If we want to end poverty in our lifetime, we must release the potential of girls. It’s that simple. When girls are educated, empowered and treated as equals, they hold the key to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and driving progress for everyone – themselves, their families, communities and countries.

Yet today, too many girls are denied this opportunity, facing double discrimination from being both young and female. Too often they are held back by early marriage, female genital mutilation, early pregnancy, sexual violence and the unequal burden of domestic chores. They are voiceless, powerless and invisible.

Many girls struggle to speak up about the barriers they face, worried about the punishments they face – and understandably so. Malala was afraid to speak up about the barriers she faced, worried about the consequences she might have to face. Today, perhaps more so than ever before, we have the opportunity before us to change the world for girls. 

Today, perhaps more so than ever before, we have the opportunity before us to change the world for girls.

The newly adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will guide all our efforts towards creating a safer, more equal and just world which leaves no one behind – and that includes girls. These goals challenge us to think and act differently, to move out of our comfort zone and go beyond business as usual. It is imperative that the spotlight continues on girls’ rights and empowerment across all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals, not just the Goal dedicated to girls and young women.

The SDGs will guide all our efforts towards creating a safer, more equal and just world which leaves no one behind – and that includes girls.

No country in the world is truly gender equal. As Jacinta, 16, from Nicaragua, was raped when she was 13 and sent to live with the 48-year-old perpetrator, because her mother felt she had no other choice. No girl should be considered less important, or less capable, just because she is a girl. No girl should live in fear, or be denied her right to speak out. No girl should be forced into a life that she has not chosen for herself.

Today, perhaps more so than ever before, we have the opportunity before us to change the world for girls. If we want to end poverty in our lifetime, we must release the potential of girls.

The SDGs will guide all our efforts towards creating a safer, more equal and just world which leaves no one behind – and that includes girls.

No Goal or target can be considered reached until it has been reached for all – including all girls everywhere.

Although heartening progress is being made in the fight for girls’ rights and gender equality, there is still much unfinished business. There is still no country in the world which is truly gender equal. As Jacinta, 16, from Kenya, rightly says, ‘We need to be valued as much as boys, and our families must invest in our education. Girls have been denied their rights for too long and it’s high time we let world leaders know we are ready to fight for them.’

But it’s not just up to girls like Malala, Maria and Jacinta to make their voices heard. We must stand beside them every step of the way. As CEO of Plan International, I am committed to ensuring that these Goals work for girls and that we reach the most marginalised girls and young women through innovative, transformative programmes. We will work hand-in-hand with them to ensure their rights and needs are being met. But we cannot do it alone; we must work in partnership with communities, local leaders, peer NGOs and national governments.

We owe it to these young women to do everything we can to achieve gender equality and end poverty, so by the time 2030 arrives it finally is a girls’ world.

“TODAY, PERHAPS MORE SO THAN EVER BEFORE, WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY BEFORE US TO CHANGE THE WORLD FOR GIRLS.”

FROM CONFLICT TO CLASSROOM

GORDON BROWN
United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education

In the year 2000 every world leader committed to getting all children into primary education by the end of 2015. But 59 million young people are still out of school – and more than half of them live in conflict and emergency settings.

Girls are hit hardest by these conditions as gender bias, safety concerns and limited resources result in girls disproportionately missing out on school. The latest figures from UNESCO show that girls living in conflict-affected areas are 90 per cent more likely to be out of school than their peers in non-conflict settings.

And sadly the situation shows no signs of abating. From Syria and Iraq to South Sudan and the Central African Republic, recent conflicts have created more displaced children and more child refugees than at any time since the Second World War.

Girls fleeing Syria, a country with near universal education before the crisis, now face being married as child brides instead of continuing their education. In Jordan, one in every four marriages between Syrian refugees involves a girl under 18, double the figure in 2012. Economic opportunities are scarce for families in host countries and marrying a daughter is seen as a way of providing for them amidst terrible circumstances. Some feel that child marriage is the best way to protect their female children from sexual violence and ease pressures on the family resources.

However, we know that girls who do not finish their education have

Continues on p2

“BARRIERS THAT WE HAVE Fought HARD TO OVERCOME TO GET GIRLS INTO THE CLASSROOM ARE OFTEN BUILT BACK UP IN TIMES OF CRISIS.”
The Girls’ Rights Gazette makes girls’ rights front page news. It intends to inform readers of the barriers girls still face in the realisation of their rights, while demonstrating the transformative power empowering girls has on poverty reduction worldwide.

It is produced by Plan International EU Office with the financial support of the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Population Fund, for the European Week of Action for Girls 2015. If you would like further information about this publication, please contact the editor at louise.hagendijk@plan-international.org.

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*Names have been changed throughout to protect girls’ identities.

far fewer economic opportunities and worse health outcomes. These girls are also overwhelmingly from poorer families – so child brides that are poor when they marry are more likely to remain poor.

But there is hope for these girls. Hope that an innovative pilot project will soon be implemented across the region. In Lebanon 200,000 Syrian refugee children went back to school this September as part of a unique double shift programme where Syrian children use existing Lebanese schools in the afternoons and evenings.

Supported by the Lebanese Government and International NGOs it enables them to receive a formal education and extra support to overcome language barriers. It is a start, but there are over a million more children across Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon who are not currently in school and we need international funding to expand the programme. Barriers that we have fought hard to overcome to get girls into the classroom are often built back up in times of crisis. But we must not give up on the girls who deserve an education. If the journey to school is more dangerous we must provide safe passage so they are able to travel without fear. If there is a lack of female teachers they must be funded and trained. If there is forced marriage we must protect the girls who are too young to wed.

School can be a lifetime for children in times of distress, providing a sense of normality and routine and valuable lifesaving lessons about basic health alongside a formal education. It is an outrage that last year only two per cent of emergency funding went towards education and children themselves are demanding more. Girls and boys around the world have led the charge and now 10 million people have signed the #UpForSchool petition – which demands world leaders provide an education for every child – and I am committed to making sure that all children, whatever their circumstances are able to fulfil their potential.

The winning entry in UN Women’s Gender Equality: Picture it! comic and cartoon competition, organised together with the European Commission, the Belgian Development Cooperation and the UN Regional Information Centre. Winner Emilio Morales Ruiz says of his comic, “Gender inequality is still visible today. Even the smallest acts are important steps for solving this global problem.” Go to beijing20.unwomen.org to view all the winning entries.
THE PROMISE OF EQUALITY

PHUMZILE MLAMBO-NGCUKA
United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women

The year 2015 has been a momentous one – for girls, for women and for all of society. In September, leaders from around the world met in New York to make historic, personal commitments to gender equality and women’s empowerment. Never before have we had such direct confirmation from the very highest levels of government and the private sector that women’s empowerment is a pre-condition for achieving a thriving, resilient, equal world.

It is an inspiring time to celebrate the European Week of Action for Girls, for it is the girls of today who will be the ultimate beneficiaries as well as drivers of this change. They are the first generation with the chance to come of age in a gender-equal society, and their numbers are growing; right now more than half the world’s population is under 30, and that figure is projected to rise to 75 per cent over the next decade. We must reach our goal of “Planet 50:50 by 2030” so that the next generation of girls has a chance to make the most of the promise of equality.

We know from numerous global reviews that we have made progress in key areas such as girls’ enrolment in primary and secondary education, in ensuring women have greater access to contraception, and in new, non-discriminatory laws that support access to resources and economic opportunities, or discrimination and violence. What we do not need from the SDG process is more analysis – we need concrete steps forward and solutions found.

The Development Committee in the European Parliament recently adopted a resolution focussing on the EU’s new Gender Action Plan which aims to give momentum to the bloc’s work in this area. The European Commission’s own evaluation shows that in the past, there was insufficient political commitment and resources in our EU Delegations to prioritise gender on the ground. Too often responsibility for gender action was given to junior staff and the issue seen as a tick box exercise. That’s why one of the key messages of our resolution was that gender equality must be the core business of EU Delegations, with more emphasis on reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

In addition, gender must be a systematic and integral part of all human rights dialogues between the EU and third countries to make sure that our partner governments feel the pressure to act.

Given that the Commission has recognised the need for a step change in its gender policies, I was disappointed that it chose to publish what it is calling the Gender Action Framework as a Staff Working Document, rather than as an official Communication of the Commission as a whole. But whatever the words on paper are, they will mean very little if they are not translated into concrete action on the ground.

I and other colleagues hope to continue discussions on the next steps soon following the global goals summit. Continues on p4

Supporting girls to develop to their full potential 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 own lives, but also those of their children, families and communities. Everyone benefits, including boys and men. But significant gains for gender equality in the past 15 years, girls and women across the world continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, injustice, violence, disease and discrimination, including in their national legislation and legal systems.

In many societies, girls and women are subject to deep-rooted and harmful social norms, attitudes and behaviours that assign them a lower economic, political and social status than men and boys, even where there is legal protection against gender and age discrimination.

Violence continues to be perpetuated against women and girls all over the world – within families, in schools, in communities and in society at large – often with impunity. Girls and young women often do not have control over important decisions that have a major impact on their health and well-being, such as the opportunity to choose if, when and with whom to start a family.

This vicious cycle of gender inequality and poverty hinders progress across all social and economic outcomes.

PHUMZILE MLAMBO-NGCUKA visits the Grassroot Soccer SKILLZ Street intervention in Khayalitsha, the largest informal township in Cape Town, South Africa

(Let’s win, lose or draw?

GOALS FOR GIRLS POST-2015: WIN, LOSE OR DRAW?

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GIRLS AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

2015 is a milestone year, with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by world leaders in September. These goals will guide the international community’s work for the next 15 years, and must galvanise global efforts to ensure girls everywhere can reach their full potential.

Extraordinary progress has been made in the past 15 years in reducing extreme poverty, improving child wellbeing and promoting gender equality, but significant gaps remain and the poorest and most marginalised have often missed out. The SDGs must address this and ensure that no one is left behind.

Poverty reduction will depend on advancements in gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment. Girls must therefore be represented in the content, financing, implementation and monitoring of the SDG framework.

GIRLS AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The European Week of Action for Girls 2015 will challenge EU leaders to champion girls’ rights and empowerment by implementing transformative policies and practices and putting girls at the heart of efforts to achieve the post-2015 goals and targets.

The EU should lead by example to ensure policies and programmes transform the systems and social norms which perpetuate the inequality and discrimination which prevent girls reaching their full potential, and promote girls’ right to physical and psychological integrity, access to high quality education, vocational training, and economic opportunities, and strengthen their voice and participation.

Follow the conversation on Twitter @PlanEU #EUGirlsWeek #GirlsVoices

FROM WORDS TO ACTIONS

LINDA MCAVAN MEP
Chair of the European Parliament’s Development Committee

Now that world leaders have agreed the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is vital that they put their commitment to gender equality at the forefront of implementing them. No society can develop sustainably if half its population faces systemic barriers to achieving its potential.

Goal five – to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls – with its nine associated targets, offers a good framework for action. But that political will now needs translating into concrete targets – so getting the right indicators in place will be crucial. We are well aware of the problems facing women and girls, whether it is their lack of political representation, unequal marriage is renounced and abandoned, and where women play a key role in peace and security processes.

UN Women has prepared a new strategy on youth that aims to strengthen initiatives to empower young women and encourage young men and boys to stand with them for gender equality. It combines traditional forms of advocacy with new approaches to creative partnerships, technologies and funding. Girls need to know that we are fighting hard to carve out these spaces for them, and that our expectations are high.

The year 2015 is an exciting time to be a girl. Let us make 2020 an even better time to be a woman.
For decades, Africa – because of its economic and social situation – has faced huge problems. We young people, we young girls I should say, are particularly affected by those problems. Let’s look at a concrete example: me. Although I was enrolled in school when I was six years old, I decided to stop my studies at the age of 15, when I was in first year of secondary school. You will certainly wonder why? Precisely because I had no support. I am not talking about material or financial support, but a moral one. I had no one to push me, motivate me, support me morally, and inform me about the risks I ran by dropping out of school. I needed a counselor, someone who could have advised me.

I always thought that assertiveness, being independent, necessarily meant having money, which is why instead of choosing school, I decided to start an income-generating activity. I wanted to earn enough money to take care of myself and help my parents. This is a form of pride in our culture. The more you help your parents, the more you are perceived as a responsible child who is likely to succeed.

I now bitterly regret not having continued my studies. Just as the many other girls my age who had to leave school for various reasons regret it. Over time, we realised that we had given up on a fundamental right: the right to education. But it is not just a right that I lost. I lost an opportunity that was offered to me by going to school – to gain knowledge, to graduate, to get useful skills, to have a profession to claim a well-paid job, to occupy positions of high responsibility, and to participate in decisions that affect my life, to be listened to, to be confident enough to stand-up and say no to any form of aggression that girls can be victim of.

I must say that I was privileged because I had access to education, even though I did not understand fully this opportunity. In my country, many young people have no access at all to education for several reasons. For example, in urban and rural areas alike, many parents believe that the education of girls cannot be pushed, the vocation of the daughter being to marry, to have children and to take care of the family. The advantage is given to boys who get priority to enrol in school.

Our parents need to understand that education is not just for boys, and that when given a chance, girls can achieve just as much – if not more – than boys. They need to stop believing in gender stereotypes and let us continue our studies, instead of putting us in a marriage that will create more misery than happiness.

Senegal’s policies try to improve girl’s access to education for a long time, but we still don’t see tangible results. We need to advocate on this issue to push the government to take the necessary decisions. I have been given an opportunity to speak up, and I am now able to advocate to policy makers and be the voice of other young people. It is an ongoing job, talking with my friends, my parents, my parents’ friends, telling them about the importance of education and pushing to end child marriage and other harmful practices against girls, which represent obstacles to our education. This is not easy, because as a young girl I am often not listened to. But in the end, I manage to put my message out there.

Today I own a little restaurant, a small eatery that serves breakfast and that allows me to earn a living and help my family if necessary. I consider this as a way to reach my bigger goal. My ambition is to earn enough money to resume my studies, and realise my dream of education and pushing to end child marriage and other harmful practices against girls, which allow me to earn a living and help my family if necessary.

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In short, I want a shift in trend. I want young women to stay active and not to give up. I want discrimination to end, and gender equality to be achieved all over the world. And I appeal to our leaders, and our parents, to increase their efforts to reduce gender disparities so that we girls can participate as equals in Africa’s development.
EMPOWERING GIRLS THROUGH EDUCATION

IRINA BOKOVA
Director-General of UNESCO

The global goals that have just been adopted at the historic United Nations Summit pledge to transform our world by leaving no one behind. This universal, rights-based agenda can only be realised if gender equality becomes the norm in every society. This ambition starts by tackling inequalities at the root and by investing in the most powerful transformational force that exists to empower girls and women – a quality education.

The fourth Sustainable Development Goal spells out this ambition, guided by the Incheon Declaration that was adopted at the World Education Forum in May 2015, co-convened by UNESCO with six UN partners. It promises to ensure that all children pursue 12 years of quality, free and publicly funded education – the first time the world has signed up to such a comprehensive goal.

Our starting point is the fact that over 60 million girls are out of school today and more than half of them are adolescents. Only 38 per cent of countries have achieved gender parity in secondary education. We have to address all the obstacles that prevent girls from learning – family poverty, discriminatory laws, social prejudice, low expectations, and schools that simply are not safe for girls. The picture is worse in situations of emergency and crisis, where girls are often the first targets of violence and extremism.

To overcome inequality and injustice, we need to act on all factors that marginalise girls and hijack their educational journey. From school safety and gender sensitive teaching and curricula through to community awareness raising and advocacy, the range of interventions must span the social and political spectrum in order to succeed.

This is why we have joined forces with UN Women and UNFPA to launch a joint programme to empower adolescent girls and women through education, working on multiple areas inside and outside the school. The same spirit guides the Girls’ Right to Education programme just launched in some of the most disadvantaged provinces in Pakistan, along with our EU-supported programme bridging learning gaps for youth in response to the Syria crisis.

We can put a face on the 17 global goals that will guide the international community for the next 15 years – this is the face of a young adolescent girl, in school, learning in a safe environment, not subjected to violence, not married off early and given everything she needs to aspire and follow her dreams. This is the face of the future all societies need.

“I have a confession to make: I’m a feminist.”

FRAIS TIMMERMANS, FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

“#GIRLSVOICES

“I WANT TO SHOW LEADERS, NO MATTER THEIR BACKGROUND OR PERSONALITY, WHY GIRLS’ VOICES MUST BE HEARD AND WHY WE MUST BE RECOGNISED AS POTENTIAL LEADERS IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND BEYOND.”

NURFAHADA, 16, FROM THE PHILIPPINES.
AGENDA 2030: WHAT NOW?

TANYA COX
Acting Head of Plan International EU Office and co-chair of the Beyond-2015 European Task Force

So, now what? As the ink dries on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and memories of a historic UN General Assembly begin to fade, “So, now what?” is the question we must all answer.

The newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent the most ambitious effort yet to reduce poverty, tackle inequality and injustice, and protect the planet. That 193 States have all agreed to them, by any measure, a huge achievement. Yet these goals will count for little if they remain just words on paper. When in New York, we all agreed that the true test of whether the 2030 Agenda lives up to expectations will come in its implementation. Full realisation of every goal and target by every state is essential if the promises of the SDGs are to lead to concrete results and improvements in the lives of children, especially girls, the world over. Not least because the goals of the Agenda are so interlinked and inter-dependent.

What is also clear, however, is that the weakest part of the 2030 Agenda lies in the ‘follow-up and review’. But without strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms, how will states – and other relevant actors – be held to account for their commitments? Importantly, children and young people must be included in both designing the implementation plans of states and in ensuring that implementation is monitored effectively. Children have a right to be involved in the decisions that affect them, and governments have an obligation to ensure their views are heard.

But young people, especially girls, face multiple exclusions which act as barriers to their effective participation in decision-making. Beyond the broad age- and gender-based discrimination, specific groups face additional disadvantages, such as rural youth or those with disabilities.

Girls’ ability to participate is most particularly constrained by poverty and the discriminatory social norms and attitudes which curtail the realisation of their rights on a daily basis. Yet it is critical that their views – which are so often different to adults – are both sought and listened to. This is not only an end in-and-of itself: it is fundamental to the success – or otherwise – of the entire 2030 Agenda. That will require two things.

Firstly, widespread, systematic changes must be made to structures and attitudes, so that children in general and girls in particular are recognised as legitimate actors and change-makers today, not simply passive beneficiaries of tomorrow.

Secondly, the appropriate mechanisms and processes must be put in place throughout countries from national to local level, to enable young people to participate. That means they must include both formal and informal mechanisms, be age-appropriate, but also disability-friendly, perhaps in multiple languages and the using methods that are accessible to all young people – be they scorecards, surveys or using ICT.

Since it is at the local and national levels where young people are most able to participate meaningfully and effectively in both accountability processes, governments must ensure a “bottom up” approach to accountability.

As civil society, we also have a duty to ensure we work with – not just on behalf of – young people. From the way we conduct our advocacy to the programmes we implement, we too must be held accountable to ensure that we do not in any way undermine the achievement of the SDGs and work towards their realisation, within our mandates. This is something Plan International is committed to, and we look forward to working with girls – and boys – around the world to hold their leaders to account for their commitments in Agenda 2030.

#GIRLSVOICES: ALL WE NEED IS OPPORTUNITY

Yuma, 15, from Nicaragua, is on a mission to change people’s minds-sets around violence.

Acts of violence are common in my community. I’ve seen physical violence, trauma and bullying – much of which has taken place at the hands of gangs. In my neighbourhood, there are many gangs. They loiter on the streets, harassing boys and girls and encouraging fights. When they see us girls, they walk towards us and try to touch our hips, our shoulders and our face. Gangs scare us. This kind of behaviour causes confidence issues and leads to a lack of self-esteem, especially for girls my age.

It’s hard to be a girl in my region as we are much more disadvantaged than boys. Men have all the power – especially at home – as they are the ones who make the decisions. However, being part of Plan International’s Girl Power project, I now realise that women are just as strong as men and that life doesn’t have to be like this. This, along with seeing people suffer from violence, is the reason I became an agent of change. I decided I wanted to be like this. This, along with seeing people suffer from violence, is the reason I became an agent of change.

I have learnt how to interact with people and how to express myself. I now know what to do if someone is suffering violence. I enjoy learning new things and when I see someone has found happiness with my support it makes me feel good. I am keen to develop new ideas and I wanted to help those who have suffered harassment.

For me, it is important to support victims of violence in any way I can. If I am unable to deal with the case, I seek help from teachers, peers or those who work for Plan International. The most important thing is to support the victim in whatever way we can.

I have learnt how to interact with people and how to express myself. I now know what to do if someone is suffering violence. I enjoy learning new things and when I see someone has found happiness with my support it makes me feel good. I am keen to continue learning and share my ideas with others. I feel confident that women can achieve all the things that men do, and I am determined to keep learning.

WORLD LEADERS HAVE COMMITTED TO 17 GLOBAL GOALS TO END EXTREME POVERTY, PROTECT THE PLANET, AND ENSURE PROSPERITY FOR ALL. FOR THE GOALS TO BE REACHED, EVERYONE NEEDS TO DO THEIR PART: GOVERNMENTS, THE PRIVATE SECTOR, CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZENS. FIND OUT MORE AT www.un.org/2030development
Traditional Leaders: Catalysts of Change

Traditional leaders are custodians of cultural practices across the globe generally, and Eastern and Southern African countries are no exception. The chiefs are mandated to guard the beliefs and values that have time immemorial been imbedded in the cultural practices of a given ethnic group or groups, and pass them on to the next generation.

However, there are certain elements in some cultural practices that perpetrate abuse, discrimination and gender inequality. The trend of social acceptance of abuse and gender inequality in various communities has led to increased violence against children, in particular girls, where for instance high levels of child marriages have been perpetrated. Malawi is one such example – it has the eighth highest rate of child marriage in the world, with one in two girls married before the age of 18. Most girls who are subjected to child marriages in Malawi live in rural areas where traditional leaders are at the helm of cultural practices and traditions.

But by engaging and sensitising these traditional leaders, we can make significant progress towards ending child marriages in the country. Inkosi Kachindamoto is an outstanding example of a traditional leader who has demonstrated just that. So far, she has annulled 330 child marriages. Instead of becoming brides and grooms before they are ready, these children are now back in school.

“I realise that it is a fact that child marriages condemn millions of girls to the all too familiar related cycles of poverty and gender inequality. Because of this realisation I have mobilised my fellow chiefs and communities to do something to end child marriages,” she says.

The traditional chiefs in Malawi have also been involved in lobbying for the recently enacted Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act that, among other things, raises the minimum age of marriage to 18 years of age. By formulating and adopting by-laws to end child marriages, Chief Kachindamoto is able to promote and monitor their use. “My main focus has been to ensure that by-laws are systematically monitored to stop child marriages and encourage teen mothers to go back to school and complete their education,” she explains.

And Chief Kachindamoto is not afraid to take sanctions against perpetrators. “I have suspended seven traditional chiefs under my jurisdiction who were alleged and found to have encouraged child marriages,” she adds.

Through harmonised action involving all stakeholders, including traditional leaders, we can strengthen practice, policy and legislation to build a violent free world where all girls and boys may develop to their full potential.

As Chief Kachindamoto says herself, “I strongly believe that chiefs and all traditional leaders as custodians of customary law and cultural practices have a big role to play in ending harmful cultural practices that perpetrate violence against women, girls and boys. We should be seen to spearhead change in our respective communities.”

GIRLS WHO GROW UP SEEING ONLY MALE PRESIDENTS OR AMBASSADORS MAY DEVELOP A BELIEF THAT POWER IS ESSENTIALLY MALE.

ZEID RA’AD AL HUSSEIN, HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

“I WANT TO SEE GIRLS’ RIGHTS RESPECTED. WE NEED TO FIGHT ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST GIRLS AND WOMEN... IT’S HIGH TIME WE LET WORLD LEADERS KNOW WE ARE READY TO FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS.”

JACINTA, 16, FROM KENYA
#GIRLSVOICES: A RAY OF HOPE

23-year-old Roma says girls – and society – need to believe they can achieve anything.

What is life like for a girl growing up in India and in your community?
In India and in my community, a lot of people are not happy at the birth of a baby girl. Girls are not provided with equal opportunities in comparison to boys. Girls are told to make sacrifices and compromise in every situation, including when they are married. The ultimate goal of most of the girls is decided by their parents, and it is to marry as soon as possible. The earlier the girl is married, the earlier the responsibility of her safety is taken off her parent’s shoulders. The situation is improving slowly, but it will take huge efforts and time to change the way people think about girls and start treating them equally.

What needs to change for India and the world to be a better place for girls to live in 2030?
First of all, the mentality of the community needs to change. It is critical to make the community realise that girls and boys need to be given equal opportunities, because they both play a central and vital role in the development of the country. The government should provide a safe environment for girls, and facilitate their access to education, while promoting the value of girls to the population. More opportunities should be offered to girls to give them a chance to become independent.

What do you think would change if there was a girl who became president in your country?
If a girl becomes President of the country, other girls will get motivated and will have a belief in themselves that if she can become the president than they can move ahead in life. Also, the parents will be more likely to support their daughters and will believe in them to do well in life.

This will be ultimate role model for the other girls of the country, this will instill the strength and courage that a girl can achieve anything in she believes in herself. This will provide millions of girls, reeling under repression and neglect, with wings to take new leaps of emancipation.

More than anything it will provide us all the ray of hope that we can expect more girls friendly schemes and services, better access to quality education and employment opportunities, provision of women-friendly spaces, more safety nets, and higher representation of women in all sectors.

Do you think it is important for young people to be asked for their opinion about things which affect them?
Children and young people need a platform where they can express their views and ideas. As they live in the community and are part of every challenge, they can play an important role in providing the solutions. If I could make the decisions in my community, I would make sure that all girls get an education and opportunities matching their skills. I would also create opportunities for boys and girls to interact and work with each other. Finally, I would try to ensure that boys and girls respect each other.

Kristalina Georgieva
Vice-President of the European Commission for Budget and Human Resources and UN Global Champion for Disaster Risk Reduction

Over the course of 36 hours beginning on 30 October, 2014, Sudanese army troops carried out a series of attacks against the civilian population of the town of Tabit in North Darfur, including the mass rape of women and girls.
Khadamallah*, in her mid-teens, said that soldiers came to her home at about 10pm on Friday night: she was in the house with her younger siblings. Soldiers entered the house, took some firewood and hit one of the children. One soldier dragged Khadamallah out of the room. Two of them held her down while the other one raped her. Many others who were there were standing around. Eventually they brought her back to her room, tied her to the bed, and left.

Such despicable acts are enraged and heart-breaking at the same time, and they are commonplace in situations of conflict and disaster. Data on Gender Based Violence (GBV) in emergencies is hard to come by, but it is clear that it increases during such times. In contrast, the ability to prevent, detect and follow up on such cases decreases.

There is a clear will to tackle the problem. In September, 190 leaders at the UN General Assembly agreed to 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development, to be achieved in the next 15 years. One of them – Goal five – is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. This includes eliminating all forms of violence and harmful practices against all women and girls.

The European Commission seeks to stop GBV in humanitarian situations in three main ways. First, by mainstreaming a gender approach into all actions, to create more awareness for differentiated vulnerabilities and needs.

Second, with targeted actions. These include empowering people to challenge attitudes that condone violence, but also assisting survivors with medical care, psychological support and referral mechanisms.

Third, with capacity building to empower humanitarian actors and partners to better address GBV. In this context, it is particularly important that the Sendai Framework repeatedly refers to the importance of integrating a gender perspective in disaster risk reduction.

In 2014, the EU budget supported 40 projects that prevented and responded to GBV in humanitarian crises, contributing more than €12 million, across countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. We need to do more, and the EU is increasing its budget for external action, including for humanitarian aid. I am also co-chairing the UN’s High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing to address the growing gap between the number of people in need of assistance and resources available.

When we take stock in 15 years’ time, I hope we will have achieved all the goals set in New York this September. But I particularly want us to reach Goal five – for the sake of the girls and for the sake of humanity.

* Named changed to protect identity.

**#GIRLSVOICES**

**“THE EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS HERE IS SO WEAK. I WANT TO CHANGE EVERYTHING. MOST OF THE GIRLS HERE HAVE NO EDUCATION AND THIS ENDS UP CAUSING PROBLEMS SUCH AS TEENAGE PREGNANCY.”**

**Luiza, 16, from Brazil.**
"FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, WE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO END POVERTY IN OUR LIFETIME – IT IS WITHIN OUR GRASP. HOWEVER, THIS CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED BY RECOGNISING THE POTENTIAL OF GIRLS."

ANNE-BIRGITTE ALBRECHTSEN, CEO OF PLAN INTERNATIONAL

“GIRLS ARE THE ONES WHO ARE GOING TO EDUCATE TOMORROW'S LEADERS, AND THEY ARE THE ONES WHO ARE IN CHARGE OF CHANGING THE WORLD.”

GOEDELE LIEKENS

has been UNFPA’s Goodwill Ambassador for Belgium for over 15 years. As a clinical psychologist and sexologist, she talks to Girls’ Rights Gazette about why good sex education and female empowerment are vital for all our wellbeing.

Girls’ Rights Gazette: You joined UNFPA’s team just before the Millennium Development Goals were adopted in 2000. What results have you seen in the past 15 years?

Goedele Liekens: I’ve travelled to a lot of countries, and I have seen that we have really changed a lot of things for the good since 2000. Things like female literacy and lifting people out of poverty. And for the goals related to sexual and reproductive health things have really improved. One of the nicest results I’ve seen lately was in Ethiopia, where they have made great progress in the fight against female genital mutilation (FGM). It’s gone from 90% of the girls being cut in certain areas down to less than 10%. These kinds of examples we can find all over the world. We have seen that things can change for the better – it just takes a little energy and a little money – not even that much!

GRG: Have there been things that haven’t improved? What are the biggest challenges that girls face when it comes to realising their sexual and reproductive health and rights?

GL: For me the big issue that still needs to be addressed is unplanned pregnancies. I think that you should get pregnant – as we always say – by choice, not by chance. That’s a really important thing, for the personal development of both the mother and the child. This is a much broader issue than simply the number of children a woman has. The impact of having unplanned pregnancies is huge on the personal level, but also on a social and psychological level for a society as a whole. For the wellbeing of women and girls everywhere it’s so important to stop it.

GRG: Why is it important to empower girls and young women from an early age, informing them of their sexual health and reproductive rights?

GL: For me this question is as fundamental as asking why it is important to eat and drink. Girls are the key to sustainable development. Girls are the ones who are going to educate tomorrow’s leaders, and they are the ones who are in charge of changing the world. So we need to educate girls, and they have the right to make their own, informed, decisions. This is a crucial matter.

GRG: How important are men and boys in promoting gender equality and respect?

GL: One of the biggest challenges is to involve men and boys more and more in sex education, gender equality and women’s empowerment. I’ve seen it work, for instance in Ethiopia where young boys are given sex education and are already aware of, and talking about, FGM. We can’t do it on our own and men are not our enemies. On the contrary; it’s just that they often don’t have the right information. If we inform the men then most of them will say, ‘Well, let’s give girls all the education they need’. If we don’t involve them then it’s as if we’re working against them, and that’s exactly the opposite of what we want to achieve. We want gender equality. We don’t want equality to go in reverse and defeat itself.

“I WOULD LIKE MY COMMUNITY TO BE FREE, OPEN AND READY TO EMBRACE CHANGE. I WANT TO SEE A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE IS EQUAL. GIRLS RIGHTS AND VOICES SHOULD BE LISTENED TO AND RESPECTED BECAUSE THEY ALSO DESERVE JUSTICE.”

ANTONIA, 17, FROM KENYA
CROSSWORD

ACROSS
3. The leading cause of death for adolescent girls in developing countries
4. Can be physical or emotional
8. To make a girl stronger and more confident, especially in controlling her life and claiming her rights
9. Conserves an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources
10. In football or in sustainable development, they are worth achieving
11. Makes children visible in the eyes of law right from their birth
13. The practice or principles of social equality

DOWN
1. Relations between men and women, boys and girls
2. Working together
5. Boys and girls not getting the same rights and opportunities
6. Provided at school
7. Applies to everyone, everywhere
12. A young person
14. Anyone under the age of 18, according to the UN

WHO SAID WHAT?

1. “I will be the most vocal male feminist in the European Commission.”

2. “We are committed to ensuring that every adolescent girl, regardless of her age, culture or background has access to equitable and quality education and importantly expresses her right to live and not be a child bride.”

3. “If we stop defining each other by what we are not, and start defining ourselves by who we are, we can all be freer, and this is what HeForShe is about. It’s about freedom.”

4. “Let this be the last time that a girl is told education is a crime and not a right.”

ALPHABET SUDOKU

Place the letters from the word EDUCATION in the grid, such that each row, column and 3x3 box contains each letter only once.

TRUE OR FALSE?

A. The sustainable development goals aim to end poverty in Africa.

B. Over half of the world’s population are children and youth.

C. During the Asian Tsunami in 2004, more men were killed than women.

D. A girl is much more likely to go to school if she lives in a rural area.

E. Globally, women earn about 76% of the amount paid to men.
GOALS FOR GIRLS POST-2015: WIN, LOSE OR DRAW?

A visual guide to girls and the Sustainable Development Goals. View the full gallery at plan-international.org/eu.

Goal 1: No poverty
Goal 2: Zero hunger
Goal 3: Good health and wellbeing
Goal 4: Quality education
Goal 5: Gender equality
Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation
Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy
Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth
Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure
Goal 10: Reduced inequalities
Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities
Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production
Goal 13: Climate action
Goal 14: Life below water
Goal 15: Life on land
Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions
Goal 17: Partnership for the goals

PUZZLE ANSWERS

QUIZ
1: c 2: a 3: c 4: b
WHO SAID WHAT?
1: a 2: b 3: a 4: c
TRUE OR FALSE?
a: False, the SDGs framework is universal, meaning that all member states without exception will have to implement it.
b: True, and about 90% of them live in developing countries.
c: False, up to 45,000 more women than men died.
d: False, school attendance for adolescent girls is 37% higher in cities than in rural areas.
e: True, it is estimated that at current rates it will take 75 years before women can expect to be paid the same as men for the same work.

WORD SEARCH
UNLOCK THE POWER OF GIRLS
#GIRL4PRESIDENT