Plan International, 2008b). A lack of girls' schooling costs the world's poorest countries billions of pounds and can further inhibit the ability of a country to recover from the global economic recession (Plan International, 2009).

#### Female genital mutilation/cutting

FGM/C 'comprises all procedures that involve the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.'<sup>13</sup> Performed predominantly on girls between the ages of 4 and 14, and in some contexts on infants, FGM/C is still largely conducted by traditional practitioners without anaesthesia, using scissors, razor blades or broken glass. It is estimated that in Africa, 92 million girls aged 10 and above have undergone FGM/C, and that up to 3 million girls in 28 countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Egypt and Sudan are at risk of being subjected to FGM/C annually (in UNICEF, 2005). Globally, WHO estimates that 100 to 140 million girls and women worldwide are currently circumcised.<sup>14</sup>

**In Africa, 92 million girls aged 10 and above have undergone FGM/C, and up to 3 million girls in 28 countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Egypt and Sudan are at risk of being subjected to FGM/C annually.**

- UNICEF (2005)

FGM/C is practised predominantly in countries along a belt stretching from Senegal in West Africa to Somalia in East Africa, and to Yemen in the Middle East. It is also practised in some parts of Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as by some immigrant communities in Europe and North America.

The prevalence of FGM/C varies significantly between and within countries. Countries with a high estimated prevalence of FGM/C include Guinea (99 percent), Egypt (97 percent), Mali (92 percent), Sudan (90 percent), Eritrea (89 percent) and Ethiopia (80 percent) (UNICEF, 2008).

International agencies and many governments agree that FGM/C represents a serious violation of girls' human rights and physical security. An interagency statement by WHO and other international agencies and donors described FGM/C as a 'violation of the rights of the child [...] [and the] health, security, and physical integrity of the person, the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment,

and the right to life when the procedure results in death' (WHO *et al.*, 2008).

There are no recognised health benefits to FGM/C. It is a painful and often traumatic experience, which involves the unnecessary removal and mutilation of healthy female genital tissue for non-medical reasons. FGM/C is potentially life threatening and carries significant short- and long-term risks to a girl's physical, sexual and psychosocial health and well-being. Immediate health complications can include severe pain, shock, haemorrhage, tetanus or sepsis (bacterial infection), urine retention, open sores in the genital region and injury to nearby genital tissue. Haemorrhage and infection can be so severe as to result in death.<sup>15</sup> Long-term consequences may include infertility, menstrual problems, an increased risk of childbirth complications (including prolonged and obstructed labour and the risk of haemorrhage and infection), newborn deaths (babies born to women who have undergone FGM/C are more likely to suffer a higher rate of neonatal death (WHO *et al.*, 2008)), recurring bladder and urinary tract infections, cysts, fistulas and the need for more surgery.<sup>16</sup> FGM/C also increases the risk of HIV infection, not only through the use of non-sterile instruments during the procedure but also through the increased likelihood of tissue laceration, loss of blood and tearing of the female genitalia during sexual intercourse. Ongoing consequences are ill-health and the inability to maintain a livelihood (e.g. Save the Children, 2004).

There is also a problem of increasing 'medicalisation' of FGM/C, which poses a challenge to efforts to eradicate the practice. This is where the performance of FGM/C has shifted from traditional practitioners to medical practitioners, and where it is carried out in health clinics and hospitals, using anaesthetics and surgical instruments. For example, in Egypt, 94 percent of daughters were found to have undergone FGM/C conducted by trained health personnel; this was the case for 79 percent of mothers. This shift has been attributed by some to early anti-FGM/C advocacy efforts that overemphasised the health consequences of the procedure, which led to the

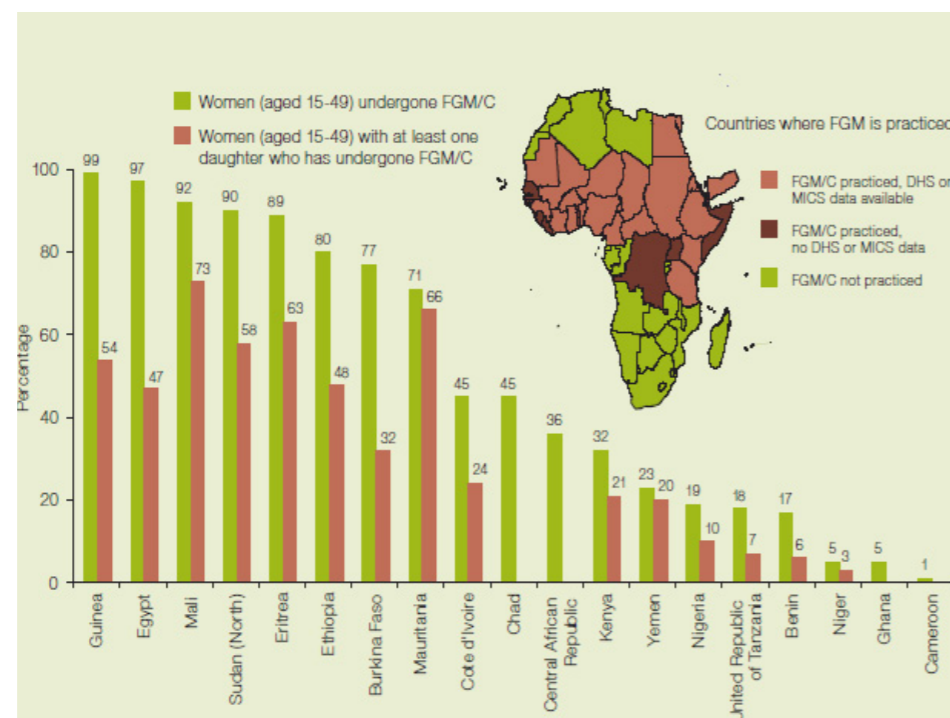
misconception that medicalisation was a more 'benign' form of the practice (UNICEF, 2005).

The psychological implications for girls who have been subjected to FGM/C include anxiety, depression, problems arising from 'sexual dysfunction' and behavioural problems in children arising from losing trust in caregivers. As well as poor health outcomes, FGM/C can result in negative social outcomes, which carries important poverty implications. One of the most readily apparent linkages between poverty and FGM/C can be seen in relation to girls' increased risk of vesicovaginal fistula, a debilitating condition which can lead to community rejection. Attributed to FGM/C in 15 percent of cases, vesicovaginal fistula can cause incontinence and a stench that saps sufferers of their emotional, physical and social well-being.<sup>17</sup>

The practice of FGM/C is a manifestation of discriminatory social institutions and represents a severe form of physical insecurity. Despite efforts by governments, the international community and NGOs, this violation of physical integrity continues because a range of cultural, social and religious factors perpetuate its practice and it is defended on the grounds of 'tradition.' These societal traditions are built around ideas of what it means to be a 'proper' wife/woman, notions of 'femininity' and 'modesty,' aesthetics, hygiene,

**Figure 1: FGM/C in Africa and the Middle East**

The prevalence of FGM among women and their daughters



Note: Data are from latest available years, 1996-2004. Adapted from UNICEF (2005). Changing a harmful social convention: Female genital mutilation/cutting. Innocenti Digest No.12, UNICEF Innocenti Research

Source: Pinheiro (2006)

### Box 6: FGM/C is linked to understandings of adulthood and citizenship

In Kenya, female Member of Parliament Linah Kilimo, who had not undergone FGM/C as a girl, came face to face with the patriarchal forces that perpetuate the practice when she decided to run for public office many years later. Her opponents challenged her eligibility to hold a position in public office based on the grounds that she had not been circumcised. Although they claimed that 'only adults' could occupy such positions of responsibility, she went on to become a Minister in Kenya's National Rainbow Coalition government.

Source: IRIN (2005)

marriageability, religious piety, ethnic/cultural identity and female morality.<sup>18</sup> In many societies, FGM/C is a rite of passage into adulthood and involves coming of age rituals in which the whole community participates. FGM/C entails notions of ethnic and cultural identity and a sense of 'belonging' to a community, as well as what it means to be an adult and a proper woman or wife (see Box 6). For example, in Somalia, FGM/C is usually performed in adolescence and considered an important initiation into womanhood. It is shrouded in secrecy, and its pains, along with the pains of childbirth, must be endured to prove one's womanhood (World Bank and UNFPA, 2004). In Ethiopia, FGM/C and marriage are considered the two major events of a girl's life. Families come together and a great deal is spent on the event by the community (WOMANKIND Worldwide, 2007).

FGM/C is also founded on beliefs about preserving a girl's 'sexual purity' and virginity, as it supposedly 'tames' the libido of a girl and prevents her from engaging in illicit sexual relations before and after marriage. In addition, FGM/C is carried out in some societies for apparent aesthetic and hygiene reasons, as female body parts are considered 'ugly' or 'dirty,' and the removal of 'male' parts (e.g. the clitoris) is believed to signify cleanliness and beauty and to enhance sexual pleasure for a girl's future husband.

Given the importance of respecting and reproducing societal norms and practices for the survival of the community, girls who escape FGM/C and families (especially fathers as family heads) who decide not to circumcise their girls can be

marginalised and stigmatised as deviating from long-lasting social rules and endangering the community's cohesion and survival. Community pressures are significant for girls and their families, and as a result mothers are often the primary actors responsible for their daughters' circumcision. Where girls have not submitted to FGM/C, they are often ostracised by the community (including family members) and rejected by potential spouses (see Box 7). Economic reasons are also involved: circumcisers, most often females, are able to access an important source of income and increased social status. Another economic factor closely linked to FGM/C is the offer of bride wealth.

## 5. Intensification of gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations

Insecurity and the threat of violence faced by girls dramatically escalate in times of state fragility and armed conflict, which in turn drives and perpetuates chronic poverty (see Goodhand, 2003). Conflict also significantly changes gendered roles and relationships. Around 200 million girls are living in countries that are affected by armed conflict. Between 1998 and 2008, it is estimated that approximately 2 million children were killed, 6 million injured and more than 1 million orphaned or separated from their families as a result of conflict; over 250,000 children were associated with armed groups (in Plan International, 2008a). At the end of 2006, there were 32.9 million refugees and

### Box 7: FGM/C and social status

In societies where FGM/C is practised, it is considered an essential 'rite of passage' into womanhood for a girl who becomes, in this way, a socially eligible marriage partner. Accordingly, parents are not willing to abandon the practice as they are afraid that their daughters are not going to get married (and become full members of their communities through marriage and childbirth) and that the whole family is going to be stigmatised. FGM/C assigns value to the girl and her family. Among the Chagga in Tanzania, the bride price for a circumcised girl is higher than for an uncircumcised one. In Sierra Leone, FGM/C has been a requirement in order to join the country's secret societies; failure to become a member has been regarded as equivalent to social exclusion. Uncircumcised women can also be more easily divorced by their husbands. Hence parents who uphold the tradition often do so out of what they perceive to be the best interests of their daughters, highlighting the power of this social convention in the eyes of its practitioners.

Source: UNICEF (2008)

internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world – and a large percentage of these were women and children (ibid). Rape has been used systematically as a weapon of war in many conflict settings across the world, from Afghanistan, Chechnya and Sudan, to Liberia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone (see Box 8). Tens of thousands of women and girls were systematically raped during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995 (Amnesty International, 2009). In Rwanda, up to half a million women were raped during the 1994 genocide. In Sierra Leone, the number of incidents of war-related sexual violence among internally displaced women from 1991 to 2001 was as high as 64,000 (UNIFEM, 2010).

Girls also participate in the fighting forces of many countries across the world, recruited forcibly through abduction or enlisting ‘voluntarily.’ Around 100,000 girls make up the estimated 300,000 child soldiers in the world. Between 1990 and 2003, girls were part of militia, government, paramilitary and/or armed opposition forces in 55 countries, and were involved in armed conflicts in 38 of these (McKay and Mazurana, 2004). Mazurana et al., (2002) estimated that girls represented between 30 and 40 percent of all child combatants in recent conflicts in Africa. Angola, Burundi, DRC, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Libya, Mozambique, Nepal, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda are just some of the countries in which girls were participants in rebel forces.

Girl combatants endure significant hardship, including the deprivation of food, health care, shelter and education. As a result, many girls became ill or disabled, or die. Many died during pregnancy or childbirth, often because of a lack of medical care and unsafe abortions in the bush (McKay, 2004). Many aspects of their roles in fighting forces, particularly

relating to their sexual exploitation and domestic slavery, reflect gender discrimination embedded in the social institutions of a given society. The fact that women are socialised, expected and needed to perform such roles in peace as in wartime does not receive much attention (Bennett et al., 1995). According to the needs of their group, girls often take on a multiplicity of roles in fighting forces, from domestic servant, cook, cleaner and porter, to sex slave or ‘wife’ of a male combatant, spy, fighter and suicide bomber.

Since the end of the Cold War, the nature and trajectory of violent conflict has undergone significant change, with important implications for its impact on girls. Conflict is now predominantly internal, taking place within countries and involving the state and various non-state actors. It lasts longer – often several years or even decades – and violence often continues after the official ‘end’ of fighting. Worryingly, the targeting of civilians has become a deliberate tactic of war, as opposed to an unfortunate side-effect. These changes have blurred the lines between civilians and combatants (Thompson, 2006). As well as increasing the risk of violence to girls, these changes have seen transformation in ‘traditional’ gender roles in some contexts. The overall result of the changing face of conflict is the increasing insecurity and vulnerability of girls to gendered violence, and the connected risk of falling into, and remaining mired in, chronic poverty traps well into adulthood. The threat of extreme violence and sexual exploitation becomes an everyday reality.

As conflict escalates, girls are often forced to give up their education, because of parents’ concern about their safety or through displacement. Girls make up more than half of the 39 million children out of education living in countries affected by conflict (Plan International, 2008a). The intergenerational



© Jenny Matthews / Panos Pictures (2007)  
Uganda. Grace was abducted by the LRA during the war between government forces and the LRA.

**Box 8: Conflict and the use of female bodies as a tactic of war**

In today’s armed conflicts, victims are much more likely to be civilians than soldiers: 70 percent of casualties in recent conflicts have been non-combatants and most of them women and children. ‘Women’s bodies have become part of the battleground for those who use terror as a tactic of war – they are raped, abducted, humiliated and made to undergo forced pregnancy, sexual abuse and slavery.’

The 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) was the first treaty to expressly recognise this broad spectrum of sexual and gender-based violence as among the gravest breaches of international law. This was followed in October 2006 by the groundbreaking UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, which explicitly acknowledged the impact of conflict on women and girls and stressed the need to address their particular needs and to promote their participation in all peace-building activities with a focus on four specific areas: women and the peace process, security of women, gender and peacekeeping operations and gender mainstreaming within the UN.

Systematic rape in war has different functions. In Darfur, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, it was used as a weapon of ethnic cleansing, but this was not the case in DRC, Liberia or Sierra Leone. According to some studies focusing on the political economy of post-Cold War conflicts, given women’s multiple roles in armed groups, sexual abuse is also a deliberate strategy to control and exploit women’s assets and mainly their labour. In the recent conflict in the Kivus in DRC, paramilitary forces have attacked villages and abducted young women, whom they systematically raped and then used as forced labourers in the mines.

Source: Rehn and Johnson-Sirleaf (2002); Turshen (2001); UNIFEM (2010)

poverty implications are illustrated in the words of a 14-year-old Kurdish girl: ‘I don’t have a future ... I can’t write and I can’t read. But if I had the opportunity to read and write and be a student, I would want to learn to be a teacher – to teach the next generation. I would like to send my children to school, even in wartime and in difficult times’ (ibid).

Increasing conflict, and the poverty it often engenders, may require girls to take on new responsibilities and work in the home. For example, if their parents are killed or engaged in fighting, girls may find themselves having to run the household, take on care responsibilities for other family members or contribute to the household economy. Being forced to make a living in times of conflict exposes a girl to significant physical insecurity. She may be forced into commercial sex, join an armed force or engage in unsafe paid work (Plan International,

**Rape has been used systematically as a weapon of war in many conflict settings across the world, to exert power and social control, to redraw ethnic boundaries and to wipe out opposing communities.**

2008a). Instability and poverty may also see girls being forced into early marriage for economic or security reasons, which is correlated with poor health and education and low self-esteem (see Chapter 1 on Discriminatory Family Codes). Poverty, displacement and the breakdown of traditional structures of family and community support further increase the risk of girls being targets of sexual violence, torture, trafficking and/or sexual slavery or abduction for recruitment to a fighting force. For example, a 1999 government survey carried out in Sierra Leone found that girls under 15 made up 37 percent of the country’s sex workers, and over 80 percent of these children were unaccompanied children or children displaced by war (Hyder and Mac Veigh, 2007).

**Gender-based violence in post-conflict settings**

In the immediate aftermath of conflict, ‘the transition from war to peace emerges as a critical moment in the shifting terrain of gender power,’ and girls and women can soon see any gains from having fought side by side with men diminishing (Meintjes, 2001). Violence against women is very common during this period, owing to poverty and frustration, availability of weapons, a culture of impunity and the normalisation of violence (Baksh et al., 2005). Increased levels of post-

Box 9: The abusive peacekeeper

The presence of international well-paid and largely male staff in impoverished post-conflict settings creates peacekeeping economies and commercial sex industries. In both Sierra Leone and DRC, the creation of international military bases has resulted in high levels of prostitution for local girls and women as their only survival option (Higate, 2004). In some post-conflict settings, not only military but also humanitarian personnel have abused girls and women. For the first time in 2002, a Save the Children Report revealed the ugly truth in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone (Naik, 2002)<sup>19</sup> on the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti and Southern Sudan, in both urban and rural settings: many incidences of forced sex were perpetrated by peacekeepers and aid workers against children; many children also traded sex in exchange for money, food, soap or luxury items such as mobile phones. Other experiences include (see Save the Children, 2008): the UN mission in Cambodia in 1992 to 1993, which raised the number of prostitutes (children included) from 6,000 to 25,000; the involvement of peacekeeping forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina in trafficking of women and girls; separate abuse of minors by international peacekeepers in Eritrea in 2003; and peacekeepers exchanging food and other items for sexual favours from local women and girls in DRC in 2004.<sup>20</sup> Fear of negative economic consequences and of retaliation, resignation and powerlessness, lack of faith in justice and lack of access to legal services make people unwilling to report all these cases.

conflict economic insecurity have also been linked to increased levels of forced prostitution and trafficking, particularly in settings with a strong presence of peacekeeping forces (Mazurana *et al.*, 2005) (see Box 9).

Similarly, girls' roles in conflict are often ignored in post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation programming, leading to the marginalisation of girls and women during this critical period. Despite the growing and unavoidable recognition of the involvement of girls and women in armed conflict, there also exists a sense of denial, silence and stigma surrounding girl soldiers. The roots of this invisibility lie in gendered stereotypes whereby women are not seen as fighters. For example, in Sierra Leone, relatively few girls participated in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes, because the gender-discriminatory framework did not recognise women as combatants and rather recognised them as sex slaves, wives or camp followers (McKay, 2004). Also, many girls choose not to go through the process, fearing further stigmatisation and marginalisation in their communities if they are identified as having transgressed societal boundaries and traditional gender stereotypes.

Research shows that girls must grapple with daunting challenges to their physical and psychosocial recovery as a

**'I don't have a future ... I can't write and I can't read. But if I had the opportunity to read and write and be a student, I would want to learn to be a teacher – to teach the next generation. I would like to send my children to school, even in wartime and in difficult times'**

- 14 year old Kurdish girl in Plan International (2008a)

result of their experiences in armed groups. Post-conflict, girls must often bear 'a secondary force of victimisation' in the form of social and economic marginalisation, as well as continuing threats to their health and security (Denov, 2008; McKay, 2004). Girl combatants often face stigma, harassment and ostracism on their return and find it extremely difficult to reintegrate, an experience made harder if their parents have been killed and their communities destroyed. Communities that place value on sexual purity consider them to be 'spoiled goods,' and girls are often subject to assault by males from within the community (McKay, 2004). The presence of babies conceived during wartime is cause for further harassment, and sometimes outright rejection by communities.

Girls are particularly vulnerable to chronic poverty on their return. They generally come back to conditions of impoverishment, with infrastructure, local economies and sometimes entire communities destroyed. Medical and sexual reproductive health services and other basic services they desperately need, such as education and psychological support, are often not available to them (Save the Children, 2005). In the face of rejection from the community, and having missed out on educational opportunities, many former girl combatants are forced into prostitution or begging for survival. In DRC, returning girls were regarded as being without value and their families as being without honour. Girls reported that their communities were afraid that they were agents of disease, that they had developed 'a military mentality' dangerous for the community and that they were a negative role model and could corrupt other girls. Girls returning with babies faced additional stigma, and their babies were considered to be future rebels and community enemies (Save the Children, 2005). Box 10 gives excerpts from an interview with a returning girl combatant in Sierra Leone that highlights the risk of such girls sliding into chronic poverty and passing their poverty status on to their children.

Box 10: The story of a girl combatant in Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, an estimated 80 percent of children attached to various armed groups were between 7 and 14 years. Isata was born in northern Sierra Leone, and prior to the war she lived in what she refers to as a 'big village.' She was the daughter of farmers. When Isata was nine years old the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) attacked her community and abducted her.

'After my abduction I was in total fear and I thought I would die at any time. I wondered if I would ever see my parents again. The only thing I was thinking about was where my family was and how I could get to them. [But] the moment you are captured you automatically become part of them.'

Isata was gang-raped by several RUF members soon after she was abducted. This was the beginning of repeated sexual violence against her until she eventually became the 'wife' of a powerful male rebel commander. As she related, submission to sexual assault was a way to stay alive. Isata regarded her 'marriage' to the commander as a lesser of two evils, as it provided her with a degree of protection.

'For my very survival, I gave myself up and I was ready for [coerced sex] at all times. This was until a commander took me as his own and decided to have me as a permanent partner. He then protected me against others and continued to rape me alone but less frequently. He never allowed others to use me.'

Besides being an object of sexual gratification, Isata was also forced to take on multiple roles that included cooking and washing and carrying weaponry and ammunition. After about a year with the RUF, she was provided with tactical and weaponry training and cajoled into becoming a combatant.

'I was trained how to use the gun and to dismantle a gun quickly and how to set an ambush [...] We were told to fire on people above the waist. This would ensure they would die. If we just wanted to intimidate people and not kill them, we were trained to point the gun in the air.'

Isata's gradual adaptation to the RUF's militarised environment engendered feelings of self-confidence and pride. As time progressed, her world entailed routine killing and mutilation of victims, sustained through indoctrination, forced ingestion of alcohol and drugs immediately prior to conflict and desensitisation tactics (e.g. celebratory singing and dancing after battles). At 13, Isata became pregnant by her 'husband,' who abandoned her when he learned about the pregnancy. Soon after, Isata's affiliation with the RUF abruptly ended when she and several other children were found by UN troops and taken to a camp. This sudden shift in circumstances – from the strict militarised system of the RUF to a transitional camp and encouragement to learn a new 'civilian' trade – was not easy. Isata was again compelled to begin an unsettling process of transition and adaptation to a completely different social context. Although benefiting from temporary shelter, skills training and a small amount of financial support, she found it difficult to shed her role as a child soldier. Her reticence to cast off her military identity and her acquired sense of power was evident in her actions in the camp. Maintaining her persona as a leader of child soldiers in the camp, she was elected 'head girl' – a position of coordination and responsibility that enabled her to exercise control over other girls. When she and several other former combatants did not receive their financial rewards on time, they organised a violent attack.

Isata's time in the camp was short-lived, and after several weeks she found herself alone in Freetown, still pregnant and struggling to adjust to completely new circumstances over which she had no control. She was overcome by fear of stigmatisation and condemnation by those who might learn of her past life as an RUF combatant. Gradually, Isata began to be haunted by her past actions in the RUF, and feelings of fear, guilt and loss began to torment her.

'The war was no use to my life – it only set me back. I don't know how to start over [...] I often think about some of the bad things that I did and I always pray and ask God for forgiveness [...] I'm shy to meet people as a result – I always keep to myself. I'm afraid that people will find out that I'm a former combatant and they will take revenge on me.'

Soon after her baby was born, with no means to support herself, she warily agreed to stay at the residence of a local NGO worker whom she had met at the camp and who encouraged her to move in with him and his wife. Yet shortly afterwards, the man began to sexually abuse Isata. This led to another pregnancy and he demanded that she leave his home. Not knowing the whereabouts of her parents or extended family since her initial abduction as a small child, at the time of her last interview in 2003 Isata had no permanent residence and was dependent on a network of supportive people to care for herself and her two small children. She expressed hope that one day she would find work as a hairdresser or food retailer, and that in the near future she could reconnect with her community.

Source: Denov and MacLure (2007)

Box 11: Localising international commitments

The African Union’s Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and its Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa have made a significant contribution to efforts to eliminate FGM/C in the region. The UN Secretary-General’s Study on Violence Against Women in 2006 reported that 15 of the 28 African states where FGM/C is prevalent have enacted laws criminalising it, and two of the nine Asian and Arabian Peninsula states where FGM/C is prevalent have also enacted legal measures prohibiting it. Other countries with large migrant populations that traditionally practise FGM/C have also passed laws to criminalise FGM/C (e.g. Australia, Belgium, Canada, UK and US).

In other contexts, CEDAW has been used as a basis for strengthening women’s legal rights. For example, in 1999, the Indian Supreme Court drew on CEDAW alongside the national Constitution to compose national guidelines on sexual harassment, after local police failed to investigate the rape of a social worker.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the 2007 Thai Constitution includes a clause that women are to be protected from violence, with rehabilitation services provided by the state. In Morocco, changes to the Family Code in 2004 have drawn on CEDAW to give women greater equality within marriage and to introduce the concept of shared responsibility between spouses. Changes to the penal code have also been introduced which criminalise violence against a spouse.

Source: [www.unifem.org/cedaw30/success\\_stories/](http://www.unifem.org/cedaw30/success_stories/)

6. Addressing physical insecurity: Promising policies and programmes

Eliminating violence against girls and transforming discriminatory social institutions that support it requires a holistic, context-sensitive and multipronged approach. In this section, we discuss promising practices involving measures which focus on 1) changes in legislation and its enforcement, 2) community awareness, 3) policy advocacy and 4) female empowerment.

Legal reform and enforcement

At the international level, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) and the Beijing Platform of Action (1995) provide important frameworks for protecting girls from violence. It is critical that these are in turn enshrined in strong regional and national frameworks, in order to highlight the responsibility of the state to alleviate gender discrimination and violence against girls (see Box 11). Establishing legislation that criminalises gender-based violence is an important first step in tackling the culture of silence, tolerance and impunity for perpetrators that is all too common.

However, while many countries across the world have signed up to international human rights treaties and protocols, and some have passed laws criminalising gender-based violence, there are significant shortcomings in implementation and enforcement at the national level in many contexts (UNFPA, 2007). Part of the challenge lies in the misalignment between customary law and international human rights standards (as discussed in Chapter 1 on Discriminatory Family

Codes). States must send out a clear message that gender-based violence is not a ‘private affair’ but a violation of human rights, for which perpetrators will be held accountable. As such, tackling the invisibility of violence against girls requires strong reporting mechanisms and data collection systems, and for gender-sensitive regulations to be put in place. In this regard, dedicated police units with officers trained in investigating sexual offences, combined with counselling services, can encourage reporting and prosecution of offences (UNICEF, 2000b).<sup>22</sup> In Jamaica, for instance, Sexual Offences Investigation Units have been established in each parish. As well as providing health care, these centres record victim statements and support victims in attending court (Amnesty International, 2006). Malaysia has established one-stop crisis centres at hospitals to provide integrated victim support services, including police reporting, medical treatment and counselling, and this model is now being replicated in parts of Asia and in South Africa.<sup>23</sup>

Local NGOs and women’s groups have also played an important role in supporting the implementation of policies and legislation, through awareness raising and training for public officials (see Box 12). Women’s groups in Albania and India, for instance, have put in place telephone hotlines for domestic abuse and coordinated the work of NGOs, health care providers and the police and armed forces in dealing with violence against women (Desai, 2010). Helplines have also been used as a means to enable children to report violence they experience within the household and to offer them assistance. Pinheiro (2006) points out the importance of helplines for child domestic workers in child labour elimination efforts. The Kasambahay (domestic worker) helpline programme in the Philippines, for example, receives reports of abuse and offers assistance to victims and provides effective shelter and information services to children at risk, especially domestic workers and victims of trafficking (UNICEF, 2009).

Box 12: Sensitising authorities to gender-based violence

The Tanzania Media Women’s Association ran a media campaign in 1998 using radio, television and multimedia to support the enactment of the Sexual Offences Special Provision Act, a law criminalising FGM/C. The campaign also worked with other NGOs and theatre artists and produced education materials, information kits and an information website to raise awareness and disseminate information.

Partially in response to the advocacy efforts of gender-based violence movements, the UN introduced the first female peacekeeping unit in 2007 in Liberia. Acknowledging the problems with male peacekeeping forces in fragile post-conflict settings, in January 2007 103 female peacekeepers from India arrived to work towards stabilising the social order, combating high levels of sexual abuse in the capital and operating as role models for local women to join a UN training programme for female police officers.

Source: UNICEF (2008); <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6316387.stm>

Box 13: Reshaping masculinities

A growing number of initiatives aimed at tackling gender-based violence are focusing on reshaping traditional masculinities, especially among young men who are at greater risk of HIV and STIs and more likely to perpetrate sexual abuse against young women, as the following examples highlight.

Program H (‘homens’ is ‘men’ in Portuguese), has been adapted to the Indian context and piloted with young low-income men in Mumbai through the collaboration of the Horizons Programme, Brazilian NGO Instituto Promundo and Indian NGO Coro for Literacy. Given that India has the second largest population of HIV/AIDS globally, and that young people aged 15 to 24 account for 37 percent of those who are HIV positive, tackling traditional gender norms and aggressive masculinity is critical to reducing risks among both young men and young women. The Mumbai programme, Yaari-Dosti (‘Friendship/Bonding between Men’), seeks to challenge and change attitudes towards gender relations, reproductive health, condom use and partner, family and community violence. The programme aim is to reduce young men’s HIV risk and violence against women by promoting a model of a ‘gender-equitable man’ – one who supports relationships based on equality and respect, engages in household and child care activities, shares responsibility for reproductive health and opposes partner violence and homophobia. The pilot evaluation found that, compared with the initial 36 percent, only 9 percent of men continued to believe that a woman should tolerate violence; only 3 percent agreed that beating a wife who refuses sex was a male right (initially 28 percent); only 35 percent continued to believe that child care was a maternal responsibility (63 percent); and only 11 percent said that a man should have the final word in household decisions (24 percent). Sexual harassment of girls had declined considerably, and violence against partners had also declined, from 51 to 39 percent (Verma *et al.*, 2006).

A Family Planning Association Bangladesh programme in impoverished Comilla district is educating local men about women’s rights, illustrating how violent behaviour is transmitted across the generations. According to one male participant: ‘I realised through the training that when I stopped my wife from going outside alone, didn’t provide enough food, or was abusive to her, all were acts of violence [...] it will never happen again.’ The United Kingdom (UK) Department for International Development (DFID)- funded project also raises awareness of domestic violence among women through the use of peer educators chosen from communities. Legal representation is offered to abused women and training and loans are also provided to help women set up small businesses and achieve economic independence and greater bargaining power within the household. One woman, married at 13 to a man of 32, states: ‘I was abused every day [...] but I was too scared to protest. Then I took a loan and set up a poultry farm. Once my husband saw me earning, he started respecting me more. Now my husband says: “She’s independent – I can’t do anything to her!”’ So far, the programme has contributed to lower levels of domestic violence, prosecution of husbands who have attacked their wives and greater female confidence, independence and respect within these communities.

Ethiopia’s Addis Birhan (‘New Light’) also aims to reshape male attitudes. Run by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Amhara Regional Bureau of Youth and Sports and the Population Council, it uses a discussion group approach targeted at married men in more than 100 rural villages. Over a period of three months, trained male mentors hold weekly meetings at community level with groups of 25 to 30 men. Young men are given information and hold dialogues on gender relationships, caring for children and family, sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and domestic violence. Participants report that the meetings have enabled more open discussions at home and have helped them change their thinking on gender norms. The first survey undertaken among husbands and married adolescent girls showed considerable improvements in gender relations and increased male involvement in household tasks and support vis-à-vis wives within the household.

Source: [www.dfid.gov.uk/Media-Room/Case-Studies/2010/Bangladesh-abuse/](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Media-Room/Case-Studies/2010/Bangladesh-abuse/); Erulkar and Alemayehu (2009)

Awareness raising and education

Tackling discrimination that is deeply ingrained in social institutions requires broad community involvement. Working with men and boys can be especially important to tackle cultural norms and practices that sanction aggressive masculinities (Box 13 and Chapter 5 on Restricted Civil Liberties).

Other initiatives focus on working with young women and girls themselves so as to promote attitudinal and behavioural changes. Promising practices pay particular attention to raising female awareness about reproductive health services, sexuality and contraception options (see Box 14).

Awareness raising and community education efforts that seek to involve village and religious leaders are also important. In efforts to combat FGM/C, for example, some initiatives have focused on providing alternative livelihood options to traditional excisors. Ethiopia’s Lay Down the

Blade programme offered practitioners training and skills development. Despite concerns that non-excisors had enrolled in the programme, this intervention nevertheless indicated the possibility of recognising, and tackling linkages between physical insecurity and chronic poverty (WHO, 1999). Other promising practices have sought to promote alternative cultural rites rather than simply banning FGM/C. Because of the cultural and symbolic importance that such practices often have for communities, initiatives that recognise the need for shared social rites and propose new forms of rituals are often more effective (see Box 15).

Policy advocacy

Women have mobilised globally to make violence against girls and women visible, paying particular attention to securing commitments to undertake relevant legal and policy

Box 14: Reaching girls affected by war through reproductive health services

Empowering Adolescents and Young Girls Affected by the War through Reproductive Health Services, HIV/AIDS Prevention and Reintegration Opportunities in Sierra Leone involves the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and partners including government ministries, the WHO, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The project targets women between the ages of 15 and 38 who have been abducted or suffered violence at the hands of combatants in the war. Some 2,300 girls have been reached, including widows, sex workers, single mothers and people living with HIV. The project provides behaviour change, skills and communication education to enable girls to make choices, while capacity building helps them regain self-esteem. Children of participants receive health care and education alongside access to a safe play area, and partners receive condom supplies and HIV awareness training. The project has also had community-wide benefits as awareness of gender issues has increased, evidenced by a drop in gender-based violence and forced early marriage. Girls who become pregnant are now encouraged to join the programme once they have given birth, rather than being excluded from education.

Source: UNFPA (2007)

Box 15: Circumcision with words

FGM/C has been practised in over half the districts of Kenya as a rite of passage for adolescent girls and an opportunity for community celebration and reaffirmation of social ties; it has also been a prerequisite for marriage. Since 1993, a women’s local NGO, called Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation, has run community sensitisation campaigns emphasising women’s rights, disseminating educational material and identifying and training community members, usually young women, to become peer educators to advocate against FGM/C. Realising that girls and families were reluctant to stop practising FGM/C and break the long-lasting community rituals that accompanied it, the programme developed an alternative ritual in accordance with the specific cultural context but excluding genital cutting. The first alternative ceremony took place in 1996: 29 girls were secluded and received week-long training not simply on their traditional responsibilities as adult women but also on sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, marriage, the harmful consequences of FGM/C and gender empowerment. During their seclusion, the girls prepared songs, dances and drama for ‘a circumcision with words and not the knife.’ A final public celebration conferred traditional gifts on the girls along with a booklet containing communal wisdom to guide their lives. The girls presented their songs and dances and publicly pronounced the abandonment of FGM/C in the presence of government and religious leaders, who were invited to give speeches. The mothers of these first girls created a support group and started disseminating the alternative rite. At both community and individual household level, this new rite was replicated as a means of introducing girls to adulthood in a less painful way. By 2001, more than 5,000 programmes were running throughout the country, and 30 alternative rite of passage ceremonies. Given the close relation between FGM/C and marriage, the programme also intentionally targeted young men and informed them of the harmful effects of the practice on women’s health and sexuality.

Source: Chege et al. (2001); World Bank/UNFPA (2004)

reforms and to empower women and girls to claim their rights. Although CEDAW does not focus on gender-based violence (except for Article 6), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women’s 1992 Recommendation No. 19 is considered to be one of the most significant and influential international documents on violence against women, defining gender-based violence as a form of discrimination ‘that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately’ (and) ‘which impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms’ (see Bouta *et. al.*, 2005). Thanks in large part to the efforts of civil society gender equality champions, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action in 1993 also recognised women’s and girls’ human rights as ‘an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights,’ and this was backed up by the appointment in 1994 of the first UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, whose mandate was to document and analyse the causes and consequences of violence against women globally as well as to hold governments accountable for violating women’s human rights. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action also included violence against women as one of its critical areas of concern (Critical Area D), calling on governments to take concrete measures ‘to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.’

In response to ongoing activist activities, many regions have developed their own conventions on violence against women, such as the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights and its Additional Protocol on Women’s Rights (2003) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, also known as the Convention of Belem do Para (1994) (UNICEF, 2000a). Most recently, in March 2010, echoing the increasing emphasis on the impact of conflicts on women and girls and

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000), the Secretary-General appointed a Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Global advocacy efforts have also successfully secured a number of commitments focusing on gender-based violence against children (see Box 16). The UNCRC acknowledges that children have the right to protection ‘from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has care of the child’ (Article 19). In 2000, two Optional Protocols were adopted by the UN General Assembly: on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. In 2006, the groundbreaking Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence Against Children recommended the establishment of a Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, with the post first filled in 2009 in accordance with UN Resolution 62/141.

Measures promoting empowerment and participation

Empowerment initiatives are another important approach to tackling gender-based violence. These include a range of approaches, from those aimed at enhancing girls’ self-confidence to efforts to strengthen their access to services and income-generating opportunities. The former seek to tackle deeply engrained socio-cultural attitudes about female inferiority and voicelessness, and in this way to contribute to undermining socially sanctioned gender-based violence. A number of African women’s NGOs, for example, in recognition of the ways that girls and young women are often

Box 16: Ensuring school is a place of learning not violence

ActionAid’s Stop Violence Against Girls in School project was launched in 2008, as was Plan’s Learn without Fear Campaign. Both international campaigns have used a combined approach consisting of community-level initiatives, research and advocacy to improve girls’ educational access and achievement, with girls’ empowerment placed at the heart to secure transformation of gender relations in schools and communities.

ActionAid reports that, according to available data, overall violence against girls by teachers, peers and family members has been reduced by 50 percent in the intervention areas; enrolment of girls has increased by 22 percent; girls’ dropout has declined by 20 percent; and 14,000 girls in these areas state that they are confident to challenge school-based violence.

Evidence from Plan’s campaign suggests that, to date, there has been a range of positive impacts, including for example: the adoption of a Children’s Code in Togo, with provisions barring a range of violent behaviours in schools; the launch of a free 24-hour telephone helpline in Kenya, providing both preventative and support services through referrals and school outreach services; and the adoption of a new school curriculum, the Step by Step Manual Towards School Coexistence and Student Participation, on peaceful values in El Salvador.

Source: ActionAid (2010); Plan International (2008a)

Box 17: Let Us Speak Out

Tuseme (‘Let Us Speak Out’), the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)’s flagship empowerment programme, uses theatre for development techniques to address barriers to girls’ social and academic development. Tuseme trains girls to identify and understand the problems that affect them, articulate these and take action to solve them. Through drama, singing and other creative means, girls are provided with negotiation skills, self-confidence and decision-making and leadership skills, and taught how to speak out. Tuseme was initiated at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 1996 and enhanced by FAWE with gender in education and life skills components. The model has been introduced in Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Among the positive outcomes cited by FAWE are improved self-esteem, enhanced leadership, social and life skills, positive attitudinal changes of teachers towards girls and a reduction in sexual harassment. It is estimated that 80,000 girls and boys have benefited from Tuseme training.

The Biruf Tesfa (‘Bright Future’) programme in urban Ethiopia aims to help adolescent female domestic workers to break out of exclusion and abuse. Ethiopian women and girls in urban centres are very vulnerable to sexual violence and HIV/AIDS, especially as girls who migrate to cities in search of employment are less well informed, at higher risk of sexual abuse and less prepared to avoid abusive situations. Since 2006, the Ethiopian Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, the Population Council and a number of local partners have targeted out-of-school girls aged 10 to 19 who live in urban slums and are rural-urban migrants, domestic servants and orphans, with the aims of: breaking their isolation; providing them with basic literacy, sexual and reproductive health knowledge and networks of participation and support; and offering them the human and social capital to protect themselves and to gradually move into safer and better paid employment. Trained mentors visit house to house and enlist all household members, including taking their sex, age and schooling status. They follow up on girls enrolled in the programme and often have to negotiate their participation with their employer, who often does not want to let girls out of the house. They are also offered basic health screenings at local government clinics and medical care free of charge. By December 2009, it was estimated that over 17,000 girls, mostly domestic workers, had benefited from the Biruh Tesfa programme in the five urban centres. Participant girls have been able to break out of their isolation, make friends, access information and support and reduce their vulnerability to sexual violence: ‘After I started this program, I learned how to protect myself from violence and what to do if I am victimized. I think that if I had attended this program earlier, I may not have been raped by that person and become pregnant.’

Source: [www.fawe.org/activities/interventions/tuseme/index.php](http://www.fawe.org/activities/interventions/tuseme/index.php); Erulkar and Ferede (2009)

Box 18: Demobilising girl combatants – the Liberian case

In 2003, following the end of 14 years of conflict in Liberia, UN Security Council Resolution 1509 provided the guidelines for the peace-building process: it established a peacekeeping force, asked for a DDR programme with ‘particular attention to the special needs of child combatants and women’ and, in accordance with the groundbreaking Resolution 1325, reaffirmed ‘the importance of a gender perspective in peacekeeping operations and post-conflict peace-building’ (Para 3(f)).

At the end of 2004, when the disarmament and demobilisation processes were complete, 22,000 of the more than 103,000 participating ex-combatants were women and 2,740 were girls. However, this was only a small fraction of the overall number of women and girls who actually participated in the conflict: many chose not to participate in DDR for fear of stigmatisation, others were misinformed and others were manipulated by their commanders, who denied the existence of child soldiers. Nevertheless, a study of the programme stressed that girls accounted for 30 percent of demobilised children in Liberia, which compared favourably with only 8 percent in neighbouring Sierra Leone and must thus be counted a success.

UNICEF coordinated the process for under-18s and was actively involved in raising girls’ awareness about DDR and encouraging them to participate. There were 29 Interim Care Centres all over the country and children were offered sex-segregated shelter, health services, counselling, life skills training and recreational activities. Family tracing and reunification services were also offered by the Red Cross. When the centres closed, 90 percent of the children had already returned to their communities. In areas lacking infrastructure and resources to create a centre, drop-in centres were created, offering children support and psychosocial care. Overall, the centres ‘were impressive for the comprehensive nature of their efforts to address the needs of the child ex-combatants and, in their provision of gender-specific and age-appropriate programme activities, their compliance with Security Council Resolution 1325 was readily apparent.’

Source: Delap (2005); Hanson (2007); Human Rights Watch (2005b); Williamson and Carter (2005)

socialised to be submissive to their male counterparts in many communities, work to transform gender relationships through the participation of girls in schools and communities (see Box 17).

In post-conflict settings, although children, and especially girls, are often invisible in DDR initiatives, gender equality champions are slowly succeeding at ensuring that greater attention is paid to addressing the specific vulnerabilities of girls (see Box 18).

Overcoming barriers to service access is another critical approach aimed at empowerment, and is especially important in post-conflict contexts. Initiatives aimed at addressing girls’ marginalisation in the post-conflict context include efforts to promote their access to basic services (e.g. education), develop their skills and reintegrate them into the community. Initiatives enabling girls to access basic support services and the abolition of user fees (particularly for reproductive health, psychosocial support and education services) are crucial for girls who have been subjected to gender-based violence. In Sierra Leone and Uganda, traditional rituals have been used in some areas to welcome former girl soldiers back into their communities. It has been argued by some that safe rituals which respect the human rights of girls could facilitate psychosocial healing (McKay, 2004). The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has introduced female classroom assistants into refugee camps in West Africa and given them specific responsibility to a create girl-friendly learning environment (see Amnesty International, 2008). Similarly, the UN Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence against Women supported a project to train female ex-combatants in Rwanda, many of whom had been victims of sexual violence during the armed conflict, on women’s human rights and violence against women. The training provided participants with a safe space to speak about their experiences of violence and trauma. It also empowered them to play a leading role in the fight against sexual violence and HIV/AIDS in their communities (UNIFEM, 2010).

Another critical empowerment approach is to tackle the income poverty that renders so many girls and young women vulnerable to violence and exploitation. For instance, a study by the Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity (IMAGE) found that microfinance-based structural interventions, combined with training, are possible and can reduce levels of intimate partner violence and HIV infection. Conducted in South Africa’s rural and poverty-stricken Limpopo province between 2001 and 2005, IMAGE’s study provided poverty-focused microfinance as well as gender and HIV education to an intervention group of women in the poorest communities, including a cohort of 14 to 35 year olds. Women’s ‘household economic well-being, social capital, and empowerment’ were found to have improved through this

Only a small fraction of the overall number of women and girls who actually participated in the Liberia conflict were included in the DDR process: many chose not to participate for fear of stigmatisation, others were misinformed and others were manipulated by their commanders, who denied the existence of child soldiers.

intervention, hence reducing vulnerability to intimate partner violence. In the intervention group, intimate partner violence was reduced by 55 percent (Pronyk *et al.*, 2006).

7. Lessons learnt and policy implications

Changing deep-seated behaviours, beliefs and perceptions that underpin girls’ physical insecurity is challenging, and represents a responsibility that governments are sometimes reluctant to fully undertake, for fear of upsetting the sensitivities of their constituents by ‘meddling’ in their ‘private affairs.’ Political will, backed by adequate resources, is fundamentally important, as is encouraging participation and support among community leaders, men/boys and women/girls. In particular, social change initiatives need to focus on the following:

- Strengthening legal reform on gender-based violence so that it adequately covers vulnerability to violence in all spheres (the family, schools, workplace, communities) and especially its implementation;
- Enlisting boys and men as partners in tackling gender-based violence and developing programmes to address ideologies of masculinity favouring violence;
- Investing in psychosocial and economic empowerment programmes for girls in order to reduce their vulnerability to gender-based violence;
- Recognising the strength of cultural values underpinning harmful traditional practices such as FGM/C and the need to offer alternative symbolic rituals in order to fulfil this socio-cultural need;
- Being sensitive to different socio-cultural and political contexts which require tailored approaches, including in situations of conflict, where special protection measures are needed;
- Enhancing the integration of the specific needs of girls and young women in the design and implementation of DDR approaches;

- Investing in initiatives to monitor and regularly report on and learn from the implementation of international conventions on gender-based violence at the national and sub-national levels.
- Ultimately, the alleviation of chronic poverty will come about only if the structural causes that perpetuate it are addressed. Challenging the norms, traditions and practices that condone violence against girls and young women is a critical part of challenging chronic poverty; it is just and leads to equality; ultimately it makes good development sense.

Notes

- 1

A number of studies from developing countries, including China, Colombia, Egypt, India, Mexico, the Philippines and South Africa, indicate a strong correlation between violence against women and violence against children (UNICEF, 2006).
- 2

<http://genderindex.org/content/social-institutions-variables> and OECD (2009).
- 3

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Recommendation No. 19 (1992) states that ‘gender-based violence, that is, violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately [...] includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty’ (Bouta et. al., 2005). The World Bank defines it as the physical, sexual and psychological violence committed against both men and women as a result of their gender (Specht, 2006). The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and other UN agencies use the term violence against women (VAW) to denote physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse against women and girls. ActionAid uses also VAG (violence against girls) to include all forms of violence. [www.unifem.org/gender\\_issues/violence\\_against\\_women/](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/).
- 4

Hindin *et al.* (2008); Jewkes (2002); LISGIS (2008); NIPORT (2009); UBOS (2007); UNICEF (2000).
- 5

The same WHO survey reports that young women aged 15 to 19 are at higher risk of physical and sexual violence in all investigated settings apart from Japan and Ethiopia.
- 6

In Latin America, although early marriage is less common, owing to a growing regional trend towards cohabitation, early pregnancy rates are high (e.g. 13 percent in Peru), fuelled by a lack of information and difficulties in accessing contraception (see e.g. McKinnon *et al.*, 2008).
- 7

However, education is not a determining factor in Jordan (Hindin *et al.*, 2008).
- 8

Imposes a penalty of 14 years to life imprisonment for the kidnap or abduction of women and dowry deaths or torture.
- 9

Aimed at deterring violence against women.
- 10

Imposes a penalty of capital punishment for rape, acid throwing, dowry deaths, abduction, sexual harassment, human trafficking and prostitution.
- 11

Murray and Quinn (2009) report that over 100 million girls between 5 and 17 years old are involved in child labour all over the world, and the majority are engaged in hazardous work, including domestic service. Human Rights Watch (2007) reports that in Africa 85 percent of all child workers are girls.
- 12

In many sub-Saharan African countries, girls who get pregnant are expelled from school, and customary laws and practices continue to prevail for settling sexual violence issues, at the expense of girls’ well-being. Even when statutory law explicitly offers re-entry rights after delivery, as in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea and Nigeria, social practices can still lead to school dropout, preventing girls from completing their education. In northern Sierra Leone, village chiefs promulgated a new local law, according to which school girls impregnated by male students have to drop out of school, along with the boys responsible. In Benin, Burkina Faso and Ghana, parents whose daughters had been abused by local teachers asked traditional leaders to settle the problem; the latter applied customary laws imposing financial compensation or the marriage of the victim to the abuser (UNICEF *et al.*, 2010).
- 13

[www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/).
- 14

[www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/).
- 15

[www.unfpa.org/gender/practices2.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/gender/practices2.htm).
- 16

[www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/) and [www.unfpa.org/gender/practices2.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/gender/practices2.htm)
- 17

[www.forwarduk.org.uk/key-issues/fistula](http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/key-issues/fistula).
- 18

Note that although FGM/C is practised among Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities, none of the holy texts prescribes the practice, which in fact predates both Christianity and Islam (WHO et al., 2008).
- 19

See also Save the Children (2008) for more recent experiences.
- 20

The military has long been associated with increased sexual violence and prostitution (e.g. Enloe, 1993). Yea (2004), for example, writes of the negative effects of US military bases in the Philippines and the trafficking/migration of Filipino young women to work as entertainers in US military clubs in South Korea.
- 21

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/lee-waldorf/making-human-rights-for-women-reality>.
- 22

The first such station was created back in 1985 in São Paolo, Brazil, as women complained about being unable to report abuse in police stations because of the disbelief and the lack of respect they confronted. Since then, such police stations have been created in Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Peru, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela.
- 23

<http://webapps01.un.org/vawdatabase/searchDetail.action?measureId=15467&baseHREF=>.

## Restricted civil liberties



# Restricted civil liberties

## 1. Gender, restriction of civil liberties and poverty dynamics

### Definition and indicators

The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) Civil Liberties Sub-Index captures women’s freedom of social participation and consists of two variables: freedom of movement and freedom of dress. The first variable measures *freedom of women to move outside the home*, giving consideration to freedom to travel, freedom to join a club or association, freedom to do grocery and other shopping without a male guardian and freedom to see one’s family and friends. The second variable measures *the extent to which women are obliged to follow a certain dress code in public*, for example being obliged to cover their face or body when leaving the house.<sup>1</sup>

The sub-index includes data for 123 countries, 30 of which show moderate or high inequalities. Most countries with mild to moderate discrimination are in sub-Saharan Africa. Countries with high discrimination are primarily in the Middle East and North Africa and South or Central Asia, but also include countries from sub-Saharan Africa and Muslim countries in East Asia (Indonesia and Malaysia). The five worst performers are Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen. SIGI analysts tie high restrictions on the sub-indicators of women’s mobility and dress to deeply rooted traditions and customs, as well as gendered economic roles often interacting with conservative interpretations of religion – particularly Islam, as manifested in Sharia law, for example (Branisa *et al.*, 2009; Jutting and Morrisson, 2005; Morrisson and Jutting, 2004).

In this chapter, taking a somewhat broader view of civil liberties, and focusing more particularly on girls and younger

women, we expand and redefine the parameters of analysis to include three distinct but interrelated dimensions: 1) the degree to which girls’ rights to a separate identity are established through birth registration which, we argue, sets the foundation for other civil rights and liberties; 2) particular restrictions on mobility outside the home that girls and young women may face. We do not consider dress codes, rather, we focus on gendered ideologies of ‘public’/‘private’ spaces; and 3) restrictions on the ability of girls and young women to participate in decision making on issues of concern to them, including through freedom of association and participation in civic affairs. We attempt to identify explicit linkages between patterns of gender discrimination in civil rights and liberties, as so defined, and particular poverty dynamics. Promising initiatives to overcome gendered barriers to civil liberties are examined, along with ongoing challenges in this domain. A number of policy implications are highlighted as a means of advancing reflection on the way forward.

### Civil liberties and safeguards against gender discrimination in international law

Civil liberties, in the broadest definition, are considered to be among the most fundamental individual rights, such as freedom of speech, opinion, movement and assembly, as well as the right to information, to be protected by law against unwarranted governmental or other interference. Key sources of civil and political rights safeguarding civil liberties in international law include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), which together make up the International Bill of Human Rights. Particular safeguards for the civil and political rights of women and children include: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979), which guarantees women the right to liberty and the security of personal human rights as well as fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field;<sup>2</sup> and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989), which

Birth registration, as a fundamental human right, represents a state’s official recognition of a child’s existence, without which a child is essentially invisible.

includes non-discrimination as a key guiding principle, thus encompassing gender discrimination, and entails a number of articles specifically guaranteeing children’s right to participation, to organisation and peaceful assembly, to information and to freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion (Articles 12–17; 31).<sup>3</sup> Article 31 on the right to play and Article 23.1 on the rights of children with disabilities strengthen and broaden the domains of participation that must be made available for all children. (Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities also strengthens the right of children with disabilities to participate in their society.) The UNCRC also provides for the right to immediate registration after birth, with a right to a name, nationality and identity (Articles 7 and 8). The importance of birth registration is also recognised in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 24) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990).

2. Dimensions of restricted civil rights and liberties: Statistics and lived realities

Gender barriers in birth registration: Causes and consequences

Birth registration, as a fundamental human right, has been termed the ‘first right’ of the child. It establishes the right to a name, nationality and family relations. It represents a state’s official recognition of a child’s existence, without which a child is essentially invisible. As such, it is a passport to citizenship and participation in society, as well as the foundation for the realisation of other rights and entitlements. Without birth registration, children’s access to basic social services, such as education and health care, may be at risk: a number of countries require birth certificates for entry into formal schooling as well as for public health care. Its importance continues through the lifecycle, for activities ranging from employment and marriage to obtaining a passport, voting, opening a bank account and accessing credit. Moreover, registration provides a measure

Box 1: Links between birth registration and child well-being

Registration can play a part in connecting children to services. A multivariate analysis of household survey data from 63 developing countries reveals a number of correlations between health, nutrition and birth registration. In Burundi, Myanmar, Niger and Trinidad and Tobago, children with the lowest birth registration had also received no vaccinations; in Northern Sudan, 72 percent of registered children versus just 50 percent of unregistered children had access to appropriate medical care; in Myanmar and Zimbabwe, well-nourished children were more likely to be registered (43 percent) than malnourished children (32 percent) (UNICEF, 2005b).

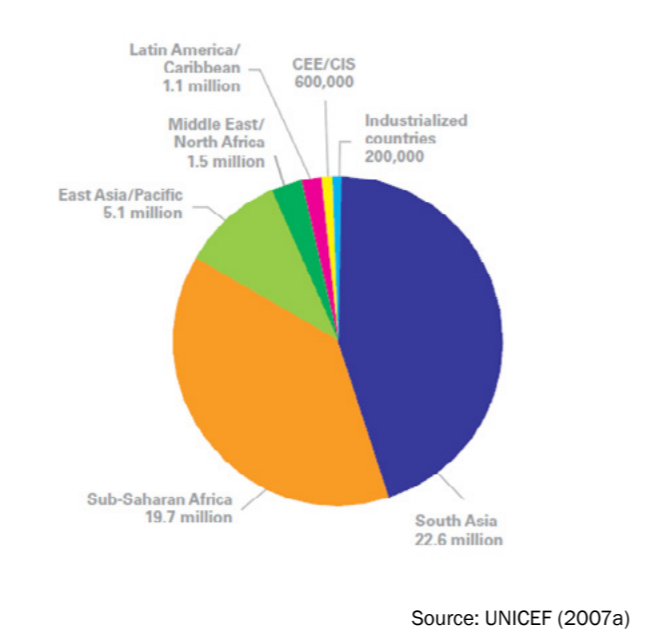
of protection against violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation and discrimination, such as, for example, engagement in exploitative child labour, recruitment into armed forces, child marriage and child trafficking. It also helps safeguard a child’s rights to inherit property and land. Lack of universal birth registration as an element of overall civil registration systems hampers a government’s ability to plan and allocate budgets according to viable statistics (UNICEF, 2005b; 2007b).

Education rights are equally in jeopardy: in Cameroon, a birth certificate is a prerequisite for school enrolment, whereas in Nepal unregistered children can be allowed to attend with the permission of the school principal but are not eligible for free school materials and scholarships. In Ghana, some farmers exploit the lack of birth certificates to hire minors as cheap labourers in the cocoa industry (Cody, 2009).

So, too, lack of birth certificates favours child trafficking, with prosecution not easy without proof of a child’s identity and age. Girls face particular risks of trafficking for sexual exploitation, particularly in regions of low birth registration, such as in north Thailand in the Mekong sub-region (UNICEF, 2002a). Without birth certificates, police may be unwilling to intervene: in a number of cases of Bangladeshi and Nepalese girls rescued from Indian brothels, repatriation was delayed for months or even years pending identification processes; in the Philippines, 50 percent of child abuse cases, mainly of child sexual abuse, prostitution and child labour, do not reach courts because birth certificates are not available (Cody, 2009). In Pakistan after the 2005 earthquake, apart from increased vulnerability to trafficking, which also occurred after the

Figure 1: Births not registered

Around 51 million children born in 2006 have not been registered  
Number of annual births not registered, by region (2006)



© Giacomo Pirozzi / Panos Pictures (2007)  
Niger, Agadez. Zeinabou Obono, who has six children, registers the births of her three-year-old son and her newborn baby at a birth registration session in the Toudou Quarter.

Asian tsunami, girls without a birth certificate could not exercise their right to inheritance (ibid). This is also the case with children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, who do not have the necessary documentation to qualify for financial assistance such as small grants or other support, or even to inherit their dead parents’ land or other property.

Lack of birth registration thus has clear linkages to the persistence of intergenerational poverty trajectories, with intertwining causes and consequences. For women and girls, repercussions may be especially severe, building on and magnifying other pervasive patterns of gender discrimination and vulnerability.

As a result of concerted efforts on the part of national governments, international partners and civil society, the global proportion of children with birth certificates has risen in recent years. Nevertheless, birth registration is by far not universal, and many challenges remain. According to the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2007a), one out of three countries in the developing world has birth registration rates of less than 50 percent. Around 51 million children born in 2006 were not registered at birth; 44 percent of them live in South Asia, which is the region with the largest overall number of births and the largest number of unregistered children (22.6 million) (see Figure 1). Sub-Saharan Africa, with two out of three children

under five not registered at birth, is the region with the highest percentage of unregistered children under five and, in some countries in the region, registration levels declined between 2000 and 2005 (UNICEF, 2005b; 2007a).

A number of barriers persist in efforts to promote universal birth registration. These include: lack of political will; administrative weaknesses; legislative gaps and hurdles; economic burdens putting registration out of reach of the poorest households; geographic barriers impeding access to services of all sorts; political instability and conflict; and neglect of cultural and community realities (UNICEF, 2002b).

Gender barriers figure within this last category of difficulty, and are linked to both values and practices. In a number of countries, birth registration as a whole suffers as a result of a gender bias that excludes women as actors from the process (UNICEF, 2002a). This has been found to be the case, for example, in India, where registration is far more likely to be delayed if the father is absent (Plan International, 1999; Serrao and Sujatha, 2004), as well as Nepal, where laws requiring registration by the most senior male household member can effectively disempower mothers and shut out single women (Team Consult, 2000, in UNICEF, 2002a). In Lesotho, a patrilineal society, single women are sometimes urged to register their children with the name of their own

**Box 2: Gender, ethnicity and birth registration in Thailand**

Many hill tribe girls and women in Thailand do not have Thai citizenship: their children are also stateless. Parents without documents cannot register the birth of their child and unregistered children in turn cannot enrol in school. Thai citizenship is a prerequisite for access to health care; employment opportunities are also limited for non-citizens. Young girls and women are often forced to leave their villages and migrate in search of jobs, with vulnerability to exploitation and abuse by traffickers, employers and the police intensified by their lack of official papers. Many experience abuse by employers as ‘they are hill tribe people, and employers think they can do whatever they want to them.’ Some end up in shelters that have been established to offer support and guidance. ‘There is an Akha (hill tribe) girl here who was in school until the 9th grade, but she can’t continue because she has no papers. She went to beauty school at night [while living in the shelter] and does all the girls’ hair here. She wants to open her own salon, she has a lot of skills. ’ In spite of initiatives taken, many such girls become trapped in poverty, with limited opportunities to improve their lives.

Source: Physicians for Human Rights (2004)

father (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1998, in UNICEF, 2002a). In many cases, the registration problems facing a single mother can be insurmountable. In Ecuador, for example, the mother may have to negotiate with the child’s father to persuade him to acknowledge his child (Campaña Nacional de Inscripciones Tardías, n.d, in UNICEF, 2002a). In Peru, officials may refuse to handle a registration unless the child’s father is present (UNICEF Peru, in UNICEF, 2002a).

Particular problems may arise for children whose parents are of different nationalities, particularly when the mothers are married to foreign nationals who are not citizens in countries where patriarchal national laws grant citizenship according to the father’s nationality only, such as Bangladesh, Egypt, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (Dow, 1998, in UNICEF, 2002a).

Gender discrimination leading to disparities in education for girls also has a significant effect on birth registration, with both ‘upstream’ and ‘downstream’ implications. Women with little or no education are less likely to register their children at birth. In both Tanzania and Chad, for example, children of mothers who have had some level of secondary education or more were significantly more likely to be registered than those of mothers without education (49 percent versus 2.7 percent in Tanzania; 50 percent versus 20 percent in Chad) (UNICEF, 2002a). Equally importantly, in countries where attending school is also a mechanism for registration, girls may miss out on both of these valuable opportunities (ibid).

Birth registration rates for boys and girls do not in themselves show clear-cut patterns of gender disparity: a multi-

**Box 3: Closing vistas for adolescent girls**

The exact start and end of adolescence are arbitrary, but adolescence is the time when puberty brings about physical changes, gender role definition is intensifying and girls move from childhood to adult roles as wife, mother, worker and citizen. During this period, health and social behaviours are established that have a lifetime of consequences. Puberty triggers a marked divergence in gender-based trajectories, usually resulting in greater possibilities for boys and greater limitations for girls. The stronger emphasis on gender roles at the onset of adolescence often underscores the distinct cultural disadvantages that girls face, particularly with regard to opportunity, individual choice and the freedom to err. On the whole, adolescent girls in developing countries spend less time in school than boys, perform a disproportionate share of domestic work, have less mobility outside the home and fewer acceptable public spaces for leisure activity and claim fewer friends, mentors and social outlets.

Source: Levine *et al.* (2009)

**Birth registration suffers as a result of a gender bias that excludes women as actors from the process.**

- UNICEF (2002a)

country analysis (UNICEF, 2005b) found gender parity in birth registration in around two-thirds (65 percent) of the countries studied. Gender disparities that do exist favour boys in some cases (in Cameroon, 80 percent of boys are registered compared with 77 percent of girls) and girls in others (in Brazil, 93 percent of girls compared with 91 percent of boys are registered). UNICEF concludes that gender is a less significant variable than others (for example household wealth, residence and mother’s education), and that existing gender disparities will be considerably reduced when overall birth registration levels in a country rise above 50 percent. Nevertheless, particular action may be needed in a number of countries where significant gender disparities in birth registration persist – rendering girls particularly vulnerable – including the following: Afghanistan: male/female ratio 1.21; Equatorial Guinea: 1.16; the Gambia: 1.12; Guinea-Bissau: 1.05; Maldives: 1.11; Mauritania: 1.07; Niger: 1.07; Sierra Leone: 1.05; and Tanzania: 1.39. In some instances, gender may intertwine with other categories of exclusion to negatively impact on girls (see Box 2).

**Restricted mobility for adolescent girls and women**

In many cultures and societies, the mobility of girls as they reach puberty and beyond is increasingly restricted – sometimes for reasons of safety and security but also as a result of gender

**Box 4: Gender differences in mobility – country examples**

In Allahabad, India, 93 percent of boys compared with 22 percent of girls reported being able to travel unaccompanied to visit a relative (Sebastian *et al.*, 2004).

In the urban slums of Nairobi, two-thirds of boys, compared with only one-third of girls, reported having a safe place to meet same sex friends (Erulkar and Chong, 2005).

Data collected for the Harvard Adolescence Project showed that, in Morocco, increasing gender differentiation during adolescence included closer monitoring and restriction of girls’ activities to the home, where they were expected to take on greater responsibilities (Davis and Davis, 1989, in Mensch *et al.*, 2000).

Ethnographic work in Egypt suggests similar patterns (Hoodfar, 1997). In contrast with Egyptian boys, who find expanding areas of action, Egyptian girls in adolescence have traditionally experienced an abrupt end to the relative freedom and mobility they enjoyed in childhood. Around the time of puberty, girls are expected to display increasing modesty and to withdraw from some public spaces to which they had access as children (Ibrahim and Wassef, 2000, in Mensch *et al.*, 2000). In rural Upper Egypt, the only non-familial social outlet for girls is school (Brady *et al.*, 2007).

ideologies of family honour linked to control over females and social definitions of ‘public’ and ‘private’ domains. Restrictions of girls to the home, where they are responsible for a variety of household chores, are linked to their socialisation into socially prescribed gender norms and preparation for their future role as wives. This in turn is a contributing factor to early withdrawal of girls from schooling, and – particularly – post-primary education, depriving them in this way of the well-documented advantages and empowerment accruing from education at this level. Socially isolated, confined to the family, household and gender-sanctioned spaces and engaged in childbearing activities at an early age, it is often difficult, if not impossible, for many girls and young women to participate in wider social networks, skills training opportunities, civic activities or political affairs related to the governance and social development of their communities.

This same restricted mobility often contributes to a spatial disadvantage for adolescent girls and young women, who may be denied access to many public spaces where resources are found and/or key political and economic development processes occur, including governance and paid employment.<sup>4</sup> In the most extreme cases of purdah and other forms of female exclusion from the public domain, women become almost totally dependent on male family members for access to external resources and stimuli. Although much has been written about the different forms of female autonomy and power that can be and are created within the private realm of family and household, gendered patterns of restricted mobility can help perpetuate gender disparities in access to social and economic resources and contribute to processes of disempowerment of women.

Hallman and Roca (2007) point out that restrictions on mobility are closely related to girls’ exclusion from social, political and economic life (thus from participation) and as such are part of the processes that perpetuate disparities in education, health and economic development and exacerbate

poverty. Although girls face restrictions early in life, their transition to adulthood entails greater restrictions and barriers. Girls may enter adolescence earlier and mature faster than boys, but their entrance into adulthood is often a retreat into the domestic sphere, as they take on more family roles and their mobility, public participation and economic, social and political rights are increasingly restricted (Lloyd, 2005).

The increasing physical limitations encountered by girls as they enter puberty have been documented in a number of studies, which contrast this with the growing independence and mobility often experienced by adolescent boys (see Box 4).

For many girls, marriage is the only socially acceptable avenue for exiting a poor and overly protective natal home, and many girls eagerly anticipate marriage with the view that it will expand their social horizons (Brady *et al.*, 2007; Colom *et al.*, 2004). This expectation frequently does not materialise, however. Population Council research (in Hallman and Roca, 2007) shows that married girls have more limited peer networks, less social mobility and freedom, more limited access to media and other sources of information and lower educational attainment than their unmarried age mates.<sup>5</sup> Compared with women who marry later, married adolescents (often with much older spouses) have less freedom of movement, less autonomy and decision making in household and reproductive decisions and, in some settings, increased risk of gender-based violence, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV infection.<sup>6</sup>

Girls and women in many societies are often, in effect, considered social minors, passing from the authority of father (and brothers) within their natal home to the authority of the husband (and in-laws) on marriage – each of which may impose restrictions on movement as one element of control. Young married adolescents may be in a particularly weak position, as they often have much older husbands, who may consider it their prerogative to make all household decisions and control the movements of family members. In an analysis

## Box 5: Extreme cases of restricted mobility and autonomy for women and girls

The Pushtun-dominated Taliban imposed strict gender segregation and exercised tight control over the bodies and lives of women and girls in Afghanistan. Under Taliban rule (1996 to 2001), girls and women experienced movement restrictions, arbitrary detention and physical abuse, and were denied their right to work and to education. They were not allowed to exit their house without a close male relative as their guardian (mahram), even when visiting a hospital for health issues or childbirth, and had to completely cover their face and body using the burqa or chadori. The oppression was more intense in urban areas, where in the pre-Taliban period women had enjoyed freedom of movement and participation. The vast majority of girls over eight did not receive any education, especially in urban areas: although some secret schools remained in operation, the UN estimated that only 3 percent of girls had some education during the Taliban regime (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Progress for women and girls in Afghanistan remains uncertain under the Karzai regime, which has not upheld principles of equality before the law. A 2009 law imposed restrictions on Shia women, such as the requirement to seek the husband's permission to leave the house apart from for unspecified 'reasonable legal reasons,' and affirmed the husband's right to cease maintenance to his wife if she does not meet her marital duties, including sexual ones. Adolescent girls' education in particular remains precarious, for a variety of reasons, including lack of schools, traditional restrictions on girls' movements, violence and insecurity and early marriage (only 11 percent of secondary school-age girls are enrolled in lower secondary school and 4 percent in higher secondary school). Both girls and women can be and are regularly harassed or attacked outside the home if they are not accompanied by their male guardian; insurgents, conservative religious factions or even family members can threaten women if they believe that her attitude, such as visibility in public spaces or participation in public roles, challenges traditional gender roles and brings shame upon her family (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

of household data on the impact of early marriage on the lives of young women, women whose husbands had the final say over their visiting the paternal family were more likely to have been married early in seven out of eight countries (UNICEF, 2005a).

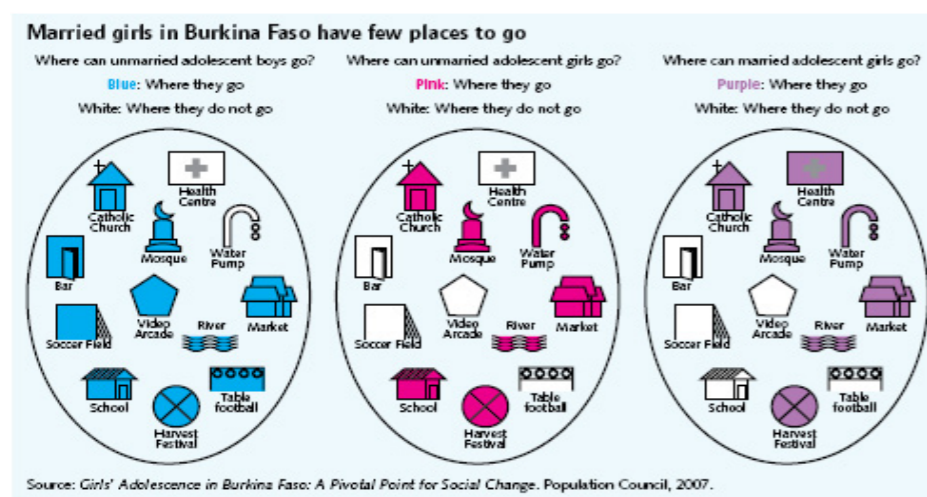
Further analysis indicates particularly high proportions of women in sub-Saharan Africa reporting that their husbands retained sole decision-making power over their ability to visit friends and relatives: this was the case, for example, in over 50 percent of the households in Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria (UNICEF, 2006, see Annex 5). Household decisions regarding women's mobility directly affect their ability to provide for

their own needs as well as the needs of their children and, in effect, represent a socially prescribed restriction of public space available to women (see Figure 2 for a graphic depiction).

The gendered division of labour, whereby women and girls are responsible for the bulk of work in the home, coupled with early childbearing, can significantly hamper women's movements. So too, patriarchal cultural traditions, social values linked to complexes of 'honour and shame' and particular religious interpretations often intertwine to accentuate tendencies towards restricted mobility and the seclusion of adolescent girls and women. Extreme examples include the cases of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, where state structures uphold cultural restrictions on women through law and punitive enforcement measures (see Box 5). Together with Sudan, these two countries are rated as 'worst performers' on the SIGI freedom of mobility variable of the Civil Liberties Sub-Index.

Saudi Arabia imposes some of the strongest restrictions in the world on the movement of women and girls. Every Saudi girl and woman is required to have a male guardian – usually the father or husband – who is responsible for making decisions on her behalf, including decisions concerning children. This

Figure 2: Constricting circles for married girls



Source: Population Council (2007, in Plan International, 2009)

## Box 6: Mobility and gender-based violence in conflict settings

'In times of crisis brought on by war, forced displacement, or natural disasters, incidents of gender-based violence tend to increase due to social upheaval and mobility, disruption of traditional social protections, changes in gender roles, and widespread vulnerabilities. Conflict situations greatly increase the mobility of populations. Often women and children are forced to flee without male family members, resulting in increased vulnerability to gender-based violence as they are isolated and without traditional protections. During conflict, women frequently lack the traditional protection of their families and spouses, and often face the additional threat of armed soldiers who regard them as spoils of war. Even when abuses are not aimed at them individually, women suffer violations of their human rights disproportionately when normal codes of social conduct are ignored in times of crisis. During conflict or other emergencies, women may also be forced to assume traditional male roles, such as taking responsibility for the household because men are engaged in fighting or have been killed. Certain responsibilities may put them at greater risk of harm; for example, in the course of collecting firewood, water or food, they must venture away from protected areas. They may have to walk near military encampments and checkpoints in order to collect resources, exposing them to harassment and possible sexual assaults. Vulnerability increases when individuals become refugees, internally displaced, and are forced to live in camp settings. The vulnerability of women and children in these settings is particularly acute, as they comprise 80 percent of refugee and displaced populations worldwide.'

Source: Benjamin and Murchison (2006); see also Ward and March (2006) on the intensified dangers to girls and women needing to seek subsistence outside of refugee or internally displaced person (IDP) camps

practice is justified by an ambiguous verse in the Quran which, according to some scholars, has been misinterpreted by the religious establishment: Sura 4 Verse 34 of the Quran states that 'men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more [strength] than the other, and because they support them from their means.' Apart from male guardianship, the Saudi government imposes strict gender segregation, with negative consequences for women's civil liberties. Girls' access to education often depends on the goodwill of their male guardians, whose permission is needed for enrolment; women's economic participation is extremely low and again dependent on male permission; some hospitals require a guardian's permission for women to be admitted (even for labour) or to administer a medical procedure on her or her children. The imposition of male guardianship on women makes it nearly impossible for victims of domestic violence to independently seek protection or to obtain legal redress, and lack of full legal capacity affects divorcees and widows. Women cannot travel with their children without written permission from the children's father and, in cases of air travel in particular, need their male guardian's written permission to travel alone, with details required on the number of trips and days permitted. Saudi Arabia is also the only country in the world that prohibits women from driving: combined with limited accessible public transport, Saudi women are effectively prevented from leaving their homes and participating in public activities (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

Societal concerns for the security of daughters are not always unfounded: girls do face grave problems of insecurity or threats of violence linked to mobility, particularly in societies where crime and/or gender-based violence may be prevalent. Unconstrained mobility in South Africa, where violence of all sorts is well documented, is identified as 'the route to disaster

for girls,' who are considered under threat of attack, robbery or rape while walking on the streets or riding in vehicles, or in encounters with 'sugar daddies' ready to offer money for sex (Dunkle *et al.*, 2007, in Porter *et al.*, 2010). In Ngangalizwe, South Africa, Cecilia, 12 years old, sometimes travels into town by minibus taxi with her mother or a friend, but is nervous about travelling alone:

'I don't like travelling alone when I am sent to town to buy things for the house [...] The thing I fear about travelling on a minibus taxi is that the drivers propose love to us [...] I am scared that they might kidnap me or rape me if I am alone in the taxi [...] The taxi conductors are very rude. Just because we are girls they talk trash and vulgar language to us. They don't have respect' (in Porter *et al.*, 2010).

Conflict zones may also be marked by intensified gender-based violence, with both causes and consequences linked to issues of mobility (see Box 6) (see also Chapter 4 on Physical Insecurity).

One particularly negative manifestation of the restricted mobility of girls and women is its contribution to lower rates of schooling for girls, particularly at post-primary level. Parental concerns for adolescent girls' safety and 'honour' in and on the way to school are often heightened by the lack of a sufficient number of schools at this level, resulting in greater distances to travel or the necessity of boarding. Persistent practices of early marriage combine with restrictions on married girls' mobility to further diminish adolescent girls' chances of continuing education. A number of studies in South Asia highlight the various cultural beliefs and systems that shape parents' attitudes towards their daughters' schooling, including patterns of female seclusion and restricted mobility (Herz, 2006; Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2008). This in turn has a clear influence on poverty dynamics, given that both the social and economic returns to girls' schooling at secondary level are particularly high.

Even when girls may be able to take advantage of educational opportunities, restrictions on mobility may limit their ability to seek out and take on available paid employment. This has been seen to be the case, for example, in Egypt, where women’s rising levels of education, in contrast with men’s, have not been accompanied by rising levels of employment, with one explanation suggesting a linkage to restricted job mobility and travel options (Ragui and Arntz, 2005, in World Bank, 2006). Conversely, where young women are more mobile, they are more able to engage in and benefit from the potentially empowering effects of paid employment.

Limitations on mobility can also have health consequences for women and girls who may not be able to access available services. In Pakistan, for example, where just 18 percent of women report that they have ever travelled alone, unaccompanied by others, and 28 percent indicate that they could travel alone to a health centre should the need arise,

**Box 7: Social isolation and exclusion**

‘Hundreds of millions of girls in poor communities in the developing world, with especially high concentrations in Sub-Saharan Africa, are socially isolated from their peers, lack access to mentors, safe and supportive spaces, schooling opportunities, livelihoods skills or prospects for decent work. They are at significant risk of gross violations of their human rights (child marriage, female genital mutilation, exploitative work), forced sexual relations, poverty-driven exchanges of sex for gifts or money, excluded from meaningful civic participation, and unable to realize their human potential.’

Source: Bruce (2007)

restrictions on mobility hinder their access to and use of reproductive health services (Mumtaz and Salway, 2005). So, too, for girls and women living in rural areas of West and Southern Africa that are characterised by limited access to services and markets owing to the poor quality of roads and inadequate transport. Here, the impact of immobility is severe in terms of access to education, health services and markets. Restricted mobility affects girls’ school-going opportunities, women’s access to maternal health services and livelihood possibilities for both women and girls for off-farm income through access to markets, recognised as a protective factor against ‘deep poverty.’ Such restrictions on mobility are therefore seen to contribute to the persistence of intergenerational cycles of poverty (Porter, 2007; Porter *et al.*, 2010).

Gender disparities in participation and voice

The civil liberties that are the hallmark of true citizenship are often denied to adolescent girls, who have limited opportunities to participate in discussions and decision making within their families and wider communities. Adolescent girls and young women have extremely limited voice in family matters – whether as daughters – subject in most cases to patriarchal authority structures, often compounded by patterns of son preference, whereby brothers may dominate – or as young wives who fall under the authority of husbands and in-laws. As with mobility, for young girls, being married to a much older man or inserted into virilocal residence patterns where older in-laws wield power is particularly silencing in terms of voice and agency. This can lead to a particular gender-based experience of the poverty trap of limited citizenship in their own societies, characterised by limited opportunities

to participate in associative groups, leisure activities, educational programmes and/or extra-curricular activities and both political and economic development processes.<sup>7</sup>

Social norms, values, customs and ideologies may conspire with poverty and its attendant dearth of opportunity to deprive women and girls of their rights to participation. These include gender distinctions that define ‘public’ and ‘private’ spaces and constrict spheres of action (as seen above); a division of labour that often burdens girls and



© Dieter Telemans/ Panos Pictures (2002)  
India, Bombay / Mumbai. A girl sleeps outside the house where she is employed as a maid.

young women with sole responsibility for household labour, thereby limiting the time and energy available to engage in outside activities; ideologies, both cultural and religious, that may attribute lesser importance to the individual or collective opinions and capabilities of women and girls; and authoritarian family, community and wider political structures that limit voice and participation according to gender, age, social class and other hierarchies, among others. Limited access to information, coupled with low levels of literacy and education, also inhibits the ability of girls and women to participate in society. The result may be that women and girls exercise little control over key issues of concern to them (see Figure 3).

Girls face multiple forms of discrimination in which gender combines with other factors to limit their ability to make their voices heard and exercise their rights to participation in society. Bruce (2007) identifies four categories of girls who may encounter particular barriers to participation owing to extreme social isolation: those living outside family structures, including especially girl migrants to urban areas who often work as domestic servants in the households of others; poor girls who are on their own or have to support their families, including orphans; girls at risk of child marriage; and girls already married. Hallman and Roca (2007) add another category: girls belonging to minority groups who may be clothed in a double cloak of invisibility, woven of intertwining strands of gender and ethnicity that combine to inhibit

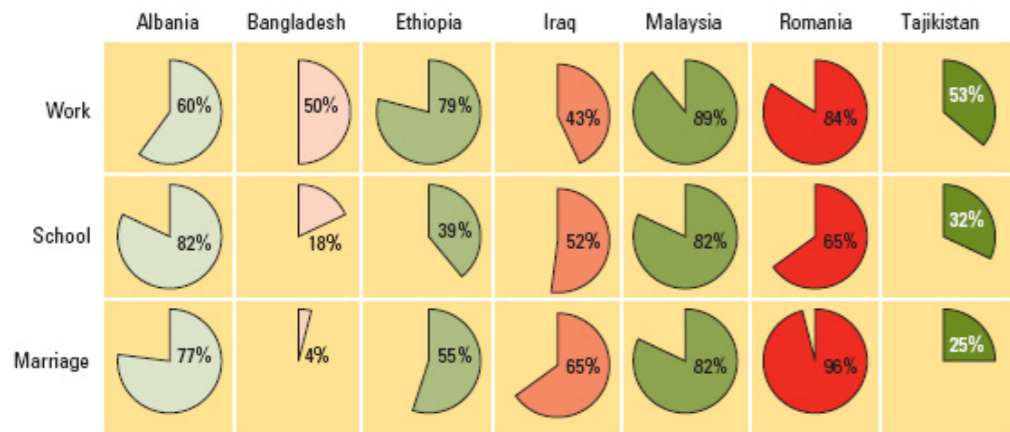
Box 8: Categories of exclusion

In urban Ethiopia, girl migrants working as domestic servants lack family, friends and any supportive mechanism to protect them, while experiencing increased risk of sexual abuse by their employers owing to their dependence on them for shelter and food, their isolation within the domestic sphere and their invisibility. Their request to participate in a programme offering them basic literacy and numeracy skills, health information and friends was not favoured by their employers, who often did not want to let girls out of the house (Erulkar, *et al.*, 2010).

participation in public processes. Box 8 provides examples of such categories of exclusion that may combine with and amplify gender-based exclusion and isolation. (See also Theis, 2004.)

In Guatemala, girls are less likely than boys to engage in social activities as well as schooling. Minorities make up three-quarters of out-of-school girls: school enrolment rates are 75 percent for non-indigenous children and 71 percent for indigenous boys but only 54 percent for indigenous girls, dropping to 43 percent for extremely poor indigenous girls (data from 2000, included in a study by Hallman *et al.*, in Hallman and Roca, 2007).

Figure 3: Young women and girls with little say in life decisions



Note: The figure shows the percentage of people ages 15-24 who answered ‘myself’ (rather than parents, government, or other) to the question: ‘Thinking of [each transition: your current or most recent occupation, your years of schooling, and your marriage partner], who has the most influence?’

Source: World Bank (2006).

Data from studies by the Population Council (Hallman and Roca, 2007) reveal that poor girls in particular tend to feel threatened and insecure: they are often socially isolated, lacking friends and networks of support, and do not engage in any social or recreational activities. In the urban slums of Nairobi, for example, only a third of girls report having a safe space to meet same sex friends (compared with two-thirds of boys); in Addis Ababa, girls reported having an average of 2.7 friends compared with the average 4.7 of boys; in South Africa, girls reported feeling insecure in their neighbourhood, experiencing harassment and lacking sources to support them in case of need; in rural Upper Egypt, with many girls out of school, there is no socially acceptable space to meet with others outside the family household.

Social isolation may be experienced differently in different settings. In Nepal, for example, where female adolescents have far less opportunity for social interaction than boys, the situation seems particularly acute in urban areas, where 20 percent of girls spend no social time with their peers at all: urban girls who are not in school or not working have few legitimate social outlets (Malhotra *et al.*, 2000, in Levine *et al.*, 2009).

The lack of opportunity for girls to participate in social activities not only is a denial of rights but also entails serious dangers for well-being in terms of physical health and emotional development, as well as educational opportunities and improved job prospects. Overloaded with domestic tasks, lacking access to schooling and essential information about themselves and their bodies, with limited chances of having friends with whom to voice concerns and from whom they can receive support, girls often lack basic life skills and the confidence needed to make choices and decisions for themselves and later for their children (e.g. Bruce, 2007). In KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, for example, where three times as many women as men aged 15 to 24 are infected with HIV, girls who were socially isolated tended to be more at risk of experiencing non-consensual sex (Hallman and Diers, 2005, in Levine *et al.*, 2009).

Constraints on girls’ participation in decision making and social activities outside of the household may in turn set the pattern for limitations on women’s later ability to participate in the economic and political life of their community, as capabilities in these domains need to be built on strong foundations over the lifecycle.

3. Promising programme and policy initiatives

Linking birth registration and gender equality

Advances have been made in strengthening and expanding national birth registration systems, a number of them addressing specific gender barriers to registration. Legal reform, for example, has included the elimination of discriminatory practices that do not allow women to register their children without the presence or the approval of the child’s father. In Nepal, a landmark Supreme Court ruling of 2005 declared that, in the absence of the father or in cases of uncertain paternity, a child’s birth must be registered based on the mother’s citizenship, including children born to women engaged in prostitution (Cody, 2009). Peru amended its legislation in 2007 to ensure the right of children born out of wedlock to be registered under the father’s name. Morocco adopted a new Law on Civil Registration in 2008. Thailand reformed the Nationality Act in 2008 to ensure that all births are officially registered regardless of the parents’ legal status (UNICEF, 2009). Other strategies to strengthen birth registration in general include: increasing budget allocations; coordinating actions between central authorities and local structures; integration of birth registration into existing structures and services such as health and education; involving the widest possible array of stakeholders; and awareness raising around the issue.

One successful approach in India has promoted birth registration as an effective strategy to protect girls’ rights. The Kopal Project, supported by Plan International, has operated since 2004 in selected districts of four Indian states with

Box 9: Birth registration and cash transfers – examples from India and Bolivia

In India, a number of different programmes have been designed specifically to raise the status of girls in society and promote their rights, starting from the right to an identity through birth registration. In the Ladli scheme, for example, the government of New Delhi makes parents’ possession of a birth certificate for their daughters a prerequisite for regular cash transfers into accounts established for each girl (10,000 rupees on her birth and 5,000 rupees at different stages throughout her education, dependent on her family’s income).

In Bolivia, the Bono Juancito Pinto scheme was initiated in 2006 to provide financial incentives to parents or guardians to enrol and maintain their children in school: as in the example above, possession of a birth certificate is required for participation.

Source: Cody (2009)

Box 10: Safe spaces and schools for girls and women in Nepal, Pakistan and Yemen

With support from Save the Children UK, a core group of 18 girls in Surkhet, Nepal, met regularly to gather information about safe and unsafe spaces in the locality. They then met with community members and authorities to raise awareness and call for changed attitudes, in order to transform unsafe spaces into safe ones, to improve girls’ mobility and to expand access to public services and opportunities. The group has developed strong networks with local authorities, police and teachers’ and women’s groups, all of which now recognise the group as an important agent for change. The initiative has led to behavioural change among teachers, boys, parents and community members. Meanwhile, the girls have become more confident, articulate and able to negotiate for change.

Pakistan’s Northwest Frontier province is a conservative tribal area, where gender disparities in literacy are striking: 59 percent for men and 21 percent for women. The dearth of qualified women to fill teaching posts in rural areas contributes to parents keeping their daughters out of school. UNICEF’s Mobility Support Scheme, in partnership with local authorities, teachers and parents, hired local vehicles and trusted drivers to take women teachers to and from their schools. The scheme has been a resounding success: 300 female teachers initially benefited and some 150 new teachers have been appointed in three districts. In Upper Dir district, an 85 percent drop in absenteeism has been recorded. In Hangu district, 21 primary schools have been reopened and girls’ enrolment has increased from 800 to 14,000.

Recent studies show that lack of accessibility and socio-cultural factors are among the main causes of low enrolment and high dropout rates for girls in Yemen. A scheme has been launched to facilitate the recruitment of female teachers in rural areas and to expand the educational infrastructure, thus eliminating the need to travel long distances to school. Girls’ participation in school can be enhanced by acknowledging socio-cultural realities, including gender segregation and restrictions on mobility, and by bringing schools closer to girls, both physically and culturally.

Source: Alim *et al.* (2007); Bhandari *et al.* (2005); Mujahid-Mukhtar (2008)

Box 11: Changing lives/changing perspectives

In rural Upper Egypt, where female education is discouraged and adolescent girls’ mobility and participation are severely restricted, the Ishraq (‘Enlightenment’) programme was launched in 2001 to provide safe spaces for educational, health and social opportunities. Initially targeting 278 girls aged 13 to 15 years in four rural communities in one of Egypt’s poorest regions, the programme offered literacy and numeracy training, health knowledge, life skills and, for the first time in Egypt, sport activities for girls. Local young women who had graduated from secondary school were employed and trained as teachers and mentors of the girls. Boys and especially the brothers of the participants were also involved in discussions on gender roles. An evaluation indicated wide-ranging results: girls made progress in their studies and gained self-esteem. By engaging in sports, they also gained team-building, cooperation and leadership skills while laying the foundations for a healthy lifestyle. This involvement in sports challenged traditional gender norms and local perceptions, making girls more publicly visible and leading to changes in ‘how the girls are seen in the community and how they see themselves.’ Programme successes have led to its expansion to 30 villages, involving 1,800 girls.

Source: Brady *et al.* (2007)

low birth registration rates, coupled with distorted female/male sex ratios resulting from practices of female foeticide. An evaluation in 2008 demonstrated that the project had been effective in both increasing birth registration rates and improving the sex ratio, particularly through the creation of a broad coalition of partners, including youth volunteers, actively working to raise awareness of the issues and implement activities. The project’s success has been such that it has been replicated in four more districts by UNICEF (Cody, 2009; Das and Silvestrini, 2008). Another innovative approach to gender barriers involves linking birth registration with cash transfers for girls (Box 9).

**Enhancing mobility and creating space for participation**

The importance of creating ‘safe spaces’ for adolescent girls to congregate has gained power in recent years as a strategy designed to overcome community fears about girls’ participation in public spaces and the subsequent restrictions on mobility that this entails: ‘For young women making the transition to adulthood, the existence of safe social spaces in which girls can interact with their female peers serves as a critical site for the development of self-esteem and identity, building the foundations for future community engagement’ (Lloyd *et al.*, 2005). Specially designed centres have been built

Box 12: Mobilising girls through sport

The Mathare Youth Sports Association in Kenya began as a sports league for boys but evolved to integrate girls after programme managers and team members saw women athletes during a trip to Norway in 1992. Parents’ initial reluctance to allow their daughters to participate – linked to concerns that time would be taken away from household chores and that increased mobility would expose them to unsafe spaces – were slowly overcome, and mothers in particular became active supporters of their daughters. According to project documents, participation in the programme has: 1) expanded the gender roles available to young girls; 2) provided opportunities to build friendships and gain confidence; and 3) created an avenue to escape the socially defined confines of daily routines. There was a conscious effort to work against gender stereotypes in the organisation and, after some ten years of operation, a number of girls have risen through the ranks to be managers/coordinators, coaches and referees.

Source: Brady and Khan (2002, in Lloyd et al., 2005)

and public facilities such as schools after hours have been used creatively for a variety of purposes, including catch-up education, peer-to-peer support networks, leisure activities and girls clubs, financial literacy and skills building (Levine *et al.*, 2009).

Strategies in education to address parents’ concerns about security for their daughters have also led to the development of the child-friendly/girl-friendly school concept, which seeks to create safe, supportive environments in schools closer to communities, often employing female teachers (e.g. Herz and Sperling, 2004).

As in the example above, innovative efforts to promote girls’ participation in physical activities and sport have sought to break persistent barriers and gender stereotypes in this domain, where lack of access to sport is often linked to cultural notions about the female body. This is also illustrated in Box 12. Renowned female sports figures can serve as potent champions of gender equality in this regard, and as influential role models for girls. In Morocco, for example, female hurdles champion Nawal El Moutawakel recognised her position as a role model for women, especially Muslims, noting that her main function as a member of the International Olympic Committee was ‘to encourage more women to participate in sport worldwide’ (in DAW, 2007). Tennis champion Serena Williams, motivated by her participation in the 2006 United Nations Global Youth Leadership Summit, undertook a mission to Ghana and Senegal to highlight the role of sport in the empowerment of women and girls in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (ibid).

Amplifying voices and organising representation

In a growing movement to give voice to children, a number of national and international actors are involved in efforts to support and promote participation by children and young people in activities and decision making around issues that concern them. These include the creation of school clubs and extra-curricular activities linked to girls’ concerns and broader community issues; the establishment of children’s councils and parliaments; the reinforcement of child-to-

child outreach programmes and media and communications networks; the mobilisation of information and awareness-raising campaigns on different aspects of child rights; and the application of participatory research and programme planning methodologies as a means of integrating the views of children and young people in national development processes, including budgets. Such approaches seek to accompany the evolving capacities of children to engage with and effect change in progressively widening communities.

A number of efforts to promote and enhance girls’ participation in particular have taken shape through coalitions of partners at international level. Others have been home grown. Boxes 13, 14 and 15 give just a few examples of some promising initiatives aimed at amplifying the voices of girls and young women and strengthening their ability to participate in political, economic and civic affairs.

What these examples, as well as the earlier ones, have in common is an approach seeking the ‘empowerment’ of girls in terms of enhanced opportunity and capacity for participation in society. Empowerment has multiple meanings and dimensions, but key elements have been defined as: 1) developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one’s ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one’s own life; 2) gaining the ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power; and 3) developing the ability to organise and influence the direction of social change (UNIFEM, in Plan International, 2009). In this sense, the approach to empowerment corresponds with Sen’s (1999) notion of ‘development as freedom,’ encompassing both processes and opportunities for expanding capabilities. These in turn require strategies for social mobilisation and communication, sustainable resourcing and support and the flexibility to evolve and adapt as contexts change over time. Movements by and for girls aimed at creating conditions of gender equality in civil liberties can in this sense gain from the experience of women’s movements and collective endeavours, building strategies and partnerships around shared goals.

Recognising the particularly complex situation of adolescent girls, a number of different global coalitions of partners have been established to work together to develop specific strategies to overcome barriers to their full participation in society and

Box 13: The importance of voice and leadership

It is increasingly recognised that consulting children and adolescents is a practical way to ensure the effectiveness of policies and practices relating to them. Building permanent mechanisms for children and young people to influence public planning and budgeting may not be easy, but it leads to encouraging results – in terms of developmental benefits but also effective community action.

In Cameroon, where persistent gender discrimination limits girls’ participation in educational and social activities, a UNICEF-supported initiative enables girls aged 14 to 17 to take up leadership roles as junior mayors and councillors in municipal youth councils. A gender balance in the councils is compulsory, and all members receive appropriate training to be able to voice their concerns and work effectively. Over three-quarters (77 percent) of junior mayors are girls. Female junior mayors and councils are actively involved in, among other things, HIV and AIDS prevention as well as activities promoting the right of young people to express freely their opinions.

In Karnataka, in India, Bhima Sangha (‘Strong Union’) involved around 13,000 children by the mid-2000s. Children organised as a union have been able to negotiate access to health care and other services; taken action against employers who mistreat child workers; and gained permanent representation in decision-making processes at village level. Children’s councils are led by children representing different interest groups, such as students, working children and disabled children. In some councils, 65 percent of members must be girls – because girls represent a majority of the child population in the area and are considered most vulnerable to exploitation. A general assembly has been created, with participation by over 1,000 children, who have gained confidence and experience in raising issues with local government officials and adult councillors.

In India, Bhima Sangha (‘

Box 14: Girls’ clubs and other initiatives to break down obstacles facing girls

The Girls’ Education Movement (GEM) is part of the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI). It is a child-centred, girl-led global movement of children and young people whose goal is to bring about positive social transformation in Africa by empowering girls through education. The network is active in Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa and Uganda. Girls take the lead, boys act as strategic allies and adults – women and men – provide guidance and support. In Uganda, girls’ clubs have addressed the lack of appropriate water and sanitation facilities in schools, through lobbying ministry officials, participating in facility construction and maintenance and mobilising government funding for menstrual hygiene materials in schools, which has in turn helped break the silence on menstruation. In this way, girls are becoming valued change agents and catalysts for community development.

Initiated in May 2010, with the support of Plan International, the Girls Making Media Project is designed to contribute to the elimination of gender discrimination and low quality media reporting on adolescent girls’ issues in West Africa, with a focus on Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo. Members of local children’s and youth organisations and girls’ clubs are trained on a variety of topics, including gender and the use of social media for advocacy, and selected girls are supported to receive an internship with media partners and/or courses in local media schools. Adult journalists receive training on ethical reporting on gender discrimination and violence against adolescent girls, with special support for female journalists who continue to engage with the girls’ clubs as role models, mentors and coaches.

Source: Barebwoha (2007); UNGEI (2007); [www.comminit.com/en/node/322095](http://www.comminit.com/en/node/322095)

Box 15: Engaging with national budget processes

In South Africa, children’s capacities are being built to participate in national budget processes through the Children Participating in Governance (CPG) project initiated in 2005 by the Children’s Budget Unit of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) – a civil society organisation. The aims of the project are: 1) to create opportunities for children in South Africa to monitor government budgets; 2) to improve children’s participation in research monitoring for budgets and rights realisation that ultimately informs policy shaping; and 3) to contribute to the alignment of government budgeting to rights realisation. Four children’s organisations representing urban and rural children from four provinces have participated in training, including on child rights and gender-responsive budgeting. The training itself was an empowering experience for the children, especially for girls, as expressed by one participant: ‘I learnt that children do have a voice and that there are people willing to listen to us [...] I learnt to use my power I have as a child and I’ve become confident around a lot of people.’ After two years of implementation, the CPG project enabled children to critique the national budget of 2006/07 and to lobby for inclusion of children within the budget development processes. Longer-term budget policy change will demand continued engagement and support.

Source: Nomdo (2006; 2007)

to foster sustainable approaches to empowerment (see also Chapter 3 on Limited Resource Rights and Entitlements). These range from the early joint initiative in 1999 by UN agencies supported by the UN Foundation to design and implement pilot projects aimed at meeting the development and participation rights of adolescent girls, to complementary initiatives by the Population Council, the Commonwealth Youth Programme, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and Family Care International, to the recent Adolescent Girls’ Initiative supported by the World Bank and others.<sup>8</sup> Lessons learnt from the actions of these and other partners are feeding into global efforts to expand civil liberties for girls and young women.

4. Lessons learnt and policy implications

Challenges encountered by some of the recent initiatives described above have included overall lack of accountability by states for their citizens, limited legislative reform and implementation, weaknesses in policy and budget structures and allocations as well as lack of specific strategies at national level to support and strengthen the exercise of civil liberties by girls and young women. Holistic responses are required to address the multiple barriers that inhibit both the recognition and the exercise of civil liberties for girls and young women. Such responses must take into account the specific contexts in which girls live and grow up and the multiple sources of discrimination (such as ethnicity, class, caste, disability) that may combine with gender to diminish their opportunities and deny them their rights. Lessons learnt for policy development and implementation include the following:

- Efforts to promote birth registration in general, and especially for girls, are an essential prerequisite to strengthening girls’ civil liberties. Legal reforms are needed to allow either parent or a guardian to register children, as are enforcement efforts promoted through enhanced budget allocations, improved coordination among central and local authorities, and awareness raising initiatives. Facilitating registration by providing opportunities in households’ daily lives through, for instance, education or health services, is also critical.
- Creating safe spaces for girls and young women to meet, share experiences and gain new knowledge and skills helps overcome gender barriers to participation in the public domain and expands opportunities for social engagement. Activities to build confidence and capacity should be built into such measures, along with efforts to establish networks of mentors and role models for girls.

- Expanding quality educational opportunities for girls, particularly at the post-primary level, is critical to processes of social inclusion and preparation of young women for active participation in civic life. This is in turn a key component of improved governance. Strategies to enhance educational access and quality for girls include: addressing both the direct and the indirect costs of a daughter’s schooling for parents; bringing schools closer to communities and promoting community involvement and support; making schools more girl friendly, including through provision of female teachers and safe environments; and enhancing overall quality so that the benefits of education can be felt.
- Amplifying the voices of girls and young women and promoting processes and structures through which they may make their voices heard are critical dimensions of empowerment and enhanced civic engagement. Care must be taken to ensure broad representation, to guard against formalism and to wed such efforts to expanded opportunities to exercise agency in acting on felt needs.
- Participation is not just about amplifying ‘voice’ but also about expanding opportunities to articulate and express that voice, providing the access to education and information necessary to participate in decision-making processes as equals and creating supportive structures for this participation, including structures created and led by girls themselves.
- Mobilisation of boys and men is required to contribute to changes in both attitudes and behaviours favouring gender equality and gender justice (Karkara, 2007). Such mobilisation is essential in addressing hegemonic forms of masculinities and patriarchal social structures (see also Chapter 4 on Physical Insecurity).
- Long-term commitment is needed for transformative social change for social justice that will alter perceptions and institutions, remove persistent gender biases and create the conditions for social justice. This entails everything from legal reform to guarantee rights, coupled with application of the laws; to social mobilisation and communication campaigns to counter resistance and shape opinions; and even to changes in the physical environment and technology.<sup>9</sup> Without such long-term efforts for multifaceted change over time, gains in one area may be offset by resistance in another: progress in each domain needs to be nurtured and supported so that the true benefits of gender equality in civil liberties can be transmitted from one generation to the next.

Notes

- 1 <http://genderindex.org/content/social-institutions-variables>.
- 2 CEDAW deals specifically with the rights of women, not girls, although there are references to girls in Article 10 on education in terms of ‘the reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely,’ and in Article 16 on early marriage, stipulating that ‘the betrothal and marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legal, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage.’
- 3 Although the UNCRC includes gender discrimination under the overall principle and articles dealing with non-discrimination, it makes no specific reference to the girl child; girl children are, however, recognised as among the specifically vulnerable groups in the preamble to the Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, with a provision in Article 9 that ‘particular attention should be given to protect children who are vulnerable to such practices.’
- 4 Spatial disadvantage has been identified as a key element in ‘poverty traps’ that both foster and maintain people in situations of chronic poverty.
- 5 Amin *et al.* (2002); Erulkar *et al.* (2004); Mensch (2005); Santhya and Jejeebhoy (2003).
- 6 Amin *et al.* (2002); Clark *et al.* (2006); Kishor and Johnson (2004); Santhya and Jejeebhoy (2003).
- 7 ‘Chronically poor people have no meaningful political voice and lack effective political representation. The societies they live in and the governments that exercise authority over them do not recognize their most basic needs and rights’ (CPRC, 2008).
- 8 [www.unicef.org/adolescence/index\\_girls.html](http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/index_girls.html).
- 9 Research has suggested , for example, that improvements in infrastructure, e.g. street lights (which enhance security), piped water and technologies that relieve the burden of household labour, are associated with increased agency and action by women and girls, removing as they do some of the key barriers to mobility and participation (Greene *et al.*, 2009). Other important infrastructural interventions include construction or improvement of roads; improved logistics include promotion of better transport options such as the use of bicycles and motorcycles (countering male monopolies but with attention to security); and technological advances include expanding the use of mobile phones, which increases opportunities of ‘virtual mobility’ (Porter, 2007; Porter *et al.*, 2010).

## Conclusions and policy recommendations



# Conclusions and policy recommendations

## Conclusions

As girls and young women become more visible in development and poverty reduction debates and action, it is critical that policy and programme design are informed by a deeper understanding of the discriminatory social institutions that too often constrain their life opportunities and the exercise of their full human agency. This report has underscored the importance of taking social institutions and culture seriously to make effective progress towards breaking the poverty traps facing girls and young women – not only in childhood and early adulthood, but also potentially across their life-course and that of their children. Girls’ and young women’s experiences of poverty and vulnerability are multidimensional and complex, and often intersect with other forms of social exclusion, such as caste, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or spatial disadvantage. There is, however, compelling evidence that progressive social change is possible, with promising policy and programme approaches emerging globally, although much more needs to be done to take such initiatives to scale, as well as to effectively monitor, evaluate and learn from such experiences cross-nationally.

Because of the context specificity of social institutions, different models of change will be essential in different places and at different times. Nonetheless, this report has identified a number of crosscutting findings about the linkages between gendered social institutions and girls’ and young women’s experiences of chronic poverty. These inform the report’s recommendations for action, which are inspired by some of the effective policy, programming and advocacy approaches discussed in the individual chapters.

First, the recent focus in development circles on girls and young women is clearly very positive. It does, however, present a number of analytical and programming challenges:

- Gender- and age-disaggregated data on girls’ poverty experiences over time in developing country contexts are very limited, constraining well-tailored policy and programme interventions. Longitudinal research initiatives such as the Department for International Development (DFID)-funded Young Lives and Plan’s

Real Choices, Real Lives Cohort Study are important exceptions, but both suffer from a number of limitations.<sup>1</sup> In the case of adolescents and youth, the data gaps are more pressing still: these age groupings are often not easily identifiable in national household surveys.

- Within international legal and human rights frameworks, female youth in particular are not well covered (either in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)). There is a clear need for thinking about the specificities of poverty and vulnerabilities facing this age group, and the specific measures that need to be developed or strengthened to protect them from the poverty traps besetting them at this stage of the life-course.
- Definitions and understandings of childhood, adolescence and youth vary considerably according to cultural context. There is a need to pay more attention to these differences, and to the challenges (especially in terms of legal frameworks) and opportunities they present for development interventions.
- It is also important to consider in more depth the specific poverty and vulnerability experiences of boys and young men, in particular the role that they can play in reforming gender discriminatory social institutions.

International development actors are increasingly recognising that promoting gender equality makes economic and development sense, but discourses on chronic poverty have been slower to adopt a gender lens. Our analysis has highlighted that debates about chronic poverty would be enriched by more systematic attention to gender dynamics, both within and outside the household, and by analysis of how these play out over the lifecycle, starting with infancy and childhood (see Table 1). Understanding how the experiences of girls and boys, young women and men are in turn shaped by

Table 1: Girls’ vulnerabilities to chronic poverty

Across the course of childhood and beyond
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poverty is a dynamic process which impacts on individuals and groups with differing levels of intensity according to their stage in the lifecycle.</li><li>• Girls’ vulnerability can begin even before they are born. Prevailing patterns of son preference linked in part to parental expectations about differential influence on poverty dynamics can lead to gender-selective foeticide.</li><li>• From infancy, girls may be subject to lower parental investments in their care and nurture, and from early childhood to higher demands on their time and labour.</li><li>• Adolescent girls in particular are subject to a specific set of poverty dynamics. Although no longer children (in the eyes of their community), they generally lack intra-household decision-making power, legal representation, economic power, asset entitlements and community and political voice. Without adequate adult support, this can intensify their potential to fall into poverty, as well as limit options for exiting it.</li><li>• Adolescent girls/young women are, however, subject to the dichotomy of also being considered adult – expected to participate in adult practices such as marriage and childbearing before their full physical and psychological development and before they have established an independent livelihood.</li></ul>
Intergenerational poverty transfers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Early childbirth impacts not only a girl’s own well-being (through the physical dangers associated with young childbearing, associated medical costs, time poverty owing to care responsibilities, limited economic opportunities owing to foregone human capital development opportunities, etc, all leading to a downward poverty dynamic), but also the well-being and development of her children. Girls’ nutrition is directly linked to infant nutrition and health, and girls’ education levels in particular can have critical impacts on their offspring’s nutrition, health and education, as well as their vulnerability to harmful traditional practices.</li><li>• Girls’ comparative lack of economic, legal and community standing means that they are dependent on others, and their children even more so. In the event of divorce or widowhood, this insecurity becomes even more apparent, as non-inheritance of assets can render them and their dependants even more asset insecure and heighten the risk of intergenerational poverty transfer.</li><li>• Marriage in youth can impact on a girl’s intra-marriage bargaining power (often determined by her bride wealth/dowry/assets), thereby determining her monetary control and power over assets or household expenditure and her potential for inheritance or management of assets.</li><li>• Girls’ lack of community voice and political participation means that they have very limited outlets to represent themselves or their children outside of the family sphere.</li></ul>
Long-term poverty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chronic poverty can be brought about by adverse incorporation into social structures like early marriage.</li><li>• Discriminatory livelihood practices or systemic market inequalities mean that girls are often forced into adverse employment – informal, insecure and lacking any social protection benefits.</li><li>• Assetlessness through persistent discriminatory socio-cultural traditions like patrilocalism is another key source of vulnerability for girls and women.</li><li>• Physical risks which disproportionately affect girls are embedded within this, i.e. sexual violence resulting in childbirth, feminisation of diseases like HIV/AIDS, etc.</li></ul>

other social categories, especially ethnicity, caste, urban/rural locality, disability and sexuality, would further enhance our knowledge base on poverty traps and strengthen our collective ability to support individuals and groups to break out of these.

Putting gender relations and girls in particular centre stage in development dialogues is key, but the specific contribution of this report lies in spotlighting the pivotal role that culturally specific social institutions play in shaping development outcomes. Although it is widely accepted that gender is a social construct imbued with power relations, too often there is a disconnect with policy and programme development. In other words, if we want to promote progressive social change, we need to think carefully about how best to reform discriminatory social institutions which shape the realm of the possible for girls, their families and communities. Indeed, in the lead-up to 2015, ‘culture’ and ‘the social’ need to become

much more visible components of debates on the MDGs and on post-MDG frameworks. These concepts need to be explored more fully, and more work undertaken to develop a clearer operational definition, drawing on insights from the broader social sciences and informed by interdisciplinary approaches. Strengthening voices and interpretations from within various cultural and social traditions and from the perspectives of women and girls themselves is also critical to gaining a fuller and more contextual understanding of how cultural forces and social institutions are experienced, as well as how dynamics of change may occur.

In this regard, we recognise the important role that the SIGI is playing in helping to jumpstart a debate around these key issues of culture and discriminatory social institutions. Rather than treating ‘culture’ and ‘the social’ as spigot variables that can be turned on and off when other explanatory frameworks

fail, the SIGI signals the need for a more systematic approach. However, as we have emphasised throughout the report, much more is needed, including:

- Understanding how social institutions affect boys and girls, adolescents, men and women throughout the lifecycle;
- Recognising the effects that social institutions have not just on economic participation but also on well-being more generally;
- Expanding the consideration of social institutions to encompass a broader range of gender discriminatory norms, practices and formal and informal laws across family, religion, state and the market (including exclusionary male networks which shape economic and political opportunities, the gender-segmented nature of the labour market, especially the informal sector);
- Paying greater attention to potential Western bias in the construction of the SIGI sub-indices and involving more Southern voices in the index’s critique and (re-) evaluation;
- Encouraging equal or greater investment in complementing quantifiable indicators with more nuanced qualitative analyses/assessments so as to avoid reductionist approaches.

Recommendations for action

Given the complex patterning of girls’ and young women’s experiences of vulnerability and chronic poverty, policies and programmes that address both the immediate and the longer-term causes and consequences of gender discrimination are critical. Gender discrimination is a deeply embedded social construct that manifests itself in different ways at different times and in different contexts – affecting attitudes and belief structures or ideologies that often permeate and help shape institutional arrangements for governance, production and reproduction. Action is necessary at all levels, by a broad array of actors – not only the state. As decades of struggle in the women’s movement have shown, such attitudes cannot be legislated away, or erased by enlightened policy alone: rather, they require continuous movement of social actors operating at different levels and by different means.

Enlightened teachers in progressive educational systems have shaped attitudes and outcomes in schools; media attention to social injustices resulting from gender discrimination shines a powerful public light on behaviours and practices that often thrive in private; private sector involvement in efforts to enhance productivity through approaches aimed at expanding the capabilities of all workers can help transform our productive spheres; and collective action by women and girls, with men and boys as allies, has been a powerful tool

to advance common goals and transform social structures and expectations. Governments must set the stage, of course, through appropriate legislation and enforcement; through policies promoting and supporting social equity; and through support for expanded civil liberties, representation and participation in public affairs. But it is only through a conjunction of efforts and strategic partnerships, facilitated by effective coordination mechanisms, that broad-based change can come about.

In developing a vision for a multipronged approach of this nature, many of the policy recommendations that emerged from the Chronic Poverty Report 2008–09 are pertinent. These include: developing public services for the hard to reach; promoting individual and collective assets; expanding social protection; strengthening measures for anti-discrimination and empowerment; and addressing migration and strategic urbanisation. However, as this report has highlighted, it is critical to pay more in-depth attention to age and gender dynamics if these policy approaches are to reach the poorest and most vulnerable. Approaches that overlook the multidimensionality of gendered and generational experiences of chronic poverty and vulnerability are more likely to flounder and to fail to support girls and young women in new pathways to empowerment. Moreover, families and wider communities are likely to miss out on the potential multiplier effects of investing in girls and achieving development goals more broadly.

To tackle chronic poverty more effectively and to promote progressive social change, the report’s findings support the following recommendations for policy, programming and advocacy action:

1. **Develop and enforce context-sensitive legal provisions to eliminate gender discrimination in the family, school, workplace and community**

- As our report’s findings have shown, legal reforms to harmonise national legal frameworks with international commitments to gender equality (especially CEDAW and the Beijing Platform) are critical, as is ensuring that customary laws and codes are harmonised with more formal legislative approaches.
- Such reforms should include: bans on sex-selective abortion; promotion of gender equality frameworks; gender-based violence prevention, penalisation and rehabilitation; reform of family codes, including age of marriage and inheritance laws; expansion of birth registration; etc.
- Equal attention is required to ensure that gender-sensitive laws are enforced, including through enhanced monitoring efforts and capacity development for police and judicial personnel.
- Attitudinal changes among girls/boys and women/men are also critical and require innovative approaches,

informed by a careful understanding of cultural dynamics and sensitivities. These can include: legal literacy for officials and communities; creative use of media; support for role models; alliances with traditional authority structures and – in the case of harmful traditional practices – identification of champions to introduce alternative cultural rites; measures aimed at building self-esteem, including through girls' involvement in sport; development of girl-friendly schools and community centres as important arenas for attitude formation and change; etc.

## 2. Support measures to promote children's and especially girls' right to be heard and to participate in decisions in areas of importance to them

- Empowerment programmes for adolescent girls, which provide a 'safe space' to participate in decision making, including through girls' movements, microfinance groups, etc, emerged as a key approach to promoting girls' voice and agency in the report. The sustainability and impact of such initiatives can be enhanced through measures to address demand- and supply-side barriers to girls' education (see Recommendations 3, 4 and 6 in particular).
- Issues of particular importance within such initiatives include: girls' perspectives on climate change and the environment; school-to work transition opportunities; reproductive health concerns; and experiences of gender-based violence within the family, school and community.
- The involvement of mentors to form and structure such participation is equally important, especially for girls and young women who have had limited or no education and/or exposure beyond their home environment.
- Programmes targeting girls should be complemented by educational programmes for boys and young men. This is especially important in the area of gender-based violence, to challenge aggressive understandings and practices of masculinity and raise awareness on different ways of relating to girls and women within and outside the family.
- Participatory research initiatives should be encouraged so as to promote fuller articulation of different voices in development debates and in the design of policies and programmes.

## 3. Invest in the design and implementation of child- and gender-sensitive social protection

- There is strong evidence that social protection can be a powerful tool to mitigate the worst effects of both

economic and social risks and to promote pathways out of poverty. Child- and gender-sensitive social protection in particular can support investments in girls' human capital development and minimise deficits in their protection from exploitation, abuse and neglect.

- It is essential, therefore, that care be taken to integrate a gender and age lens into the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of such programmes. Selection of a particular social protection instrument should begin with a systematic assessment of contextualised gender- and child-specific vulnerabilities. Women and girls should also be included in the design and implementation of social protection measures.
- Demand-side initiatives to promote girls' schooling and delay marriage and childrearing appear to be especially effective. These include: cash transfers; school feeding programmes; take-home supplements for girls (such as cooking oil); and girls' scholarship programmes.
- Conditional cash transfers can also be a useful mechanism to empower parents and communities to protect their children – particularly daughters – from the risks of harmful forms of early marriage, child labour (especially domestic work, which girls disproportionately take on) and human trafficking.
- Social health protection, including social health insurance and health fee exemptions, is another critical approach to minimising the barriers to girls' access to and uptake of health services.
- Asset transfers (e.g. small livestock such as goats) can help build young women's productive asset base and are an important means to support their economic participation and eventual independence. Protective measures to enhance young women's ability to utilise and conserve such assets are an important part of such efforts, and include technical assistance as well as organisational support.
- Public works programmes which create infrastructure designed to reduce female time poverty (such as fuel and water collection points) are also to be encouraged.

## 4. Strengthen services for girls who are hard to reach, because of both spatial disadvantage and age- and gender-specific socio-cultural barriers

- Promoting coverage of the 'hard to reach' typically focuses on spatial disadvantage, i.e. those who are marginalised through remote or hostile geographic locations. This report has underscored the importance of expanding this concept to include girls who too often remain hard to reach because of socio-cultural barriers, especially those that restrict mobility and limit public participation in community affairs.



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Bangladesh, Natore district, Rajshahi. Young women use the library and computer training centre on a boat run by Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha NGO.

- Initiatives aimed at promoting girls' access to and use of existing services need to focus on innovative and gender-sensitive means of extending: microfinance, vocational training and income-generating opportunities; health and especially reproductive health services; nutrition support; education; legal and paralegal services; and protection from abuse, exploitation and neglect (such as shelters, counselling).
- Provision of affordable, culturally appropriate and accessible child care services is critical too, not only for young mothers but also for girls who often shoulder the care work burden of younger siblings at the cost of educational achievement.
- Greater efforts are needed to bring services to girls, especially because of the vulnerabilities that many face in the spaces where they spend most time (families and schools), as well as because of the mobility constraints that may limit their access to available services. Initiatives can include: ensuring that schools are closer to communities so as to minimise the risk of physical violence; supporting the development of a female teaching corps; creating safe spaces for girls in communities; and offering home-based or mobile

services, such as visiting health care workers or female agricultural extension workers.

- In the design and delivery of such services, our analysis suggests that it is essential to be aware of other forms of social exclusion which may compound gender-related exclusion (e.g. caste or ethnicity, disability, sexuality), and ensure that service delivery approaches are tailored accordingly.

## 5. Support measures to strengthen girls' and young women's individual and collective ownership of, access to and use of resources

- Strengthening girls' and young women's ownership of, access to and use of resources, especially in terms of inheritance and physical resources (water, land, energy sources), is critical to promoting their empowerment as well as to reducing their time poverty and vulnerability to violence and exploitation.
- Our report's findings have highlighted that, given their relative powerlessness and severe resource constraints, collective access to resources may be especially important for girls and young women, for example in access to financial services, land and collateral.

- Collective approaches can also be powerful in helping girls to gain confidence with and through each other and to develop a sense of agency often denied them in the family, where they are too frequently viewed less as individuals with assets than as assets themselves (as a labour supply source, as upholders of the family honour, etc).
  - A collective approach, supported by strong mentors, can also promote information sharing, self-esteem, capability development and social capital. In other words, it is critical that empowerment approaches have an emphasis on the relational and not only the individual.
6. Strengthen efforts to promote girls’ and women’s physical integrity and control over their bodies, especially in conflict and post-conflict settings
- Given the potential multiplier effects of girls’ education and delaying marriage and childbirth, our findings underscore the importance of investing in the provision of culturally sensitive, affordable and accessible reproductive health information and service provision. Efforts should include innovative approaches that work through girls’ and young women’s self-help groups, as well as initiatives that involve men (and especially young men) as partners.
  - Programmes to raise public awareness about the problems of female foeticide in high prevalence countries, especially drawing on multimedia approaches with the potential to reach a broad cross-section of the public, are also essential if entrenched gender discriminatory attitudes are to be effectively uprooted.
  - Educational and empowerment programmes that raise girls’ and young women’s awareness of their right to be protected from violence in all spheres and to seek redress in cases of violence are critical, not only from a human rights and justice standpoint but also in terms of harnessing the broader development synergies from investing in female education, nutrition, health and economic participation.
  - Efforts to counter the culture of impunity surrounding gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict settings are vital. These should be informed by context-specific understandings of the political economy dimensions of gender-based violence.
  - Involving girls and young women in age- and gender-sensitive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes is important to promote their rehabilitation and potential psychosocial healing.

Notes

1 The Young Lives Project to date has paid relatively little attention to gender dynamics, although there is potential for more work on the basis of the dataset. It is also present in only four countries: Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. The Plan study, despite providing scope for a more in-depth gendered analysis, has only a very small sample (135 girls from 9 countries).

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## Introduction

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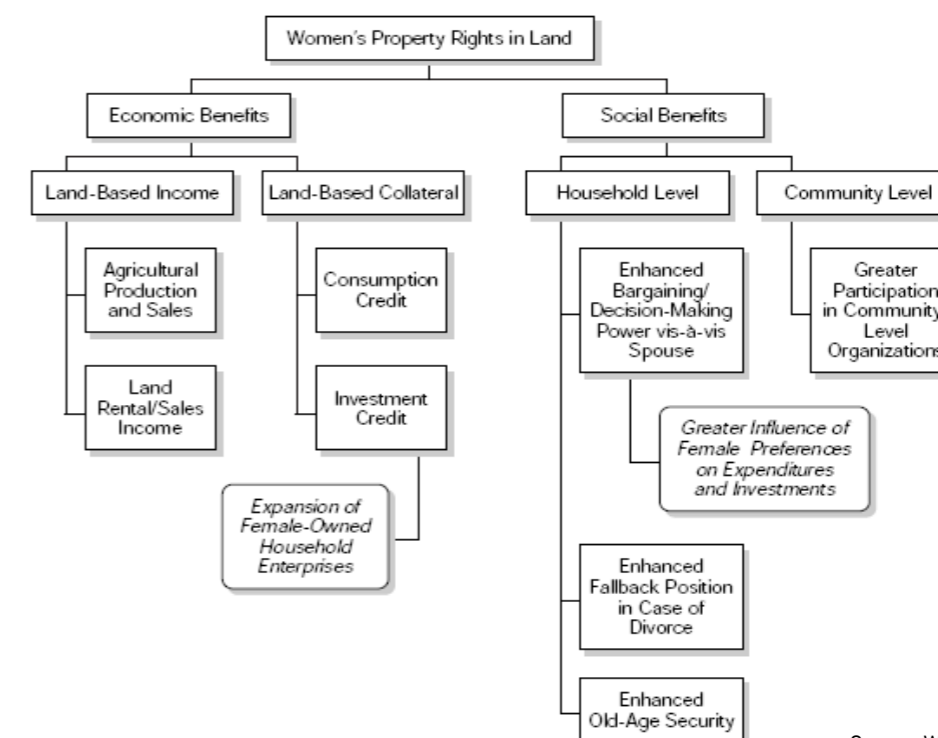
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## Annex 2: Advantages of different strategies/instruments for addressing vulnerability

Strategy and description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>Self-protection</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce the probability of a hazard materialising through, for example, diversifying livelihoods, developing assets (e.g. making housing weather and crime proof), building human capital (gaining qualifications, protecting health)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Household control</li> <li>Assets have multiple benefits beyond addressing vulnerability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ineffective against many hazards (especially covariant 'natural' hazards)</li> <li>Requires information about relative risks of different hazards</li> <li>Health/education effects are medium to long term</li> </ul>
<b>Self-insurance – savings</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make savings (ex ante) to ameliorate the loss from a hazard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can be used against any hazard</li> <li>Household control and predictability</li> <li>Does not require external approval</li> <li>Can also be used as collateral for credit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only covers small hazards for the poor</li> <li>Lack of effective savings instruments</li> <li>If excessive, may tie up much-needed resources</li> </ul>
<b>Self-insurance – debt/advances</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Borrow (ex post) to ameliorate the loss from a hazard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can be used against different types of hazard</li> <li>Speed of access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not predictable</li> <li>May have high costs/conditions</li> <li>May not be available for covariant hazards</li> <li>May require collateral</li> </ul>
<b>Insurance – private or social</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exchange of regular premiums or payroll contributions, to secure entitlements to financial protection against specified contingencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pools risk</li> <li>Small premiums can protect against large losses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only covers specified hazards</li> <li>Rarely available to the poor</li> <li>Complex and requires external approval</li> </ul>
<b>Informal networks</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop social relationships that can help ameliorate the loss from a hazard by transfers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can be used against different types of hazard</li> <li>Speed of access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only predictable for small losses</li> <li>May not be available for covariant risks</li> <li>Variable costs – may be high</li> <li>May involve adverse incorporation</li> </ul>
<b>Social assistance entitlements</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social transfers to ameliorate losses and to facilitate self-protection, including employment guarantees, transfers focused on poor households or categorical transfers (see Barrientos <i>et al.</i>, 2006)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low/no cost for the household</li> <li>May encourage long-term gains in protection, e.g. education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Often not available</li> <li>Access may require bribes</li> <li>Possibility of moral hazard</li> </ul>

Source: Hulme *et al.* (2009)

## Annex 3: Conceptual framework for potential effects of the formalisation of women's property rights in land



Source: World Bank (2005)

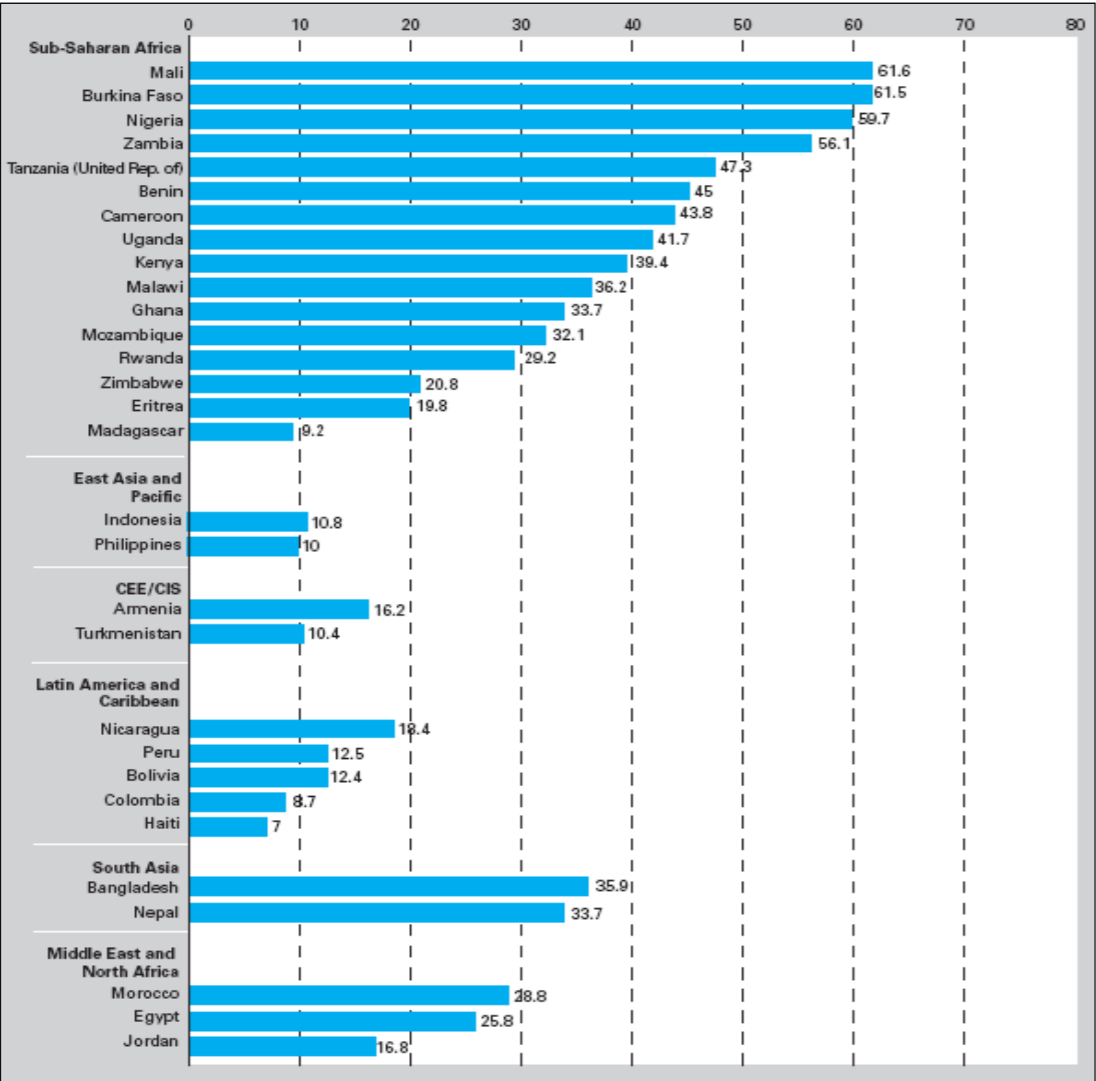
## Annex 4: Initiatives to improve the position of women in owning and controlling land

Initiatives to improve the socioeconomic well-being of women	Initiatives to address barriers linked to custom/traditional law	Initiatives to address barriers related to statutory law
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education and literacy campaigns</li> <li>Legal education for women</li> <li>Economic empowerment of women through provision of credit and market access</li> <li>Affirmative action (waive fees for land registration, land quotas for women)</li> <li>Improved participation of women in decision-making bodies on land tenure issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disseminate new land laws and build capacity and knowledge of traditional leaders to avoid discriminating against women</li> <li>Educate all members of society on women's land rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure land law has a clause that promotes land rights of women</li> <li>Harmonise land laws with other laws in the system (marriage laws, inheritance laws)</li> <li>Disseminate new land laws and build capacity and knowledge of implementers</li> <li>Translate laws into effective programmes for implementation</li> </ul>

Source: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2003)

Annex 5: Restricted decision making on visits outside the household

Percentage of women who say their husbands alone make the decisions regarding visits to friends and relatives, 2000-2004



Note: Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified.  
All countries with available data are present in the chart.

From Source: UNICEF (2006)

# Stemming girls' chronic poverty

## Catalysing development change by building just social institutions

Childhood, adolescence and early adulthood remain for many girls and young women a period of deprivation, danger and vulnerability, resulting in lack of agency and critical development deficits. What happens at this crucial time in girls' and young women's lives can also reinforce their poverty status and that of their offspring, as well as influencing their movement into or out of poverty. In many cases, overlapping experiences of deprivation, foregone human development opportunities and abuse or exploitation perpetuate and intensify poverty for girls and young women over the life-course.

Recently – in part because of the child focus of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the 2007 World Development Report – there has been growing attention on the need to include girls (and boys) more prominently in development agendas. How to do this effectively, however, remains under-researched, especially in debates around chronic poverty, which have in general paid relatively limited attention to gender dynamics.

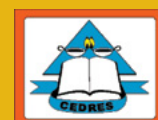
This report addresses this gap by placing girls and young women centre stage, highlighting ways in which five context-specific social institutions inform and determine their life opportunities and agency. Based on the OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), these are: discriminatory family codes, son bias, limited resource rights and entitlements, physical insecurity and restricted civil liberties. We discuss the characteristics of each social institution, its gendered dimensions, its linkages to poverty dynamics and its impacts on girls and young women.

We balance this with a review of promising policies and programmes aimed at tackling the discriminatory dimensions of these institutions. Social institutions are constantly undergoing change. The process may be slow, uneven and even suffer from reversals in some contexts, but the evidence that we present underscores that positive change for girls and young women is possible, even in the most challenging socio-cultural, political and economic contexts.

### Chronic Poverty Research Centre

The CPRC is an international partnership of universities, research institutes and NGOs. The CPRC aims to provide research, analysis and policy guidance to stimulate national and inter-national debate so that people in chronic poverty will have a greater say in the formulation of policy and a greater share in the benefits of progress.

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ISBN 978-1-906433-82-6

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