Sometimes it is hard to stay cheerful about the progress of women, when you hear that over 98% of the world’s largest companies are still run by men. In politics too, women seldom feature in key leadership roles. In March 2015, only 14 governments around the world were headed by women, and only three countries had achieved gender parity in their national parliaments.

This underrepresentation permeates the whole political ecosystem, with fewer women than men holding elected positions in local government in all countries with available data. Things are improving of course, but slowly. The lesson from around the world is that the gender gap only narrows when attention and resources are consciously committed to it.

This matters. Empowering women in the technology sector, for example, that empowers and trains women in science. A year later, the group launched Girls Coding Kosovo, a non-governmental organisation that empowers and trains women and girls in programming, engineering and computer science. A year later, the group has more than 500 participants and several products, including girls’ rights

Girls can lead the way

women in the technology sector, frustrated by the low percentage of women in the technology sector, launched Girls Coding Kosovo, a non-governmental organisation that empowers and trains women and girls in programming, engineering and computer science. A year later, the group has more than 500 participants and several products, including girls’ rights

Girls can lead the way

women in the technology sector, frustrated by the low percentage of women in the technology sector, launched Girls Coding Kosovo, a non-governmental organisation that empowers and trains women and girls in programming, engineering and computer science. A year later, the group has more than 500 participants and several products, including

Girls can lead the way

women in the technology sector, frustrated by the low percentage of women in the technology sector, launched Girls Coding Kosovo, a non-governmental organisation that empowers and trains women and girls in programming, engineering and computer science. A year later, the group has more than 500 participants and several products, including girls’ rights

Girls can lead the way

women in the technology sector, frustrated by the low percentage of women in the technology sector, launched Girls Coding Kosovo, a non-governmental organisation that empowers and trains women and girls in programming, engineering and computer science. A year later, the group has more than 500 participants and several products, including girls’ rights

Girls can lead the way

women in the technology sector, frustrated by the low percentage of women in the technology sector, launched Girls Coding Kosovo, a non-governmental organisation that empowers and trains women and girls in programming, engineering and computer science. A year later, the group has more than 500 participants and several products, including
Young women share their knowledge on global issues, Pakistan.

Every hour of every day, girls experience violence. Violence against girls isn’t just physical, it is also emotional. Some see it as part of a girl’s life; she has to go through the beatings, she has to go through the insults and she deserves them. But that is not how it should be. It is time for change. It is time that girls can stand up and be part of the decision making process.

I have been a girls’ rights activist in Tanzania for about seven years. Having spoken to girls who were forced into child marriage or FGM, they said they were told that they had to do it in order to be respectable. Some girls were footed into early marriage through the promise of continuing school. Rarely did they know that their education was going to be blocked once they were married, particularly if they became pregnant, despite the government of Tanzania adopting provisions that allow admission of mothers to school in 2015.

As a girl activist I often face criticism. Violence comes in many forms including through abusive words, but I turn a deaf ear to those who criticize promoting girls’ rights in mine and other countries. It is better to speak than remain silent.

Conventions have been written and treaties have been signed to support and protect girls and women. However, these good words are often in vain and punishments for violators of such laws are rare. I am sometimes confused; do the governments and leaders keep their eyes closed? Are girls’ issues not as important as other issues?

There are great examples of leaders, like the brave female chief who stopped 850 child marriages in Malawi. There are also girls like the group in Zambia who composed the song “We are Girls, Not Brides” which was launched last year during the International Day of the African Child. It raised awareness about child marriage and inspired many girls and parents to take action.

My goal is to work for girls’ rights until gender equality is reached. As ambitious as it may sound, keeping gender equality and women’s empowerment – including for young women – at the centre of our development efforts will be key to the success of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. From the ciders of Kosovo to the schoolgirls of rural Egypt, young women are powerful agents of change – and empowering them benefits us all.
“Equality between men and women is a fundamental principle of our European Union,” reminds Kristalina Georgieva. 

The world is changing rapidly and, in spite of bad news usually winning out against good news when it comes to what people are reading, there are in fact so many reasons to be cheerful. A big one is that we are making progress towards equality between genders.

Today’s girls will reach maturity and go on to lead fulfilling careers, making valuable contributions to society, safe in the knowledge that they are the equals of their male counterparts. Why am I so confident, you may ask? Because equality between men and women is a fundamental principle of our European Union (EU). If you don’t believe me then go and look it up in the Lisbon Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Article Eight spells it out: in all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality between men and women.

It’s written down in black and white and all the Union’s institutions are obliged to make sure it happens. In the jargon of the Commission, “gender mainstreaming” is a big deal and we will be taking a closer look at what progress we are making towards equality next year.

So that’s the good news about what we do at home – but we also want our principles to spread throughout the world. Which is why gender equality is now also firmly embedded in our funding programmes. The EU played an important role in making sure that gender equality features prominently in the Sustainable Development Goals (which governments around the world signed up to last year in order to end poverty, protect our planet and spread prosperity to everyone).

That’s why we now emphasise, when spending hard-won taxpayers’ money on everything from clean water to education in countries less fortunate than our own, that when we strive to ensure that nobody is left behind it means that this is especially the case for girls.

I have seen with my own eyes how wars destroy the lives of innocent people. In my encounters like that are what make me determined to raise up a generation of young people from Syria – the very same people upon whom Syria depends for its future, come the day when the madness of fighting ends – are at risk of losing everything. In Lebanon I met a young girl called Ayesha’s, just 15, who had travelled a day labourer to support her handicapped mother. Ayesha’s
dearest wish was to go back to school. She dreamed of going home to be a doctor or a teacher. In the world’s toughest places there are many Ayesha’s, all sharing those dreams.

Encounters like that are what make me determined to raise up the lives of women and men, girls and boys. After all, it is 2016.

Girls make up approximately one billion of the world’s total population, and continue to face discrimination and inequalities on a grand scale – a situation which perpetuates across generations. Yet, not only is girls’ empowerment a human rights prerogative, but we also know that investing girls’ rights and empowerment has a catalytic effect in breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty. For example, girls who benefit from a quality secondary education will be better equipped to make informed choices, improving not only their lives, but also those of their families and communities. Everyone benefits, including boys and men.

Investing in girls is one of the most effective uses of EU money and is key to tackling rising inequality, promoting stability and fostering sustainable and inclusive growth. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges this by specifically mentioning girls in many of its targets, and through its overarching principle of “leaving no one behind” emphasising the need to pay specific attention to girls.

Girls Count:
IDEAS + INVESTMENT = IMPACT

Girls make up approximately one billion of the world’s total population, and continue to face discrimination and inequalities on a grand scale – a situation which perpetuates across generations. Yet, not only is girls’ empowerment a human rights prerogative, but we also know that investing girls’ rights and empowerment has a catalytic effect in breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty. For example, girls who benefit from a quality secondary education will be better equipped to make informed choices, improving not only their lives, but also those of their families and communities. Everyone benefits, including boys and men.

Investing in girls is one of the most effective uses of EU money and is key to tackling rising inequality, promoting stability and fostering sustainable and inclusive growth. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges this by specifically mentioning girls in many of its targets, and through its overarching principle of “leaving no one behind” emphasising the need to pay specific attention to girls.

BUDGETING FOR GIRLS

If the EU truly intends to implement and achieve its commitments to girls and women, this must be reflected through the allocation of adequate and sufficient funds, and gender-sensitive budgets delivering what girls really need.

This week, the European Week of Action for Girls, organised by a coalition of 10 civil society organisations focusing on child, youth and gender issues, and supported by the United Nations Brussels will put the focus on how the EU should maintain and increase its investments in external action towards the mobilisation of resources and specific budgeting to empowering girls and protecting their rights. A series of events, campaigns and activities will bring attention to funding gaps, and look to solutions for bridging these gaps, in order to ensure that EU policies are delivering on their commitments and what girls really need.

Girls make up approximately one billion of the world’s total population, and continue to face discrimination and inequalities on a grand scale – a situation which perpetuates across generations. Yet, not only is girls’ empowerment a human rights prerogative, but we also know that investing girls’ rights and empowerment has a catalytic effect in breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty. For example, girls who benefit from a quality secondary education will be better equipped to make informed choices, improving not only their lives, but also those of their families and communities. Everyone benefits, including boys and men.

Investing in girls is one of the most effective uses of EU money and is key to tackling rising inequality, promoting stability and fostering sustainable and inclusive growth. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges this by specifically mentioning girls in many of its targets, and through its overarching principle of “leaving no one behind” emphasising the need to pay specific attention to girls.

If the EU truly intends to implement and achieve its commitments to girls and women, this must be reflected through the allocation of adequate and sufficient funds, and gender-sensitive budgets delivering what girls really need.

This week, the European Week of Action for Girls, organised by a coalition of 10 civil society organisations focusing on child, youth and gender issues, and supported by the United Nations Brussels will put the focus on how the EU should maintain and increase its investments in external action towards the mobilisation of resources and specific budgeting to empowering girls and protecting their rights. A series of events, campaigns and activities will bring attention to funding gaps, and look to solutions for bridging these gaps, in order to ensure that EU policies are delivering on their commitments and what girls really need.

When calling on EU leaders to invest in girls, who is better placed than girls themselves? During the week, four girls from across the globe will take over the social media channels of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DevCo) and show us that they count! By sharing their experiences, stories and opinions, girls will be centre stage in the debate and tell the EU and the World what they really need. Engage with them on Facebook and Twitter using #GirlsVoices #GirlsTakeover.

Follow the conversation on Twitter @PlanEU #EUgirlsweek
Empowerment possible. Girls' rights and to respect girls' voices in order to make girls' potential and encourage them to dream. Girls should have the voices. But I also want parents and teachers to highlight girls' and their profession are still not listened to. They don't listen to us, they consider us a burden and think they tackled.

Interest but we girls and young women want to see our problems aware of girls' problems, but they don't want to talk about it as against marriage her family isolates her. Local governments are case it reflects poorly on their institutions. When a girl protests school, instead of taking action teachers try to hide the issue in when I got older they wouldn't be able to find a groom and would marriage for her instead.

Her parents discouraged her from studying and arranged a harassment she faced on her way to school and feared for their old daughter is really beautiful. Her parents worried about sexual pay the expenses of a girl's higher studies. So parents try to miss the opportunity to find a suitable husband and don't want to against sexual harassment. They fear that their daughters will missing the support of their husbands. They were outspoken and confident.

And they had one request: to continue learning and acquire skills to generate income and further improve their lives. This is the country's largest literacy programme, run by UNESCO with donor support from Japan, Sweden and Finland.

Educating girls and women is not only a basic human right. It holds the immense power to transform our world. The evidence speaks for itself: education saves lives, promotes better health, prosperity and peace.

On 3 October, UNESCO launches the gender review of its flagship Global Education Monitoring report, "Creating Sustainable Futures for All." It warns of the dangers of the status quo and shows why investing in girls' and women's education is the only path forward to achieve the Global Goals.

Today, more than 60 million girls are excluded from their right to primary and secondary education; 64% of the world's 758 million adult illiterates are women. No country in sub-Saharan Africa has achieved gender parity in primary and secondary.

Societies are paying a very high price for this. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda will not be achieved as long as girls and women are denied their right to education, perpetuating the vicious cycle of ignorance, poverty, vulnerability, marginalization and exclusion. If all women in sub-Saharan Africa completed upper secondary education by 2030, it could prevent 3.5 million child deaths from 2050 to 2060. The incidence of early marriage decreases by 14% with a primary education, and by 64% with secondary. Educating girls and women has a multiplier effect, yielding personal and societal benefits across the development spectrum, from health to nutrition to better job opportunities to more active citizenship.

There is no insurmountable barrier to girls' and women's education. Changing the course calls for leadership, political will and a donor focus on empowering girls and women through education. It calls for policies and investment that target the complex causes of exclusion at all levels – poverty, geography, safety, laws, cost of schooling, learning environments, teaching practices and more.

It is in this spirit that UNESCO, UN Women and UNFPA joined forces to tackle these barriers together, through the Joint Programme for adolescent girls and young women launched in late 2015 that works across ministries and sectors, combining our expertise to drive change. Girls still brave incredible barriers to get to school. Women show immense courage when they enrol in a literacy class. It is the global community's responsibility to step up to the plate and invest in what is the single most effective investment to build more inclusive, prosperous and democratic societies.
INVEST IN GIRLS, UNLOCK PROGRESS

NEVEN MIMICA
EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development

Over the last 30 years, the European Union has brought forward projects all over the world to support girls and help create an environment where girls can thrive and develop their full potential. Although significant progress has been made in recent years, there is still a long way to go before women and men equally understand that empowering girls is the key to human development. We all have to continue working hard to build up a new society in which no girl is denied access to education, in which no girl is forced to marry or bear children at an early age, and in which no girl suffers physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

Access to education for girls is a given in many parts of the world – as it should be. An interesting example to illustrate this is the Cambridge English dictionary definition of a girl as ‘a female child or young woman, especially one still at school’. Still, an estimated 62 million girls between 6 and 15 years of age are denied their right to go to school, notably in emergencies and protracted crises. Don’t these girls also have the right to education? To hope for a better future?

Global trends are encouraging: more and more girls go to school and stay there longer. However, big inequalities remain, in particular when it comes to the most vulnerable groups. Girls from the poorest households face the highest barriers to education. The EU works at all education levels and is contributing to important results through initiatives such as the SHARE programme (Supporting the Hardest to Reach Children through Basic Education) in Bangladesh. This programme targets children living in economically vulnerable or geographically remote areas, as well as children from indigenous communities, and those with special educational needs.

For girls like Sabina, education is key to unlocking progress in other areas of life. The longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to be married before the age of 18 or have children during her teenage years. According to the World Health Organization, complications during pregnancy and childbirth are the second cause of death for 15-19 year-old girls globally. Some 700 million girls and women in the world were married as children, and a further 280 million young girls risk the same fate if the international community and other stakeholders, together with the countries and communities concerned, do not act.

The Programme aims to end child marriage in 12 countries in one generation and could save an estimated 2.54 million adolescent girls from child marriage. The EU is also supporting a vast range of other actions for the benefit of young girls, with the abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation as one of our core aims for the upcoming years.

During my travels to developing countries, I have met so many strong, smart and bold girls. Those who have had access to education and health services can all testify to how this has given them more freedom, more choice and more power in life as well as more opportunities to give back to their families and communities. This gives me additional motivation to keep promoting gender equality as a key driver of human and sustainable development, in line with the universal and transformative 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

I dare to imagine a world in which all girls are encouraged to fulfill their potential, and all boys, men and fathers are open-minded, supportive and vocal defenders of these rights. And to imagine a world in which girls’ rights are finally understood as human rights and are fully respected and fulfilled. I dare you all to join our collective EU and international efforts to make this a reality!

#GIRLSVOICES

“My goal in life is that I want to do something for my country to bring positive change in our society.”

LAIBA, 17, FROM PAKISTAN

A CHANCE TO THRIVE

PURNA SEN
PhD in violence against women and Director of Policy, UN Women

As children should, girls enjoy sport, they revel in learning and imagine the infinite possibilities of their adult lives. Rather, given the chance, that is what girls do.

But girls don’t always have the chance. Instead, their horizons are limited by expectations of what girls should be when they grow up, what subjects they should learn and which sports, if any, are appropriate. Rather than opening up limitless possibilities, their imaginations are fenced in, constrained by ideas of femininity that are often restrictive. In fact, girls imbibe at an early age the permissive expectation that ‘boys will be boys’ yet find themselves subject to rather cramped bounds of acceptable, female behavior and aspiration.

Girls have to be given the freedom and confidence to imagine their full potential as children and as adults. Schools can address such norms at the early stages of children’s lives. Instead of dominance and submission, boys and girls can discover the meaning of respectful relationships. Beyond norms that contain discrimination, violence and abuse. Many girls and young women discover that those who they love and believe for them will subject them to bruising, will break their bones and rape them. Teenage Continues on p6
pregnancy brings an end to schooling for many girls, with up to one-third of adolescent girls reporting their first sexual experience as forced, and early marriage marks the end of childhood of millions: more than 700 million women alive today were married before age 18.

Schools need to be safe. School boys and teachers have to respect girls as possessors of their bodies, with every right to determine whether and with whom they can be contact. Evidence suggests that girls are at greater risk than boys of sexual violence, harassment and exploitation at school. This is a major obstacle to universal schooling and the right to education for girls.

Education has many positive consequences for girls – a lesser likelihood of early marriage and greater access to economic resources, opportunities and independence. These protective factors also contribute to a safer, healthier, more prosperous and sustainable future.

Investing in gender equality puts both girls and boys at the center of the conversation. UN Women works through several partnerships to make key changes: with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, we have a global youth-led programme, “Voices against Violence,” to prevent violence against girls and young women. We also work with UNESCO and UNFPA to support the empowerment of adolescent girls through education and have produced guidance to address school-related violence, with UNESCO.

Let’s work to give girls access to the world at large while we also work to change that world and make it safe and enriching for girls. By changing the system and structures that inhibit girls and boys from living fully on their own terms, we may all have a chance to thrive.

There are several factors that prevent girls from accessing education during crises. Poverty and financial hardship tend to affect girls’ education more negatively than boys’. In several societies girls’ education is less prioritised when their family faces financial constraints. Also girls are more likely to help in the households than boys and therefore tend to be seen as greater assets at home. Furthermore, early marriages are a critical reason why many girls drop out from school and that practice tends to increase during humanitarian crises. Lack of suitable infrastructure like the lack of latrines or no possibility to maintain menstrual hygiene is also a factor. Girls also face active recruitment in armed groups and sexual violence.

Continues on p7
Children’s safety and security in schools are increasingly threatened: in at least 30 countries globally there is a pattern of attacks on education by rebel armed groups and even state forces. In many cases these groups are directly targeting girls’ education. Despite education being a universal right for all boys and girls, it is often forgotten in the midst of an emergency. Less than two per cent of the world’s humanitarian budget goes to education. In emergencies access to education can be life-saving, being a strong shield protecting girls from early marriages, teenage pregnancy, and recruitment into armed groups and trafficking and exploitation. This is why education in emergencies is a priority sector for the European Commission. Last year Commissioner Christos Stylianides committed to increase the EU’s humanitarian budget dedicated to education in emergencies to reach the global target of 4%. Already in 2016 this target has been surpassed as DG ECHO has so far allocated €52 million to education in emergencies that will support over 2,300,000 children affected by conflict in 42 countries around the world. The Commission also uses a Gender-Age Marker in its humanitarian programmes that fosters and tracks gender- and age-sensitive allocations. The Commission is also funding projects that specifically target girls’ education. For example, in South-Central Somalia, a region with one of the lowest school enrolments and literacy rates in the world, our partner Intersos is funding to foster an enabling environment for girls’ education and empowerment. Interestingly, mothers are those resistant to send their daughters to school while religious leaders were in general positive to girls’ education and themselves send all their daughters to school. The project conducts advocacy with the community and offers financial incentives for parents to keep their daughters in schools by offering trainings in business skills and start-up grants for parents and older siblings. The project also works with schools and communities to create a safe school environment, where boys and girls can be protected from violence and reassure parents of reduced risks of sexual violence towards their daughters. Finally, the project works with adolescent girls aged 12-16 to ensure that they remain in school and complete grade 8. It offers them life skills education.

Educating girls is a foundation for women’s empowerment and development. Equal access to education means greater economic empowerment and work opportunities for women and more educated girls aspire to become leaders. This is absolutely essential, also in a conflict zone.

**In many countries girls are pulled out of school during disasters, and are unlikely to return.**

In many countries girls are pulled out of school during disasters, and are unlikely to return.

**GIRLS, NOT BRIDES**

**DR. BABATUNDE OOSTIMEHIN**
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UNFPA

Girls have the right to grow up safely and define their lives. Yet, each day, more than 47,000 girls worldwide are forced into marriage before they turn 18. Child marriage denies these girls their rights and subjects them to countless dangers like unintended and unsafe pregnancies.

The United Nations development plan for the next 14 years, the Sustainable Development Goals, recognises that ending child marriage will play a vital role in ensuring that no one is left behind as the world advances. But eliminating the practice will require strong political commitment, the involvement of communities, and sufficient resources.

This year, on the sixth International Day of the Girl Child, a new chapter in this mission is under way. Back in March, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, and UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund, launched a Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.

The programme is built on evidence of what works to end child marriage. It aims to keep girls in school longer and provide them with essential health services and life skills. It will educate their parents and communities as well, giving families incentives to invest in their daughters. And it will help governments strengthen and enforce laws and policies that protect girls’ rights, including setting and enforcing 18 as the minimum age of marriage. The programme will reach and protect millions of vulnerable girls from violations that deny them their childhood, disrupt their education, limit their opportunities, increase their risk of violence and abuse, and jeopardise their health.

With the financial support of the European Commission and the governments of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Canada and Italy, UNFPA and UNICEF are making targeted investments over the next five years in 12 countries with a high prevalence of child marriage. We are confident that this flagship initiative will generate momentum within the international community, showing how much can be achieved if we make a concerted effort to end one of the greatest remaining human rights violations.

Our two UN agencies are the natural choice to lead this ambitious initiative. UNFPA has been pioneering girl-centred programming for over a decade, raising awareness at the international level of girls’ needs and rights, and advancing development to set their lives on a different path. UNICEF, likewise, has been working to promote the rights and improve the lives of every child in every situation for almost 70 years. We know that when a girl is allowed to be a girl, not a bride, and when she has the opportunity to grow up healthy, educated and empowered, she will have the unique potential to break the cycle of poverty for herself, her family and her country. And this will be a crucial step towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.
FROM POVERTY TO PROSPERITY

MARIA ARENA
Member of the European Parliament

Poverty is a universal issue affecting men, women, boys and girls all around the world. Tackling it is thus clearly one of the greatest challenges for governments, as shown in the Sustainable Development Goals and in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

If the attention is naturally mainly focusing on the situation of the poorest people in developing and least developed countries, we can’t forget that poverty has also increased in Europe since the economic crisis, with austerity programmes affecting more girls and women than boys and men. Today, in the European Union, more than 65 million women live in poverty, compared to 57 million men.

We must pay particular attention to women and girls suffering from dramatic precarious situations inside the European Union. Systematic discrimination in the fields of employment, education, access to credits, salaries, motherhood and so on is driving the deeply rooted inequalities between boys and girls, and men and women, passed from one generation to the next. The vulnerability of women confronted with precariousness has an important impact on their families and children, creating a “vicious cycle of poverty”.

Fighting female poverty is at the centre of the report voted last May in the European Parliament, under the title “Poverty: a gender perspective”. Alongside the necessary overview of the situation, members of the European Parliament called on the European Commission and Member States to address this issue and take concrete actions. One of the main priorities must be women’s access and integration into the labour market, as they are still more likely to fall into undeclared, low-paid or insecure jobs than men. Keeping in mind of course the objective of pay equity between female and male workers, as Europe still suffers from a gender pay gap that stands at 16.3%.

This can’t be achieved without setting the focus on education, qualification and lifelong learning for girls and women, to address existing educational stereotypes from a very early age and combat long-term gaps in employment and pay.

Member States are also being called upon to make significant investments to develop affordable high quality public and private childcare and care facilities, to support a better work/life balance. Likewise, the European Commission, in close coordination with national governments, should undertake a comprehensive legislative initiative concerning the different types of leave, namely maternity, paternity, parental and carer’s leave.

Another very concrete action is the establishing of a “European Child Guarantee”, that would ensure that every European child at risk of poverty has access to free healthcare, free education, free childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition. Achieving gender equality, from mothers to girls, requires a full commitment from decision-makers. The report’s recommendations, if effectively implemented, will have a direct impact on boys and girls in Europe, giving them new opportunities and showing them that poverty is not a fatality.

“WE ALL WANT OUR DAUGHTERS TO HAVE THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES AND RIGHTS OUR SONS HAVE.”
MARTIN SCHULZ, EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT PRESIDENT

GENDER-BUDGETING: A TOOL FOR CHANGE

VIVIANE TEITELBAUM
President of the Council of Women (FR) in Belgium

Equality between women and men is enshrined in the European founding texts and in the Belgian constitution and is considered as a fundamental right. This right must not only be recognised as such, it also has to apply in all aspects of life: political, economical, social and cultural. Despite some or many efforts, according to the country or issue, total equality is not yet a reality, anywhere. Something I could perceive all over Europe during my presidency of the European Women’s Lobby, and can still observe in my country as president of the Council of Women (FR) in Belgium. The way budgets and investments are made does not often enough take the needs of men and women, girls and boys equally into account nor contribute to reach real equality.

Gender budgeting is a tool designed to ensure that public money benefits in the same proportion to women and men, boys and girls and will see to it that budgets are distributed equally among all citizens. Why is it important? Because it will help fight discriminations and unequal treatments in many aspects of life. But I really want to stress one point: gender budgeting is not a goal in itself. It will allow to reflect on the existing situation and then create mechanisms for a global, transversal approach to equality. In other words, it is an instrument for public finances to keep its commitments and responsibilities towards gender equality.

“BECAUSE A MAN EQUALS A WOMAN, BECAUSE FINANCIAL RESOURCES ALLOW FOR DIRECT ACTIONS”

Continues on p9
It is also the starting point of a process and a different way of considering public policies. This working method aims at raising awareness of public servants and politicians involved in public administration to identify and promote gender equality in their areas of management. Examples may be: management of public spaces, employment, training, sports, holiday centers for young children, nurseries and daycare, neighborhood playgrounds, infrastructures, culture, urban planning, housing, transportation, education, communication, public cleaning, etc.

Another focus point is the fact that many biases, preconceptions and ready-made ideas exist on gender sensitive budgets and we need to expose them. For instance: gender budgeting does not mean separate budgets for women and men, nor an increase in overall spending but rather setting new priorities, reorienting expenditures within programs, departments and services and sometimes plan a redistribution of the amounts allocated within each of them. Which will promote the use of public funds for more equality and identify impacts on the population.

For example, the reduction or the increase in health care spending could have different consequences for women and men. We can also quote the influence of lighting on urban behavior. Other strong examples are sports, communication and political and economic representation.

The challenge would lie in asking the right questions to create the method for correction and evaluation and formulate and define a gender-specific goal of what you want to achieve. Because a man equals a woman, because financial resources allow for direct actions. Have fun!

ULUK, 16, is on a mission to ensure young people know about reproductive health.

It is so important for girls like Ainura to have access to information on their sexual and reproductive health and rights. In a country where sex and sexuality are very much taboo, young people are often left to fend for themselves when it comes to reproductive health. Uluk and other young volunteers play a vital role in providing education and services to young people where they have been largely kept out of the loop.

Women and girls in Kyrgyzstan continue to be at a disadvantage primarily due to gender stereotypes, and conservative customs and practices. Although the country has a gender action plan, and has signed the Beijing Platform for Action to uphold women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, a lack of political will and reduced funding mean that these treaties have had very little impact.

Although comprehensive sexuality education is on the official curriculum, few schools offer it. The influence of religious groups and a lack of funding make it increasingly difficult to teach sexuality education, which leaves young people – who make up 31% of the population – particularly vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancy.

Many young people in Bishkek are actually too worried to go to private clinics to avoid the suspicion surrounding their visits. They tend to use the internet to find out about sex and in turn go to unlicensed clinics to avoid their parents and the rumours that follow. The reproductive health knowledge young volunteers gain fills a massive gap in information that they do not receive at school or home. Uluk often conducts classes on reproductive health matters, HIV/AIDS and contraception at school.

Hoping to ensure that all young people benefit from improved access to information, education and services, RHAK worked with key decision-makers to ensure sexuality education and youth-friendly services were included in the national reproductive health strategy.

“The state and private sectors only seek to benefit themselves, not us,” says Uluk.

“We must take care of our own reproductive health. There’s nothing shameful in knowing about it, it is shameful not to know about it.”

* IPPF’s Member Association

SEXUAL HEALTH? IT’S SHAMEFUL NOT TO KNOW!

GALINA CHIRKINA
Executive Director, Reproductive Health Alliance Kyrgyzstan (RHAK)

When Uluk began teaching his friends about reproductive health, he had no idea that it would develop into a fully-fledged vocation. It all started when one of his friends began asking everyone to hold up their thumbs. “We did, and my friend began to laugh. And then he said that he could determine the size of someone’s penis just by observing the size of the thumb. After that, my friends began asking me questions, either on social media, or out and about.”

Uluk, 16, now refers to himself as a “junior expert” on reproductive health issues. As a volunteer for the Reproductive Health Alliance (RHAK), Kyrgyzstan, he began conducting training sessions for secondary school students, and providing referrals to other young people for their clinic in the capital, Bishkek. It was at one of these meetings that he met Ainura, who lives in the country’s Chuy Region. She told Uluk that after getting her first period, she was brought to a gynaecologist, who found out she wasn’t a virgin and informed her mother. She was subsequently punished by her father who told her, “You are not a girl; you are a disgrace to our family.”

Ainura’s story reflects the deep societal stigmatisation about sex and morality that girls face on a daily basis.

It was at one of these meetings daily basis.
DELIVERING ON PROMISES

ROELAND VAN DE GEER
Ambassador of the European Union to Tanzania

While the international community pledged to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by adopting the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in September 2015, girls and young women still see their rights being ignored and violated on a daily basis in Tanzania.

More specifically, Female Genital Mutilation, Gender-Based Violence, domestic violence and child marriage remain critical issues in the country. Not all of these practices are regarded as crimes in the legal system and some are often met with impunity, while others are even socially accepted. For instance, during the second Universal Periodic Review for Tanzania last May, the majority of the recommendations focused on the need to combat female genital mutilation and domestic rapes, to strengthen the empowerment of girls and women, and to ratify a number of key human rights instruments. Tanzania received 227 recommendations in total, and rejected 72 of those, including a recommendation to make domestic rape illegal.

Political rights of women are also still challenged: very few are in politics, either in government or in parliament. When women do get access to Parliament in Tanzania, they are often given “special seats”, which leave them with less power than their male counterparts. In 2015, only 19 percent of parliamentary candidates were women.

The EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 (GAP II) aims at the protection and advancement of girls’ and women’s rights worldwide, and has the potential to be a real game-changer for girls and women in Tanzania. But the leaders of the country must also take action, and invest much more in making sure that girls and women access their rights. The government and Parliament of Tanzania have the authority to promote social behavioral change and can become real champions for change. It is encouraging that the Vice-President has been advocating for creating an enabling environment for the empowerment of women and girls and promoting gender equality, but much more needs to be done if the country is to achieve true equality for girls and women by 2030.

For example, reinforcing law making initiatives and ensuring law enforcement could play an important role. On one hand, Parliament and civil society could work together to adapt outdated legislation and addressing once and for all the inconsistencies of the legal framework that still allow a girl to be married at 14, even when she is defined as a child until 18, or that still hamper a woman from inheriting the property of the deceased husband, or from owning land of her own.

On the other hand, law enforcement could provide some quick gains if, for example, police forces were educated and made aware of the positive role they can play in achieving gender equality, as proven by the existing police gender desks, increasingly used to report on gender violence but still very scarce.

Educated and empowered girls and women can generate a positive cycle of change in the society, if only they are given the opportunity. In Tanzania, we will work with all relevant actors to ensure that this promise becomes reality.

A woman applies henna tattoo on a 15 year-old girl’s hand, a traditional Tanzania wedding ritual.

(Plan International/Erik Thalaug)
Quiz

1. Approximately how many girls are not in school globally?
   a. 36 million
   b. 6 million
   c. 62 million

2. What percentage of the world’s humanitarian budget goes to education?
   a. 12%
   b. 2%
   c. 32%

3. What country has the highest proportion of women in parliament?
   a. Rwanda
   b. Sweden
   c. Mexico

Who said what?

1. “We won’t accept a world where our future is decided in rooms girls cannot enter.”
   a. Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General
   b. Donal tusk, President of the European Council
   c. Malala Yousafzai, female education activist and Nobel Peace laureate

2. “We won’t win the match with half the team on the bench. Empowering women economically is critical to achieving equality and the global goals.”
   a. Malala Yousafzai, female education activist and Nobel Peace laureate
   b. Anne Hathaway, UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador
   c. Donal tusk, President of the European Council

3. “It is time that we collectively intensify our efforts and ensure that true equality is finally realized.”
   a. Malala Yousafzai, female education activist and Nobel Peace laureate
   b. Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General
   c. Donal tusk, President of the European Council

4. “Gender equality is the most important fundamental value of the European Union.”
   a. Donal tusk, President of the European Council
   b. Anne Hathaway, UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador
   c. Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General

Word search

Maze

Girls can face a number of obstacles that block their paths to fulfilling their potential. Solve the maze of girls’ lives.

True or false?

1. The 2030 agenda for sustainable development specifically mentions girls in many of its goals and targets.
   true.

2. The Convention on the rights of the child commits all state parties to investing resources into realising children’s rights.
   true.

3. The number of years she spends in school has no impact on a girl’s future earnings.
   false.

4. Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world.
   true.

5. One in three national parliamentarians globally are women.
   true.

Puzzle answers

Quiz

1. c
2. b
3. a

Who said what?

1. “We won’t accept a world where our future is decided in rooms girls cannot enter.”
   a. Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General
   b. Donal tusk, President of the European Council
   c. Malala Yousafzai, female education activist and Nobel Peace laureate

2. “We won’t win the match with half the team on the bench. Empowering women economically is critical to achieving equality and the global goals.”
   a. Malala Yousafzai, female education activist and Nobel Peace laureate
   b. Anne Hathaway, UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador
   c. Donal tusk, President of the European Council

3. “It is time that we collectively intensify our efforts and ensure that true equality is finally realized.”
   a. Malala Yousafzai, female education activist and Nobel Peace laureate
   b. Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General
   c. Donal tusk, President of the European Council

4. “Gender equality is the most important fundamental value of the European Union.”
   a. Donal tusk, President of the European Council
   b. Anne Hathaway, UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador
   c. Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General

Word search

Word search:

- Dutch: Girls’ rights
- French: Droits des filles
- German: Mädchenrechte
- Spanish: Derechos de niñas
- English: Girls’ rights

Maze:

Maze:

- Dutch: Girls’ rights
- French: Droits des filles
- German: Mädchenrechte
- Spanish: Derechos de niñas
- English: Girls’ rights

Crossword:

Crossword:

- Dutch: Girls’ rights
- French: Droits des filles
- German: Mädchenrechte
- Spanish: Derechos de niñas
- English: Girls’ rights
COUNTING THE INVISIBLE

USING DATA TO TRANSFORM THE LIVES OF GIRLS AND WOMEN BY 2030