

Hope for the girl child

A Briefing Paper to the United Nations
Commission on the Status of Women at its 51st session
February 2007



prepared by World Vision

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Hope for the girl child: A briefing paper to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at its 51st session

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Cover images clockwise from top left:

Sahina, 7, lives in a slum in India, holding out a bouquet of flowers **photo:** Jon Warren/World Vision; at a conference on "Good Family Treatment" in El Salvador, boys and girls discussed ideas about how they expect to be treated by adults **photo:** Katia Maldonado/World Vision; Prudence is an orphan who lives with her grandmother, Jeanne, in one of World Vision DRC's Area Development Programmes **photo:** Lisa Jolly/World Vision; villagers walk regularly to their cassava farm, which is 9 miles one way from their home plots **photo:** Jon Warren/World Vision; innovative teaching methods help to improve the educational and recreational activities of children **photo:** World Vision

hope for the girl child

a briefing paper

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities world-wide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. As followers of Jesus, World Vision is dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. World Vision serves all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

Children are often most vulnerable to the effects of poverty. World Vision works with each partner community to ensure that children are able to enjoy improved nutrition, health and education. Where children live in especially difficult circumstances, surviving on the streets, suffering in exploitative labour, or exposed to the abuse and trauma of conflict, World Vision works to restore hope and to bring justice.

World Vision recognises that poverty is not inevitable. Our Mission Statement calls us to challenge those unjust structures that constrain the poor in a world of false priorities, gross inequalities and distorted values. World Vision desires that all people be able to reach their God-given potential, and thus works for a world that no longer tolerates poverty.

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Foreword

Gender injustice is among the world's greatest challenges. It drives so many other ills and affects more than half the world.

Even though the international community has made measurable progress in recent years with regard to gender equality, we still have a long way to go to create gender justice. A viable implementation and enforcement framework of existing laws and international conventions is still needed.

Study after study shows the positive impact of gender equality on sustainable development and on the well-being of children. As the former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, stressed, "When women are healthy, educated and free to take the opportunities life affords them, children thrive and countries flourish, reaping a double dividend for women and children."

UNICEF's latest publication, *The state of the world's children 2007*, shows how girls still lag behind in education and access to health.¹ It also examines the negative consequences of domestic violence, commercial sexual exploitation and harmful traditional practices – such as early marriage, premature pregnancy, female genital mutilation and infanticide. The report stresses the urgent need to address these issues through a gender lens.

World Vision is committed to justice, gender equity and children. These values are translated into action on a daily basis through investing in the lives of women and girls. As an organisation, we have committed to training our staff in gender equity and raising the awareness of communities, believing that information can empower change. To date, we have trained over 1,000 staff and community members with our World Vision Gender Training Toolkit.

This briefing paper is a collection of reports on the challenges and promising practices World Vision has witnessed through our work with girls and their communities. The authors all draw upon their experiences of daily work with girls in the context of sustainable development, and recommend steps toward achieving gender justice.

I urge you to take these reports, stories, and recommendations seriously: the girls of the world are counting on the international community to speak up for their rights.



Fatuma Hashi
Gender and Development Director
World Vision International

1. UNICEF, *The state of the world's children*; 2007.
<http://www.unicef.org/sowc07/report/report.php>

Preface

World Vision is a Christian organisation working for the well-being of poor and vulnerable people, especially children. We tackle the causes of poverty through sustainable development and disaster relief, and by raising public awareness and advocating for justice. We work in nearly 100 countries and, like many development organisations, we have witnessed the rewards of investing in girls.

We commit a quarter of our Area Development Project budgets to education alone, especially targeting girls. At the individual level, we support and supplement tuition and school supplies, and teach parents the value of education and the dangers of harmful traditional practices that often keep girls from school. At the collective level, we support the education of girls by building schools and roads to promote school access, and by advocating for quality, inclusive education.

Focusing on the girl child also requires a focus on gender equity. Governments, civil society and parents alike must prepare today's girls for adulthood while creating an environment where they will thrive, contribute and fulfil their potential as women. World Vision is committed to mainstreaming gender equity in every aspect of our work.

World Vision's hope for the girl child is for her to be valued, loved, educated, empowered and free to live life in all its fullness. It is a hope for boys and girls, men and women to share in healthy, equal partnership. Only then will the girl child be free of all forms of discrimination and violence. May we all be granted the will to make it so.



Ruthi Hoffman Hanchett
Gender, Advocacy and Communication Coordinator
World Vision International

Executive summary

This briefing paper to the member states of the Commission on the Status of Women at its 51st session shares some of World Vision's programmes and the lessons learned through our work to improve the status of the girl child.

Reports from five nations and four continents describe the context and the significant challenges facing girls, as well as some of the promising practices and recommendations for upholding their rights through education, empowerment, community change and the elimination of discrimination and violence.

Discriminatory attitudes, harmful traditional practices and violence are extremely detrimental to an intolerable number of girls and prevent us from reaching our Millennium Development Goals, the Dakar Framework for Action and the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) goals of gender parity in primary and secondary education. These goals, and real cultural and behavioural change, are not impossible; they must be sought with renewed commitment.

To truly eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against girls, action is required on all levels: international, national and local. World Vision calls upon all governments to address the problem of gender inequity, by providing a framework through which states can act, and citizens and development actors can help hold them accountable.¹

Action required by governments includes:

- documenting the abuses and progress of girls and making that information popularly known;
- adequately funding initiatives to ensure children's rights;
- improving school curricula, providing incentives to girls' education and ensuring free, compulsory and quality inclusive education for all children;

- upholding international treaties and enforcing laws, especially for the prevention of gender-based violence;
- empowering families economically to prevent worsening poverty and the harmful consequences of child labour and exploitation;
- providing adequate health services and abuse prevention systems to protect children; and
- educating all girls, boys, men and women on children's rights, women's rights and human rights, as well as their roles and responsibilities in upholding these rights through preventing violence and discrimination, and building gender equity in the home, community and nation.

Countries featured

El Salvador

Leon Rosales reveals that in El Salvador, like many nations, the victims of poverty – including girls, street children, women, child labourers, indigenous people, people who are disabled, and immigrants – are often ignored, suffering as forgotten people in a context of indifference, and these prejudices require deep cultural and individual transformation.²

Some of the worst forms of child exploitation in El Salvador include the commercial sexual exploitation of children, domestic labour and dangerous fishery work; the consequences are often devastating for the girls involved.

Mr Rosales reminds us that the elimination of child labour often requires innovative income-generating ideas for parents who rely on their children for income. Economic development, training and loans for parents help give children the freedom from exploitation to enjoy their childhoods and complete their education.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Frieda Mwebe explains how girls are so overburdened with chores and labour in the home that they are not able to prepare and rest for school. Thus, their education suffers and they are denied their children's rights.

World Vision's survey finds that though most boys, men and women know that girls are overloaded with work, little is done to help girls or share in their workload. This is due to beliefs about gender and a "girl's role", and to the economic situation of the nation.

Ms Mwebe points out that the state is committed by the DRC constitution to disseminate and teach people the constitution and all other conventions related to human rights. She recommends that governments act swiftly to educate parents on children's and women's rights and the importance of leisure time to girls' education and well-being.

Armenia

The team from World Vision Armenia's Child Protection Programme shares some of the lessons learned from working to protect children's rights in especially difficult circumstances, including institutions.

Believing that a healthy family environment is the best place for children to grow up, World Vision (in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) focuses on strengthening families and communities to care for their own children and to de-institutionalise children.

However, even as temporary solutions, these institutions deserve attention as they are often rife with abuse and neglect. This is due to the poor education and harmful attitudes of staff that do not encourage girls in careers or education; many girls end up pregnant, married early or exploited in prostitution after leaving such institutions at the age of 15.

World Vision Armenia calls upon states to improve the quality of these institutions while working to make them obsolete. To achieve this, states must initiate children into safe family environments as soon as possible, support families so they can de-institutionalise children, build gender equality, and teach parents a rights-based approach to parenting and new parenting skills that will enable their girl children to be self-confident and successful.

India

Reena Samuel describes one of the most harmful practices in India: the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

This report examines the prostitution of girls and the Devadasi system, which sexually exploits girls and women and traps them in cycles of poverty and abuse in the name of tradition and religion. World Vision India works with women and children in the sex trade to empower them with alternative income choices, raise awareness of the harms of the sex trade and educate their families and communities to protect and prevent children from entering and repeating the same cycle.

Fundamentally, the basis of this exploitation is the unequal power and economic balance between a girl child and a male adult. Ms Samuel reminds governments and citizens that laws will have little effect if we do not have concern for these girls and women as fellow human beings, deserving of rights, our protection and care.

Ghana

Teenage pregnancy, early marriage and child labour are the primary challenges to the development of the girl child in Ghana. Joyce Jackson shares some of the results of a recent WV Ghana child rights survey that identified the need to empower children, especially girls. It calls for a government-sponsored massive sensitisation of the public on child rights and the effects of gender inequity, child labour, and abuse on the growth and development of children.

Through case studies and in their own words, children express their desire for more committed teachers, clean water, parental involvement in their education, and for girls to be treated with the same respect as boys in school.

1. Development actors include international entities, such as the World Bank, and smaller groups, such as community-based organisations and faith-based organisations.
2. Gutiérrez, G, *Hablar de Dios, en América Latina, desde los socialmente insignificantes*, Revista Latinoamericana de Teología Centro de Reflexión Teológica Universidad centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, mayo-agosto, año XXII., San Salvador; 2005.

Written statement

prepared for the 51st United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

New York, USA

26 February – 9 March 2007

submitted by World Vision International

World Vision International welcomes the 2007 Commission on the Status of Women's (CSW) focus on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.

Over the last 10 years, 189 countries have adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with strong recommendations to improve the status of the girl child. The Millennium Development Goals have again focused the world's attention on the girl child and the necessity of gender equity for the alleviation of poverty. Yet today, while the international community has seen great progress, governments are still struggling to fulfil their commitments. More must be done to protect girls from the countless acts of injustice they suffer and to provide an environment in which they will thrive.

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, World Vision is dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race ethnicity or gender.

World Vision works within nearly 100 nations realising that gender equity is not only key to the prevention of discrimination and violence, but also essential for sustainable development, peace and the achievement of healthy and just relationships. As a child focused organisation, we prioritise the poorest and most vulnerable children and empower them and their families and communities to improve child survival, development, protection and participation.

World Vision works alongside communities to challenge harmful traditional practices that hurt girls, to

foster respect and value for girls, and to empower girls to be active participants of their own development and become leaders of their communities.

For the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, World Vision calls upon the CSW Member States to uphold children's rights through educating girls and preventing violence.

Uphold children's rights

The principle of non-discrimination and the right to protection from abuse and exploitation are some of the cornerstones of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and yet the abuse and discrimination of girls too often go unnoticed and unpunished. In order to protect the rights of girls, states must uphold the CRC, gender inequity must be addressed, and all people sensitised to children's and women's rights.

World Vision recommends that governments:

1. Work with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to commit to adequately recording social statistical data by disaggregating records of women and girls, men and boys, and create indicators and monitoring systems to track the status of the girl child.
2. Enforce the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its two Optional Protocols, with funding and accountability mechanisms, and enhance the political will needed to do so, as governments are legally bound by the conventions. Ensure that all citizens understand the provisions of the conventions and other laws for

the protection of human rights, and the importance of the prevention of violence and abuse to protect vulnerable girls and women. This can be achieved through school curricula and through educating all children, parents, teachers, welfare and law enforcement officers on children's rights and human rights.

3. Reduce child labour and ensure completion of primary and secondary education by empowering parents, especially mothers, with income-generating skills and by providing them with loans for small businesses and market access for their products.
4. Enhance health care delivery in rural areas by providing additional health care facilities, increased medical personnel (including traditional birth attendants), and increased access to medication, including anti-retroviral drugs, and work together with civil society to reduce the stigma and discrimination that surround people affected by HIV and AIDS.
5. Support the formation of community-based abuse prevention activities, including child protection committees, mentoring programmes, provision of day care centres for children of working parents, and psychological, legal and social support to families and orphaned children. Work with parents to promote a rights-based approach to parenting and gender equality, and support them in learning new parenting skills, including non-violent forms of discipline that will enable their girl children to develop self-confidence and the will to achieve.
6. Engage men and boys to create gender parity: encourage them to contribute to the work of household chores and to challenge violence and gender roles and traditions that are unjust and harmful.

Educate girls

High illiteracy rates among women and lower school attendance rates among girls, especially at the secondary level, constitute discrimination against the girl child. Unreasonable workloads in the home, preferences for sons, a disregard for the rights of girls, early marriage, child labour, poverty, and the threat of violence keep too many girls from completing their education and

trap them and their families in cycles of poverty. World Vision and the international community acknowledge that the education of girls is one of the most effective methods for the development of a nation and the eradication of poverty, and that educating girls also protects them from discrimination and violence.

To this end, World Vision recommends that governments:

7. Prioritise girls' education through committing a significant portion of the national budget to ensure free, compulsory and quality inclusive education for all (including children with disabilities). Incentives like school feeding programmes, providing uniforms and books, career education, and boarding facilities and scholarships for higher education motivate and ensure high retention and completion rates.
8. Improve the quality of education. Reform curricula to better engage girl children and eliminate gender-biased language; apply innovative teaching methods and learning materials that encourage boys and girls to challenge harmful traditional roles and adopt equitable relationships; raise awareness of children's rights; prepare girls for the workplace; and provide incentives to attract and maintain quality teachers, especially in rural areas.
9. Ensure that reproductive health and sex education are taught in the classroom and encourage values-based decision making. Challenge harmful and risky behaviour, and empower children and youth to avoid unwanted sex, with the prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections as a central tenet.
10. Ensure girls who are orphaned, married girls, pregnant girls and teenage mothers stay in traditional school programmes. Develop training courses for teachers to understand girls' needs. Provide specialised educational programmes and materials of good quality that incorporate life skills including literacy, numeracy, health and income-generating skills for children with disabilities, institutionalised children, girls who have previously dropped out of school,

and girls in especially difficult circumstances. Incorporate recreation time and flexible school schedules so youth may continue their education and transform the lives of their daughters, families, selves and society.

Prevent violence

The majority of the world's women and girls will experience violence; whether it's physical, psychological or sexual violence, it plagues every community and many homes. Violence damages health, can prevent education and economic ability, and can forever scar the girl's spiritual, psychological and emotional well-being. States must take extraordinary action to protect their most vulnerable citizens: girl children.

To this end, World Vision recommends that governments:

11. Prevent all forms of child abuse, through community-based education and sensitisation. Educate men and boys especially on their roles in preventing violence against the girl child and the rights of the girl child to be free of sexual exploitation; educate girls on their rights and empower them to recognise and even prevent abuse and unwanted sex.
12. Sensitise individuals, communities and law protection forces to understand, recognise and protect women and girls who are trafficked and forced into prostitution; create and fund multinational and regional coalitions to stop human trafficking, prevent child sex tourism, and identify and prosecute traffickers and abusers of women and children.
13. Provide care centres, in partnership with NGOs, for counselling and restoring girls and women who are victims of violence, sexual exploitation, and abuse, and empower these girls and women through job skills training.
14. Fund and enforce the strict implementation of national policies on violence and discrimination against women and girl children and incorporate follow-up actions to the 2006 UN Secretary-General's study on Violence against Children and the 2006 UN Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women.

World Vision acknowledges the significant challenge of citizens to hold governments accountable. Therefore, we call on all CSW Member States to take seriously their previous commitments to girls' rights, women's rights and human rights. We urge governments to put mechanisms in place to enforce the implementation of their own commitments, to put power behind the treaties and agreements they endorse and sign. Furthermore, World Vision suggests partnership with social institutions and civil society – such as churches, councils of elders, women's and men's organisations, educators, children's clubs, community leaders and parents – to ensure the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.

Protecting girls in El Salvador

World Vision El Salvador

El Salvador has sufficient legal instruments to ensure dignity, integrity and justice for all individuals.

The government has recently committed to eliminating child labour through its National Plan 2006–2009 for the Eradication of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, in coordination with the International Labour Organization (ILO).¹

The Ministry of Education's National Plan 2021 includes alternative programmes, such as "Effective School Networks", which seek to improve the quality of educational services for children living in poverty and also form part of the government initiative "Solidarity Network", which gives a monthly payment to families in extreme poverty in an effort to increase school attendance.² Additionally, the Salvadoran government has adopted a number of international conventions to protect the rights of women and children (see table, p10).

Despite these achievements, disturbing violations of human rights persist in this country. Many forms of discrimination especially affect women, boys, and girls, mainly living in poverty.³ United Nations agencies have been measuring the Human Development Index for living standards in El Salvador, revealing alarming signs and exposing significant gaps between abundance and scarcity.

In reflecting on Latin America, Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez emphasises that poverty does not only come from the economic environment, but from "social atavisms, economic structures, social, cultural and gender prejudices..."; street children, women, child labourers, indigenous people, people with disabilities, and immigrants are ignored by the law, suffering as forgotten people in a context of indifference, and these deep prejudices require cultural and individual transformation.⁴

World Vision El Salvador urges more decisive efforts to protect children, especially girls, from grave violations, particularly by employing existing legislation, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

By examining the educational environment of the girl child and some of the worst forms of exploitation that harm girls in El Salvador, this paper offers recommendations to eliminate discrimination and violence against the girl child.



At a conference on "Good Family Treatment" in El Salvador, boys and girls discussed ideas about how they expect to be treated by adults.
photo: Katia Maldonado/World Vision

Political will

Local development institutions in El Salvador believe that government decision-makers lack the political will to act for the equal protection of individuals.⁵ Studies indicate that in many cases, leaders and those in charge of administering justice are unaware of international human rights legislation.⁶ The legal institutions meant to defend these rights also lack political backing and adequate financing.

An example of the lack of political will is that the Republic of El Salvador still has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), an instrument considered fundamental to improving and preserving the quality of life for women. Despite the creation and approval of laws and policies protecting women and children – such as the Code of the Family and Procedural Law of the Family (1994), Law Against Intra-family Violence (1996), General Law of Education (1996), National Women’s Policy (1997), and the foundation of the Salvadoran Institute for Women’s Development (an institution governing the Women’s Policy as a follow-up to the Beijing Conference⁷) – El Salvador has yet to effectively implement the provisions concerning domestic violence.⁸

Furthermore, after the ratification of international treaties, it is often left to the discretion of agencies to

enact the secondary laws required to make the spirit of the agreement a reality.

Salvadoran women’s associations acquired prestige following the 1992 Peace Accords that brought an end to 12 years of civil war. The vitality of these movements in the following years earned the country substantial participation in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.⁹ Yet, the nation has still not met its goal of achieving full rights and protection for women and girls. Obstacles remain because of social order favours the needs and perspectives of men, maintaining their power through attitudes that justify abuse and aggression against women and girls.

Beat Rohr, representative for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in El Salvador, affirmed that the 2004 Human Development Index indicates that women are 12 places behind men in El Salvador.¹⁰ This constitutes a tremendous challenge for groups working to promote the rights of women and girls.

The women’s movement has lost some of its power now that it has become more involved with and embedded in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and is subject to the constraints of cooperative agencies.¹¹ But it continues to have a presence, combating violence against women and girls, on the street and in the mass media, along with environmental groups that support

System	Instrument	Date signed	Date ratified
UN-CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)	May 1981	Legislative decree 7059, June 1981
UN	Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952)	November 1993	Legislative decree 754, 15 December 1993
UN	Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1967)	(declaration) 1967	
UN	Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974)	(declaration) 1974	
UN-ILO	Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation (1958)	12 April 1994	Legislative decree 78, 14 July 1994
UN	Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993)	(declaration) 1993	
UN-ECLAC	Beijing Platform for Action (1995)	(declaration) 1995	No required ratification
UN-ILO	Convention Concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value (1951)		12 October 2003
OAS	Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women (1948)	15 December 1950	Legislative decree 430, 23 August 1995

Some international instruments concerning women, adopted by the Salvadoran government. Source: UNDP (2004)



Children draw, paint, and participate in diverse activities that educate them in human rights
photo: Katia Maldonado/World Vision

human rights, such as Environmental Unity (UNES), and church groups.

Most international instruments regarding primarily women and children's rights were ratified after the 1992 Peace Accords. These Accords allowed the creation of the Attorney General's Office for Human Rights Defence (guardianship of the citizens before the state) and a National Civilian Police that ended the oppression by militarised bodies.

However, the role of the Attorney General's Office for Human Rights Defence has been reduced to simply an observer of the protection of human rights for women. This office will no longer be able to receive reports of abuses or to document, via investigation, the political participation of women.¹² The rights of women and girls do not appear to be a priority in the current political climate of El Salvador, making them more vulnerable to abuse and to economic, labour, domestic and cultural discrimination.

Educational environment

The governmental educational reform that began in 1995 has made great efforts to achieve equality, with basic education now reaching almost 100% of children through the opening of schools throughout the country. Access to education has increased to the extent that there is almost no place where elementary children cannot walk to school.¹³ There has been progress towards gender equality in access to education, and increasingly more boys and girls are at the appropriate educational level for their age.¹⁴

The Ministry of Education reported first grade coverage increased to 99.5% in 2002, as a result of the spread of schools. However, there was still largely inadequate access and coverage of preschool education; just over 51% of children aged 4–6 years were reportedly out of preschool.¹⁵

“First, I Learn” is an initiative financed by the US Department of Labor which promotes the right to education for children and teenagers at risk of work.¹⁶ Minister Darlyn Meza announced that the government would absorb, in 2007, the “levelling classes” system – proposed by the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) – to benefit children who are at risk of dropping out of school due to work.¹⁷ Compulsory fees in public schools up to 9th grade were eliminated through a majority vote by the Legislative Assembly.¹⁸

But there are still situations that prevent children from remaining in the classroom. Boys and girls are beginning to leave school in the third grade. And only 40% of the children who start secondary school continue with their studies.¹⁹ Among the reasons children give for not going to school are: “I have to work”, “There's no money” and “I'm not interested.”²⁰

Absenteeism among girls is not only due to a demand for work and a lack of money, but because girls are expected and required to stay home to do housework.

According to UNICEF, persistent child labour prevents us reaching the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education (goal 2) and gender equality in primary and secondary education (a key indicator of goal 3).²¹

The low appeal of schooling is another issue in El Salvador. According to Ernesto Schifelbein – an expert and international adviser of public education from the Harvard Education Institute – students learn little because the “frontal” method used: the teacher leads the class with dictation and memorisation instead of mobilising the children's mental faculties through intelligent questions.²²

Educational studies indicate that girls generally perform better academically. However, teachers don't attribute this to intellectual ability, but rather to stereotypical gender characteristics (i.e. being quiet, well-behaved).

Unfortunately, in most classrooms a masculine language prevails whereby teachers devalue girls' responses and respond more positively to boys' use of language.²³ Quite frequently, teachers will assign the girls to school jobs that are traditionally female roles, such as mopping, sweeping and decorating, reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Another violation of the rights of girls is the lack of sex education. This system of information denial is supported by the belief that less information reduces early sexual activity and unplanned pregnancies, but results indicate the opposite effect: 36% of children born in the country are born to girls under the age of 18.²⁴

Discrimination against children: especially onerous to girls

First and foremost, it is essential to note that if women suffer from discrimination and their needs and problems are unseen, the situation is even worse for girls. Yet, as a specific population group, girls are insufficiently covered in national statistics. In the documentation that does exist, most of the data on children does not further disaggregate by gender, making analyses difficult.

Sadly, many children, both boys and girls, suffer verbal, physical, psychological and sexual abuse in their own homes; but the proportion of girls who suffer sexual abuse and rape is greater.²⁵ The physical punishment, emotional violence, negligence and sexual abuse that many boys and girls experience within their homes is perpetrated by relatives, close friends and their own fathers. The abuse of children, especially children with disabilities, that takes place in the home is often invisible and left unpunished.²⁶ Mistreatment and sexual abuse have serious repercussions on the dignity, health and development of children. Most violations and abuse are not reported partly because of a demonstrated lack of follow-through and trust in local authorities.

Both boys and girls also experience violations of their rights through child labour. According to the *2003 Salvadoran Multiple Purpose Homes survey (Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples)* cited by the ILO, there were "288,221 boys, girls, and adolescents performing some type of labour activity, remunerated or not".²⁷

Although both boys and girls suffer mistreatment and abuse, the situation for girls is far worse in terms of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and domestic work.²⁸



Veronica, 12, enjoys sweet buns from the oven her mother received from Word Vision's Micro-economic Development programme. Her mother also undertook nutritional training through World Vision, helping Veronica who was malnourished.
photo: Andrew Goodwin/World Vision

Exploitation

What are the worst forms of exploitation that harm girls? The ILO classified the worst forms of child labour in El Salvador as:

- commercial sexual exploitation;
- fishery work (mainly for molluscs gathered in mangrove swamps);
- gathering materials to be sold from garbage dumps;
- manufacturing fireworks;
- harvesting sugarcane; and
- domestic work at home and in the homes of others.²⁹

All these entail many physical risks and are often denigrating. In this report, we focus on the situation of girls in commercial sexual exploitation, domestic work and fishery work.

Commercial sexual exploitation

One of the most damaging forms of child labour in El Salvador is commercial sexual exploitation. According to the ILO, this terrible abuse mainly affects children from the lowest classes, many who still live with their parents. This horrific abuse of children does not even belong in the category of "labour" since it is in fact violence and abuse committed against children, especially girls.

Among the ILO research sample of prostituted children in the metropolitan area of the capital, 40% attend school, 4% have a secondary education, but 20% have not completed secondary school. Girls, who are more abused than boys in commercial sexual exploitation, are at risk of deteriorating health and frequently contract sexually transmitted infections, even HIV. As a result of the abuse and trauma of this exploitation, they experience anxiety, feelings of guilt and worthlessness, suicidal thoughts, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, fear, sadness, and other emotionally scarring conditions.³⁰

Furthermore, sexually exploited girls risk becoming pregnant (9.6%), being physically attacked (29.8%), experiencing police abuse (21.3%), receiving insults (50%), and having access to drugs (42.6%) and alcohol (37.2%).³¹ According to the ILO, the largest group of sexually exploited children is in the age range of 11 to 17, although their first sexual experiences typically happen earlier (between the ages of 10 and 14, but even as young as six), often when they are raped. It must be noted that children subjected to sexual exploitation have often previously suffered mistreatment and abuse from their families.

Domestic work

Another of the worst forms of child labour for girls is exploitation through domestic work that becomes a type of slavery and can include harassment and physical, emotional and sexual abuse. According to the Public Opinion Institute of the Central American University (Instituto de Opinión Pública de la Universidad Centroamericana, UCA), cited by the UNDP, 97% of hired domestic work is done by women.³² Many young people abandon their communities looking for a job in the cities as maids and are then exposed to exhausting work with little rest, no social benefits and a salary lower than the minimum wage of the cities (around US\$152 a month).

Fishery work

Mollusc fishing conjures up images of very dangerous work for young boys. Yet in El Salvador, girls are equally involved in this hazardous occupation. The situation of poverty in the mangrove lined coastal zones of the country means that boys and girls are often forced to pick molluscs. Children have to swim, sail on canoes, or walk to the places where they carry out their work. Generally, they look for the molluscs in swampy soil

interlaced with an intricate system of mangrove roots exposed at the ebb tide and in caves of putrefied mud. After paying off the “coyote” brokers a family will take home only \$2.50 for about 60 shells gathered, while popular mollusc cocktails with eight to 10 shells sell for \$3 dollars at city restaurants.

World Vision’s response

World Vision (WV) El Salvador seeks to eliminate child exploitation and to allow girls and boys to attend classes regularly. This requires alternative income generation for families, such as fishponds, the introduction of plantation cultivation, and other innovations. Job skills training and small loans also improve families’ financial situations and work to eliminate child labour, also making children less vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

All of WV’s work to alleviate poverty, to empower women, to educate communities on children’s rights and the value of the girl child, and to challenge harmful traditional practices and attitudes help to protect girls from these worst forms of exploitation. We also encourage teachers to use methodologies that address the diverse learning styles and preferences of children in situations of poverty and exploitation.

Despite the government’s progress in the legal field, policies to protect girls and women against all forms of discrimination and mistreatment are not yet effective. There is a deficiency of information categorised by gender, making it difficult to analyse the true status of the violence and discrimination against girls and rendering them invisible in records and policies.

To address these issues, World Vision makes a number of recommendations for action by a range of development actors, internationally, nationally and locally.

In particular, World Vision recommends that the government:

Protect human rights

1. Work with NGOs to adequately record social statistical data by creating indicators and monitoring systems to track the status of the girl child.
2. Uphold international treaties on human rights, turn ratified international agreements into concrete national laws for the eradication of human rights violations

“Ana”³³

“It is watered-down, there is a lot of mud, and when you step into it, you sink. The mud stinks and sometimes there are thorns or pieces of shells that wound our feet and hands...”³⁴

This is a common description made by children that work daily in the mangrove swamps, where they pick shells to generate income to help sustain the family.

Ana, 12, is the eldest of three children and lives in Cantón San Felipe, Municipio de Concepción Batres, Usulután. She studies first grade in a school located about 300 metres from her house. She has been in first grade for two consecutive years. “My mom did not have money, that is why she did not send me to school until I was 11 ... although the other children go to school at seven, eight or nine years.”

Ana said she only goes to school from Wednesday to Friday because on Monday and Tuesday she goes to work in the mangrove swamp. “Besides, I wash clothes, run errands, haul water, sweep...” she says.

She confesses that she hardly knows how to read and that she writes with no confidence. What do the teachers say when she misses many classes? “Nothing,” she answers.

Ana says that in the future she wants to continue going to the mangrove swamp even though school is more fun and the mosquitoes do not bite there and her hands do not get wounded.

Her hands are big and strong, as a worker. Her face is tender, innocent, almost angelic. Her words and silence reveal that poverty is something natural for her. Her mother has taught her not to mention their suffering to strangers.

To take advantage of the daylight they start at 6am and end at 3pm, when they sail home to return the rented canoe to its owner. When the tide is favourable, Ana’s family goes to an island and spends the night outside under the relentless attack of mosquitoes. They smoke, even the children, to drive away the mosquitoes while picking the molluscs.

and work with civil society to ensure the fulfilment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (Ratify the Optional Protocol of CEDAW and enforce this with funding, accountability mechanisms, and political will. Strengthen the National Institute for Children and Adolescents with political and financial power to enforce the Convention of the Rights of the Child, especially to prevent abuse and child labour, and ensure every child’s right to education.

Child labour and abuse

3. Create and fund coalitions to stop the trafficking of children and child sex tourism, and to prosecute traffickers and abusers of children.
4. Create rehabilitation centres to address the many needs of sexually exploited children.
5. Prioritise programmes that facilitate the participation of poor families in decision making and reduce child labour through new income-generating ideas for parents; economic development, training and loans for parents to help free children from exploitation, enjoy their childhoods and complete their education.

Education

6. Fulfil commitments to free, universal, quality, primary education and improve the access and quality of education (including early education) in remote and poor communities by applying new solutions to keep students in school, including meal incentives, and teaching parents the importance of education.
7. Include sex education in school curricula that challenges harmful and risky behaviours, encourages responsibility, and empowers children and youth to avoid unwanted sex.
8. Promote continued education, prioritising young women and mothers, linking education with women and girls’ productive, political and cultural opportunities.
9. Train teachers and raise awareness to eliminate sexist language and gender inequity in the classroom; equip teachers to address the diversity of learning styles.

Equality

10. Work to promote new definitions of masculinity that reject aggression and abuse and encourage mutual respect and collaboration.
11. Municipalities should encourage the participation of women and adolescents in development and politics; extend and deepen the role of the Women's National Institute (ISDEMU) to play a more active role, not only in dealing with intra-family violence but also in the field of women's participation in politics and labour.



by León A Rosales, Education Quality Assessor, World Vision El Salvador

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Beyond enrolment: the impact of household duties on girls' education

World Vision Democratic Republic of Congo

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), past efforts by government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to encourage girls' education have led to higher levels of enrolment of girls in school. This result is laudable, especially in light of the unrest of the recent years. Yet discrimination continues to limit educational opportunities for many girls. Much more than boys, girls are required to fulfil a wide range of household tasks, which limit their time and energy for homework. Government and non-governmental agencies need to continue working beyond the promotion of enrolment to examine issues and change attitudes and behaviours which limit girls advancing in their education.

National context

The 32-year dictatorship of Mobutu was characterised by mismanagement of public affairs and corruption leading to the deterioration of social systems and basic infrastructures, including health centres, schools, provision of safe potable water, and agriculture extension services. Following Mabutú's rule, in 1998 the DRC was ranked 143rd on the UNDP Human Development Index.¹ The overall situation of the country was further degraded due to the 5-year war with rebels backed by the Rwandan–Ugandan–Burundian coalition. The resulting breakdown of the family and increased children's rights violations within and outside the family have coincided with the violence and deterioration of the nation over the last decades.

Unfortunately, the children of the DRC have experienced a high prevalence of child rights abuses in the recent decade. An estimated four million lives have been lost in the violent conflict since 1998 and many of them were children. The Secretary-General to the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict reporting on the situation of the DRC

declared that serious violations of children's rights are continuing with impunity. The practices noted include the recruitment and use of children in armed forces; group abduction; sexual violence and sexual slavery; killing; maiming; and attacks on schools by dissident groups in the conflict areas. In addition, in 2003 the international NGO Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict reported that the DRC was a significant country of origin for trafficking in persons. Congolese women, presumably including girls, were trafficked to Europe, mainly France and Belgium, for sexual exploitation.²

Some notable improvements have been made regarding the recruitment of child soldiers; many have been demobilised and returned to their families or communities. Cases of child abuses, such as rape and other dehumanising physical punishment, have been reported to the DRC courts and fines or jail terms have been imposed. Appropriate actions are being taken by UNICEF in collaboration with the Women and Family Ministry together with child protection networks. Within this context of human rights violations, many girls continue to pursue education as a means to a better future.

Girls' education

One of the mandates of UNICEF is the support of girls' education through the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). The goal of this initiative was to attain gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005. (This was a target shared by the Millennium Development Goals and the Dakar Framework for Action.³) Another goal is to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete primary school.

The Education For All - Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) commenced in 2002 to promote quality education

in developing countries through infrastructure, learning material and capacity building. There are 30 bilateral and multilateral donors and UN agencies which comprise the EFA-FTI partnership, and the World Bank is the secretariat. While the World Bank has contributed funds towards the DRC to provide primary education for all Congolese children, the DRC government considered the contribution insufficient to cover the cost of teachers' salaries. The DRC now has an elected government which will be accountable for its National Plan and any funds that are received. One of the new president's priorities is education, but at present the government allows only 6% of its annual budget for this.⁴ The new government needs international support to ensure that the DRC enters the FTI, as there is currently no specific entry date.

Domains	%
primary school entrants reaching grade 5 (1997-2004)	54
secondary school enrolment ratio (2000-2004), male	24
secondary school enrolment ratio (2000-2004), female	13
secondary school attendance ratio (1996-2004), male	18
secondary school attendance ratio (1996-2004), female	15
adult literacy rate (2000-2004), male	80
adult literacy rate (2000-2004), female	52

Table 1: Some indicators related to education in DRC ⁵

UNICEF reports that on average in the DRC, 52% of boys were enrolled in primary school while 47% of girls were enrolled. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of enrolling girls at school and improvements have been made toward attaining the objective of gender parity. However, rural areas do not enjoy such equity in primary school enrolment.

A recent study conducted by Pact Congo in Katanga province indicated that the illiteracy rate among women in villages is as high as 99%, while in urban areas it is lower at 40% (i.e. 60% are literate).⁶

Women and girls need better education and equity in the DRC. The rate of school enrolment of children in urban areas is 71.6%, while in rural areas it is only 43.6%. The average rate of teenage pregnancy is 26%,

girls are abandoning schools due to pregnancy and early marriage.

There are few women in leadership positions within the government and the number of women depending on their spouse for survival is still very high due to their lack of education.⁷ Women's voices are often not heard within the family. This cultural value system is taught to children through daily exposure to the family life and the division of house chores. Boys learn what is normal through observation and imitate what they see their father and brothers are doing. The same applies to girls who know they must follow their mother's and sisters' model. Generally speaking, girls in the DRC do all chores related to the kitchen, care, shopping and cleaning, while boys do repairing, building and technical work.

Girls' education is not sufficiently supported because the culture and economic situation of the nation put pressure on girls to do most household work. There is gender inequality within families, which adversely affects girls' performance in school. The majority of



Estella, 15, was orphaned in 1994 by the war and holds her niece Shimene. During the 2002 volcanic eruptions in Goma, Shimene's mother went to the bathroom and never returned. Estella grabbed the baby and ran.
photo: Ellen Ericson Kupp/World Vision

the population with large families can't afford house workers as they are very poor and still struggle to get food and pay school fees for their children.

The DRC strategy of growth and poverty reduction outlines issues related to gender, girls' education and access to safe water.⁸ Only 12% of people in rural areas have access to potable water and only 37% in urban areas. The DRC's water supplier hasn't enough resources to adapt to the constant population growth, especially in towns. This means that not only are many girls denied the right to clean drinking water but they must spend good portions of their day securing water for their families.

Many children work for their families and various reports state that some travel more than 10 kilometres on foot to look for food and other provisions.⁹ The DRC will not achieve the Millennium Development Goals unless there is focus on this issue and action to release girls within the family so that they have enough time to concentrate on their studies.

Case study on household chores

Girls in grade six were chosen as a point of focus for this case study because this is a critical year for students. In the DRC, grade six students must take a selective exam, similar to a state exam, which marks the end of primary school and is compulsory for access to secondary school. If a student fails this exam, he or she will not graduate but might repeat the year. Good performance at this level is crucial to the child's educational future and critical for parents who struggle to pay school fees.

Kafubu Schools: Schooling year 2004–2005	girls	boys
total enrolled	699	753
percentage of those who "did well"	68.37%	68.36%

Table 2: Performance indicators of 11 schools in Kafubu schools,¹⁰ Kimilolo ADP (note: this table is not a comparison of school quality)

Primary school	girls	boys
total enrolled	875	737
number of students who "did well"	655	579
percentage of those who "did well"	75%	78%

Table 3: Performance indicators of primary school for sponsored children of WV Kimilolo ADP¹¹

A study was conducted in the Operational Development Area of World Vision (WV) called Kimilolo Area Development Programme (Kimilolo ADP) which includes three sites (Kafubu, Bongonga and Kampemba); Kafubu schools were targeted for the research. Kimilolo is a suburb of Lubumbashi town, which is a peri-urban site where the population is generally poor and households have an average of six children. Families survive on a combination of farming activities, casual labour, working for the government (low-level civil service) or operating a small business. The study aimed to:

- demonstrate how household chores are distributed among children in a family (between boys and girls)
- establish the correlation between daily chores for girls and their performance in school
- elicit lessons and make recommendations on appropriate actions that may help improve girls' education by creating an environment that enables academic development

Interviewees were asked about the household chores of boys and girls, the amount of time devoted to such chores and who did them. Participants discussed the daily activities of family members and the quality of student performance.

Data collection and sample

The study employed interviews with guided survey questions, focus group discussions and secondary population data. The five focus groups involved the girls of a grade six class, boys only, women only, men only, and teachers and development workers who are responsible for children sponsored by WV.

Over 150 participants responded to the questionnaire either in focus groups or interviews. Adults selected for interviews had either a child in primary school or were non-parents who worked with children aged 10–14 years.

Results (secondary data)

In the DRC in general, the rate of girls' primary school enrolment is very close to that of boys. In Kimilolo ADP, girls' enrolment is almost as high as boys but this may be because girls are more frequently selected for inclusion in WV's sponsorship programmes that help families pay for school (see Table 2). However, enrolment is still only at about half what it should be and drops dramatically for girls in secondary school.



Prudence is an orphan who lives with her grandmother, Jeanne, in one of World Vision DRC's Area Development Programmes. "War has torn my family apart," says Jeanne. "If not for World Vision, how could I take her to school? She's been very sick three times. How could I take her to the hospital?"
 photo: Lisa Jolly/World Vision

In the DRC, children are admitted into the upper grade when they have earned scores of at least 55% in all major courses such as mathematics, reading, writing, and speaking, and when they have earned average scores in the remaining courses such as ethics, hygiene, music and drawing. This is the standard for private and public schools. It is encouraging to note that according to the government data, girls perform equally as well as boys within these standard measures. Data from schools where WV is involved indicate again that girls perform nearly as well as boys in these required areas (see Table 3).

Results (primary data)

The following table shows the number of respondents by category and their awareness of girls' household responsibilities. From this table it is clear that most of

the study participants are aware of the extra burden that girls bear.

Girls' interviews and focus group

This study was carried out at a time when significant progress has been made in girls' enrolment as a result of several awareness campaigns on girls' education.

Of 40 girl respondents, 15 were included in a focus group, while the remaining 25 were interviewed individually. All the girls included in the study were in grade six, the last year of primary school. Fifteen of the girls go to school in the afternoon, 10 in the morning, and the remaining 15 attend school both in the morning and afternoon with a weekly rotation. Three of the girls will repeat the year as their performances were below 50% overall, 10 passed with an average of 60% and above, three of the girls' performances were above 70%, and 21 will graduate with an average of 54%. All but one of the girls have brothers.

Ten girls reported waking up at 5am every morning and 30 others at 6am. The respondents reported that their daily duties include: sweeping, cleaning the house, fetching water, doing the dishes twice a day, buying groceries, cooking, serving meals to help their mothers, washing clothes for all the family and bathing their young siblings. They also do other household chores requested by the parents, especially their mothers, go to school, come back and start working again at home. At the end of the day they may chat a little bit or take a rest, then study for an hour in the evening if there is electricity.

Their brothers go to school, stay home or choose to visit their friends, play football with friends, study if they want to, are served their breakfast or lunch, then rest. Five out of 40 girls said that their brothers sometimes

Groups	Number of participants	Number of people aware of girls' daily chores	Number of people unaware of girls' daily chores
girls	40	40	0
teachers & WV social workers	28	20	8
women	52	52	0
men	20	15	5
boys	10	4	6
total	150	131	19

Table 4: Case study findings – awareness of girls' daily chores

Louise

Louise, a 13-year-old girl, has completed her primary school. Louise is not very happy with her life. She wakes up every day at six o' clock, even during the holidays. She does the washing up, sweeps the house or does other requested duties until 11.30. Then she prepares herself for school.

At noon she leaves for school without any lunch. When she comes back, she can eat or start preparing food.

After that she does dishes again then goes to fetch water. Because of the crowd it can take up to three or four hours to get water from the local borehole, especially during the dry season. Then she carries water home in the evening at around eight o'clock.

"At the end of the day I'm exhausted and some days I just sleep without practicing my lessons or even drafting my homework," said Louise. "I don't have time to really go through my work before I submit it. I was admitted in first secondary form only with 56% but I'm sharp and could do better if I could have more time to concentrate on my studies.

"Even when I decide to read I'm often interrupted for other household chores. It is always my mother who says she is very tired after selling in the market. If I don't help my mother she will not have enough time to earn money for our education.

"I have three older brothers but they do nothing to help. My sisters are young; two of them help me sometimes with dishes but they are too young and they enjoy playing."

help them to carry water containers from the boreholes on their bicycles, when they want to give them a hand. "We don't have time to play," all girls in the focus group agreed. "If there is spare time, we do need a rest."

Girls also worried about accessing potable water. "I wake up early, around five, to get water before I go to school but sometimes the queue is so long and women don't give us priority," says a girl named Clementine. "As we have to go to school, we plea to have water just to wash and leave our empty container there, go to school and come back to the boreholes after class to queue again for at least two and a half hours." WV is working to provide water to improve the well-being of the children.

However, governments and communities must note that even where there are taps, pipelines do not work every day. This situation increases the burden on girls and they often spend hours looking for safe water.

The large number of daily chores affects girls' performance at school since they have very little time, or no time at all, left for homework.

"I sometimes go to school without writing my homework," says Louise. "Sometimes even during exams period I just read on my way to school."

"I prepare my homework for one hour but sometimes I'm so exhausted that I find myself dozing or sleeping on my notebooks; but I have no choice," says another girl, Carine.

Boys' interviews and focus group

Among the 10 boys who participated in the focus group discussion, six showed no interest in what their sisters do and report that they spend all their days playing with their friends. They only come home for meals or to get ready for school.

All of the boys usually spend one hour preparing for their class lessons, devoting two hours when they have homework or when they are preparing for a test or exam. Otherwise, most of them spend their spare time playing.

Only four boys reported helping their sisters to fetch water or go to the market to buy food. All of them think it is the duty of girls to do household chores. They have nothing to do with those duties. The four boys who help their sisters think that it is not really an obligation for them but they do it when their sisters are overloaded.

Jean says, "When we wake up in the morning, I wash, have my breakfast and go to school; my sisters sweep and clean the house, do the washing up, wash our young sibling, prepare our breakfast, wash themselves and go to school. When they come back they help Mummy to cook or do some laundry, fetch water, have their meal and start studying."

Ngoy admits, "I don't help my sisters because whenever I tried, my friends laughed at me. It is their duty to get water from boreholes, prepare food and help Mummy with the house chores."

Nine-year-old Joe says, “I have no sister and my mother would like me to sweep every day and fetch water for her, and buy food at the market sometimes. But I have time to play, rest and prepare my tests every day. No one laughs at me because they know I have no sister.”

Teachers and World Vision staff interviews and focus group

Among the teachers and WV staff interviewed who work with WV-sponsored children, 20 were men and eight were women. They recognise that, in general, girls in the community are hard workers and very committed to their education. However, most were surprised to see the shift in terms of final performance at the end of the year.

Teachers and WV staff say that girls normally do well in class interaction and on all assignments given in the classroom immediately after teaching new material. However, when tested two weeks later or during examination sessions, they often fail when compared to their male counterparts. Their academic ability is hindered when required to study outside the classroom, since they have no free time like the boys.

This group of teachers and NGO workers do recognise that local girls are overloaded with household duties. In their own homes, 20 of the respondents, including the eight women, reported trying to create rest time for girls. This is in spite of the fact that their own daughters have the same tasks on their daily agenda as the standard list created by the girl respondents.

In general, it is considered normal for girls to work hard and to find the time for their study if they want to do well. Teachers reported that an incentive or reward for girls, such as a scholarship at primary level, could also motivate parents to help their girls to find more study time.

Women’s interviews and focus group

The women’s group was very proud to describe the initiative they are taking to help their daughters become successful women. Of the 52 female participants, three are employees, 20 run small businesses at the market and the rest (29) are housewives. A common feature they all shared was that in their homes children all do exactly the things described by the girls’ group.

Those women who stay home do not help with household work because they assume that their role is to

teach their daughters how to do the work. Most of their days are spent sitting and chatting with friends. These mothers did not receive an education and, in turn, often do not value the education of their daughters; they do not recognise children’s right to education.

Even for mothers who believe that their children need to be educated to thrive, their children’s education is often compromised because of the heavy burden placed on their daughters. For women who are employed to work outside the home, their daughters do all the work at home.

The women blame the government for not paying civil servants enough wages and for not providing job opportunities for their husbands. They find it unpleasant for a woman to leave her home at five in the morning and return when children are already in bed, especially as the fathers are casual labourers or go to farms just so the family may survive. When the men are home, they do not help with the housework but normally chat with their friends or gather somewhere for local beer, listening to the news or music.

The mothers know that their daughters do not have enough time to practice what they learn at school and they see the consequences, but offer no solution. They



Girls in the DRC often queue for hours to collect water for their families.
photo: Leigh-Anne Havemann/World Vision

believe and accept that this is a common fight at every level. At the same time, because of the strong cultural traditions, they will never split the household tasks among all the children. Only 10 of the 52 women (less than 20%) believe that their sons should help carry water if there is a bicycle.

Men's interviews and focus group

The men expressed views that also confirmed what the girls shared. Of the 10 men in the group, two were widowers and one was divorced, and seven were educated men who completed their secondary school, two of which had a university diploma. These higher-educated men were married, employed and reported that all the children of their household are involved in chores. The remaining three confessed that they do not know what their daughters do nor do they know about the division of work at home. "Our responsibility is to find some job in town as we are casual labourers. We are responsible for the survival of our family," they said.

These men do not acknowledge the fact that their daughters are also responsible for survival through providing water and food. Such a statement makes them laugh: "We are so surprised to hear you, what kind of woman are you? Don't you know that girls and women should do that but it can't count for family survival? They are just showing that they have been well initiated to social life and marriage." They report that most of the time they only come home at midnight or 11pm at the earliest.

For them, the government is responsible for the lack of work and creating a situation where each member of the family has to struggle to survive, including girls. Another man said, "Women are the ones who ask girls to do many chores, so they are perpetuating their own childhood. Whenever I tried to help her, even to set the table, my wife reminds me that it is her duty. I am concerned about the change of attitude of women themselves as they contribute mostly to that situation."

Children's rights

Some of the men interviewed argued that, indirectly, the government is responsible for what is happening to girls' education. To some degree they are right.

The government of the DRC is a signatory to the international Convention on the Rights of Child. With respect to girls' rights, this convention has been



"Oh my school, I love my school." Carine and Clementine, both 10 years old, from a school in Kimilolo. Education is a vital aspect of World Vision's work in the DRC.
photo: Leigh-Anne Havemann/World Vision

violated in the DRC; articles 3 and 29 promote the best interest and protection of the child in all actions, as well as provide the framework for children's education to contribute to the full development of the child.¹²

The examples in this paper indicate that girls' best interests are often ignored in the family: they do not have enough time to prepare for lessons, to play and to rest because of their family chores. The full potential development of girls is at risk when they are overloaded with household chores.

Parents in the DRC seem unprepared to protect and provide for the development of their girl children, therefore the government is advised to undertake measures to ensure children's well-being and protection within the family, in accordance with article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The DRC government should undertake measures and set up a monitoring system to show their commitment to protecting children against all kinds of violence within and outside the family, including abuses against girls' health, education and full development, as stated in the DRC constitution, articles 41 and 42.¹³

The state's obligation to disseminate information and teach people the constitution, and all other conventions related to human rights (as mandated in the DRC constitution, article 45:6¹⁴) is currently not being fully upheld and the state must emphasise women's rights, as well as children's rights and human rights, in order to do so.

Finally, article 47 of the DRC constitution describes citizens' rights to shelter, access to safe water and electricity.¹⁵ Yet, within the new district there is no water and many places have had no electricity for months. The lack of electricity is a challenge for girls who normally find time to do homework at night or evening and can't afford to buy a candle. The lack of water costs them three to four hours per day.

The DRC's constitution describes the commitment of the state to protect children, yet discrimination against girls remains firmly entrenched in the culture and mindsets of the majority of Congolese men and women. Most are trapped in traditional thinking about gender roles that prevent them from considering positive alternatives.

Yet, however difficult, change is possible. Just as campaigns to encourage the enrolment of girls in school have borne fruit over time, so too we can hope that campaigns to equalise household chores among all children and adults may change behaviours over time. This change will take a concerted effort by many stakeholders.

Recommendations

Most girls in the DRC have no leisure time or time for homework. They need both for their overall well-being and to develop intellectually. The lack of access to safe water and electricity exacerbates the problem and hinders the progress of children at school. Yet the cultural traditions perpetuated by families, and especially women, delay gender equity and continue to hurt and discriminate against girls. All people need to be liberated from these harmful traditional practices.

The articles mentioned above from the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the DRC constitution provide an advocacy framework through which the state can act, and citizens and the UN can hold the state accountable.

The DRC and the international community are in agreement that the achievement of the Millennium

Development Goals is crucial to the empowerment of girls and the eradication of poverty. Strong efforts must be made so that the targets are attained.

World Vision recommends that the government:

1. Promote human rights, children's rights and gender equity through school curricula and encourage boys and girls to challenge harmful traditional roles and adopt healthy, equitable relationships.
2. Educate adults about children's rights, their own human rights, the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter, the DRC national constitution and other binding agreements that are set up to improve the well-being of children, through government-sponsored campaigns, community meetings and special training for illiterate women and men.
3. Prioritise education in an effort to effectively apply the international Convention on the Rights of the Child. Commit at least 20% of national budget to education to ensure free, quality primary education for all; scholarships should be available to motivate and enable students to continue their education. The UN must support national efforts with additional funding and accountability mechanisms through the DRC's time of transition.
4. Review and budget for electricity and water distribution plans to enable girls to gain some time for their studies.
5. Raise awareness of the need for girls to have time to play and build fun time in to the school curriculum for the development of their intelligence and overall well-being. Encourage parents to provide the time for girls to play and rest. Encourage girls' clubs, recreation and learning opportunities after class at school or at church, and create parks and libraries to provide easy access to leisure time and places.
6. Engage men and boys in all public state institutions, and via civil society (including faith communities, private organisations and NGOs) to create gender parity especially with concern for the division of the household chores.

7. Set up a system to protect children and monitor violence within and outside the family and abuses against girls' health, education, and full development, as stated in the DRC constitution, articles 41 and 42.¹⁶



by Frieda Mwebe, Child Protection, Gender & Advocacy Coordinator, World Vision Democratic Republic of Congo

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Challenges facing institutionalised girls in Armenia

World Vision Armenia

It is estimated that 6–8 million children live in some form of institutional or residential care world-wide.¹ In Armenia, national legislation encourages the reintegration of institutionalised children into society and families. Despite these admirable and necessary intentions, unfortunately, an estimated 14,500 children are in special institutions.² The term “special institution” refers to both the institutions for children with disabilities and special needs, as well as the shelters for abandoned children or those without parental care. A survey conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance (MLSI) in cooperation with UNICEF in 2004 found that girls make up 47% of the children in Armenian state orphanages.³ Instances of abuse and violence in institutions are very common and children are often trapped in a cycle of institutionalisation that severely damages their ability to function in society.

Over half of these children were placed in institutions because of economic problems in their families and a lack of adequate social and economic safety nets. Additionally, children are institutionalised because of the inability of the traditional schooling system to cope with children who have special needs or behavioural difficulties. Communication links between parents and these children are sometimes permanently broken due to the lack of resources. While most children keep some ties to their families and around 60% of children visit their families on the weekends, reintegration causes friction and is difficult. Economic hardship and social vulnerability have created a cycle where children are put into unsustainable, under-funded institutions with no mechanisms to be reunified with their families, even though Armenian legislation encourages reintegration.

Institutional care in Armenia

For centuries, Armenian society was characterised by the predominance of family values and, in Soviet times,

it maintained one of the lowest rates of institutionalised children in the Soviet Union. The situation radically changed in the late 80s and in the 90s with the Spitak Earthquake in 1988, the ongoing Karabagh conflict, and an economic blockade accompanied by the transition of political, social and economic systems. In response to widespread unemployment, many parents emigrated to work in Russia and other nations, leaving their children in institutions where the quality of services progressively deteriorated.

The programmes of residential institutions do not provide children with special care, vocational training or life skills. They do not support children’s reintegration into mainstream society or strengthen their connections with their parents or extended biological families. Most state institutions in Armenia have no social worker or psychologist to support children and their families. These factors, accompanied by a lack of housing, have created an ongoing children’s crisis. All residential care institutions are detrimental to children when they reside on a permanent basis outside of a family-based environment (articles 8 and 9 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child).⁴



Children outside a neighbourhood school that is inclusive of children with special needs because of World Vision’s assistance in providing training, psychologists and social workers.
photo: Jon Warren/World Vision

Although many children are sent to institutions because of specific educational needs, there are no special programmes for them there, and none to help them reintegrate into public education. Globally, according to estimates by the World Health Organization, 98% of children with disabilities never receive an education and UNESCO estimates only 1% of girls with disabilities are literate.⁵ The fact that institutions do not accommodate these children's special educational needs contributes to these dismal statistics, which also reflect the reality in Armenia.

A high dependency produced by living in a "total institution" without developing self-sufficiency does not prepare children for life outside of the institution. The real consequences of such inadequate preparation and care become evident when adolescents leave. The ongoing absence of parental care deepens their vulnerability at this time. A child's crisis does not end when she leaves; all the vulnerabilities and deficiencies she may have acquired follow her into the outside world. Thus, the most vulnerable life period for these young girls continues during their years of adaptation, from 18 to 25 years of age.

Common problems faced by girl children leaving institutions

The typical problems of all institutionalised children are doubled for girls. Many factors contribute to this but primarily it is the negative cultural attitudes towards women and girls that hurt them.

- In general, all institutionalised children are stigmatised; girls are often stereotyped and labelled as "prostitutes" and "with no morals". Consequently, their chances for marriage are lower than other girls, and institutionalised girls often marry institutionalised boys who face similar challenges or someone else who is at high risk of being a poor partner for life.
- Girls in general are perceived as housekeepers and babysitters, both by their parents and society at large, with few opportunities for careers. The administrative and educational staff of residential institutions also share and demonstrate these attitudes; they do not encourage the continuation of girls' studies for higher education. As a consequence, many girls leaving institutions end up as poorly paid servants, without work, or in vulnerable or risky situations.
- Girl children face the reality of having to provide for

themselves immediately upon leaving the institution. With no education, shelter, life skills or any kind of supervision, they may be trapped into prostitution, begging and theft. Their lack of life skills is usually accompanied by psychological vulnerability, often putting them at risk of being trafficked to other countries.

- The absence of life skills and basic knowledge of reproductive health issues makes girls vulnerable to early pregnancies, thus increasing the number of "single mother" families.
- Even if girl children have shelter after leaving the institutions, they frequently are excluded from society. The discriminative attitude of neighbours and lack of social networks decrease their social protection. Without this social capital they are alone in this severe reality.

World Vision Armenia's child protection programme

World Vision (WV) came to Armenia in response to the devastating earthquake of December 1988. In the following years, our projects have gone beyond meeting the demands of crisis situations to changing the quality of life in entire communities and helping Armenians to restore their country. WV currently implements Area Development Programmes in various sectors of Armenia, through educational, health and micro-financing programmes.

In April 2004, WV Armenia started to implement the Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances (CEDC) programme to tackle the ongoing crisis faced by vulnerable children both inside or at risk of entering institutions. The programme is focused on the prevention of child abandonment, the inclusion of children in need of special protection into society, and the protection of the rights and well-being of children in three residential institutions.

Believing that a healthy family environment is the best place for children to grow up, WV continues to focus on strengthening families and communities to care for their own children. Our development activities that focus on food security, health, micro-enterprise development and education for vulnerable children (including children with disabilities) and their families are critical for the prevention of abandonment and placement in institutions.

Residential care, however, is sometimes a “last resort”. So while WV believes that every child should live in families or in sustainable communities, our work with institutions is essential to protect children from abuse and to provide a basis for the de-institutionalisation of children. The aim must always be for these children to return to the family safely or be placed in a foster family or a “family-like” environment such as small group homes. This can take some time depending on each situation.

The objectives of WV Armenia and other NGOs should be to ultimately make institutions obsolete, by involving families in the education and services in these residential care institutions, initiating foster care, finding child-friendly solutions, and safely de-institutionalising children as quickly as possible. WV Armenia takes an individualised approach towards each child in the CEDC programme. Every child admitted into the programme undergoes a multidisciplinary assessment by a team of specialists including a neurologist, psychiatrist, senior social

worker, lawyer, psychologist, and pediatrician. The team creates an Individual Development Plan (IDP) for each child and implements a regular monitoring system for the child and family. The specialists and teachers, as well as parents, participate in the process of creating the IDP and work towards such goals as solving shelter problems, finding jobs for parents, and encouraging parents to solve problems themselves. The de-institutionalisation process requires the involvement and participation of parents as well as the child, who is empowered to have a voice in her own personal development plan.

De-institutionalisation requires a stable family home environment with biological or foster parents, where parents do not abuse alcohol or drugs, children’s rights are not violated, and parents set good examples for their children. For reintegration to be successful, the parents, extended family or foster home should offer appropriate conditions for a child, a sufficient income to provide for the child’s needs, and the willingness to take the child into the home. Since living in the family and in an institution are so different, families and children need counselling. Successful de-institutionalisation requires an adapted legal framework and governmental support for community-based centres where vulnerable families can apply for psychological, legal, and social support.

Case study: Vardashen

The case of Vardashen is an excellent example of the need for support when integrating these girls into society, and the obstacles to de-institutionalisation.⁶ It is a success story for the application of new policies in Armenia.

The Republican Special Educational Complex #1 (Vardashen), located in Erebuni district of Yerevan, is a public institution under the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES). Since 1997, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) – also known as Doctors Without Borders – has worked with the staff of Vardashen to improve the quality of life for the children in residence there. This programme was handed over to WV Armenia in 2004 and we have continued to work to de-institutionalise these children while preparing them for mainstream society. While Vardashen is a very different place than it was before 1997, the problems and challenges of the institution are typical of others.

The Vardashen institution has a constant occupancy of 75–95 children, most of whom were found roaming



Sponsored child Mariam, 10, holds a stuffed toy donated by a visitor. Benefits of sponsorship include schooling, feeding programmes and medical care.
photo: Jon Warren/World Vision

the streets, begging or were abandoned by their parents. As with most institutions, about 99% of the children come from very poor families, many headed by single mothers. These families have poor shelter and are unemployed or have low incomes. They represent the most vulnerable groups in society with minimal education and few professional skills. Their dire circumstances often drive parents to begging, knowing they will be more successful receiving alms with their children at their sides.

Residents of Vardashen include children who:

- need special care for education;
- are neglected, lack education and, due to deprivation of parental care and supervision, were mostly engaged in begging and vagrancy;
- are at immediate risk of abuse (physical or psychological); and
- are under 16, and have committed relatively minor crimes or infringements and are placed in the institutions by court decision.

Throughout their work, MSF encountered numerous instances of institutional violence and abuse, including cruel discipline, sexual abuse, lack of medical and social care, and a lack of recreational activities for children. Fortunately, the most serious instances and systematic uses of violence no longer occur.

Education

The issue of quality primary education still remains a problem at Vardashen. Psychologists working with the institutionalised children stated that the level of educational knowledge of Vardashen children is much lower than children in mainstream schools.

Unfortunately, this low quality education system is typical of residential institutions in Armenia because of the following factors:

- There is a lack of a specialised programmes and teaching materials for children with special educational needs.
- Qualified and skilled staff are not willing to teach in a special school like Vardashen. Although the teachers' salary was increased by 50% in September 2005, it is still very low.
- With the uncertainty of continuing education, and knowing that they are likely to be rejected from higher education, children are not motivated to

graduate with better marks.

- Institutions are regarded as “shelter” rather than “school”. With this attitude, the school administration and educators have approached their work differently and don't aim to provide knowledge.
- It is very difficult to teach these children with the same programmes and approaches as in mainstream schools without supplementary assistance. An individualised approach is missing.
- Institution directors and staff often encourage institutionalisation when counselling parents. In Armenia, both the public and special schools are financed by the MOES according to the number of children and this presents a conflict of interest for the staff who receive a financial gain for every child placed in the institution.

Education of institutionalised girl children

According to the UN, in 2004 the literacy rate in Armenia for girls and young women aged 15–24 was 99.9%, while boys and young men of the same age had a literacy rate of 99.8%. While these indicators are to be celebrated as evidence of Armenia's work to give children access to education, there are no official statistics on children with disabilities.

The combination of the low quality of education offered at Vardashen and the low social status of families of institutionalised children has limited the education of children over the age of 15. In the last three years, of the 102 graduates, only five boys continued their education in specialised technical colleges; not one student went on to higher education.

Although girls in Vardashen often expressed a desire to learn a vocation, not one has continued her education. Many survey their future options and find no hope. As a consequence, there are high numbers of early marriages and early pregnancies for institutionalised girls, keeping these young mothers at home caring for their children and families. Early marriages and pregnancies in turn become an obstacle for the continuation of education.

Often, Vardashen's personnel encourage the early marriages of their girl students. One of the teachers stated: “It is better for them ... they are safer and it is less possible for them to choose the wrong way in their life, and they will not become prostitutes.”

In reality, marriage and motherhood are not real safeguards against prostitution or other forms of exploitation and abuse.

The government-hired staff of the institution have strong negative attitudes towards girl children in Vardashen, convinced that all girls who demonstrate “weak control” will become prostitutes. This “weak control” is only a manifestation of the lack of love, instruction, structure and empowerment in the girls’ environment. Staff would prefer the girls “under the control” of husbands rather than free to possibly make poor decisions. This attitude is common among Armenian society and influences the choices and options of young women. It demonstrates how important it is for girls to be empowered to make healthy life decisions and become agents of their own development, rather than relying on others.

The same gender inequality generally exists within families and the Armenian society as a whole. Stereotypical attitudes towards women’s and men’s social roles still exist such as women being subordinate to men. Thus, with limited resources and limited access to those resources, parents would prefer to educate their sons than their daughters. Generally, boys are seen as future householders, main income generators, and as the “hope” and “support” of their parents. The perceived role of women is to care for a family and raise children. A woman is not encouraged as a leader in the family or community, hence, girls’ high marks in school do not ensure their higher education. These attitudes also contribute to the fact that Armenia has the lowest percentage of female parliamentarians of any country in Europe.

When girl children do receive higher education they are often guided towards pedagogic schools where the tuition is less than that of universities. These discriminative approaches of parents and society, beginning with early childhood, feed the cycle of gender inequality in adult social roles.

World Vision Armenia’s response

MSF supported Vardashen staff from 1997 to 2004 to set up educational and recreational activities for children, provide medical and psychological care and maintain contact between the children and their families, aiding the process of social reintegration.⁷



The objectives of WV Armenia and other NGOs should be to ultimately make institutions obsolete. Every child should live in families or in sustainable communities; the aim must always be for children to return to the family safely or be placed in a foster family or a “family-like” environment.
photo: World Vision

WV Armenia has built on these achievements by continuing to identify and change the dysfunctional elements of the institution. The combined efforts of MSF, WV and the Armenian authorities have gradually transformed the disciplinary methods and living conditions in Vardashen. The repressive approach has been replaced with an educational one through helping staff to develop alternative ways of dealing with conflicts and regulating community life.

Reuniting families

Similar to teenagers in prison, Vardashen’s children were not permitted to visit their homes and relatives in the past. Today, after nine years of MSF and WV work, more of these children visit their families on weekends and during the holidays, with WV providing transportation.

Gradually, the institution has opened up to families and the outside world. Family members are permitted to visit daily. Every week they have individual and support group meetings with specialists. The parents’ contact strengthens relationships and they become more willing to care for their own children. Psychological support, social work and legal services are further developed

within the institution to improve family relations with the end goal of uniting families and de-institutionalising children.

Education and training

To improve the educational and recreational activities of the children, WV organises various capacity building activities both for children and educators, designed to introduce innovative teaching methods and foster critical thinking in students. A special course on the prevention of child abuse and neglect was organised for the staff and educators of Vardashen. The children attended and continue to attend several non-formal training sessions on children's rights, sexual education, age development, health and related topics.

WV Armenia has emphasised vocational training opportunities by organising clubs to provide learning, life skills and play opportunities for the children living in institutions and those at risk of being institutionalised. Activities such as swimming, horse riding, sewing, theatre, shoe making, circus, art, fashion, and ceramic classes were initiated in the community, so that Vardashen's children can socialise outside the institution, learning with other community children and students of secondary schools. Vardashen's football team now competes with the teams of special and secondary schools. These interactions are crucial for integration.



Innovative teaching methods help to improve the educational and recreational activities of children.
 photo: World Vision

As part of life skills training, children's clubs meet together and visit museums, higher educational institutions, historical monuments and other cultural institutions to encourage social development and to help them reflect on integration and life outside the institution. Visits to work places and vocational possibilities are planned to raise the children's interest towards work in general and to help them make better choices in the future. Meanwhile, we plan to connect with labour and recruitment agencies for the children's job placements when they leave the institution. All activities are supported that help prepare children for life outside. While we work to return students to their families, we also work to ensure they can adjust to mainstream society.

Focusing on girls

To break the discrimination and inequitable cycles that damage the girl child's future, WV Armenia – in the framework of its child protection programmes – raises awareness of the disadvantages of early marriage and early sexual relations, through regular training sessions and the distribution of printed materials on reproductive health. These are also aimed at helping girls avoid abuse that is too often encountered in such institutions. In collaboration with a local partner NGO, Family Health Association, a new project has been undertaken to provide youth-friendly medical services, including counselling, to Vardashen children.

The early marriages hinder vocational training or recruitment into jobs. Only one girl out of all Vardashen's graduates currently has a permanent job, compared to 23 boys. Without jobs, the girls either live with their parents, marry or find themselves in vulnerable situations. Some end up on the streets without shelter. Girls need the assistance of labour and recruitment agencies to find jobs after leaving institutions, as well as support for social services to be able to receive government stipends. High unemployment, ignorance of available social services, and the lack of life skills present significant challenges for girl children seeking work.

WV's policy and ultimate goal, like that of the Armenian government, is the de-institutionalisation of every child. Much work still needs to be done. The daily lives of the children in Vardashen have improved, but their future remains compromised by the lack of resources and openness, as well as deeply-ingrained social prejudices.

The state and NGOs need to collaborate to initiate action at several levels.

World Vision recommends that the government:

1. Develop and adopt specific educational programmes in special institutions for:
 - children engaged in begging and vagrancy who have dropped out of schools because of neglect and lack of parental care; and
 - children under 16 who have committed relatively minor crimes or infringements and are placed in the institutions by court decision.
2. Develop high-quality specialised educational materials for schools for children with disabilities and children in especially difficult circumstances. Curricula should apply life skills development, literary, numeracy, finance management, family budgeting, health education, reproductive health and family planning education, vocational training, and encourage the pursuit of education and careers, promoting opportunities through examples and mentors.
3. Allocate funds from the state budget to develop manuals and regular training for teachers working in special institutions. The training should include a knowledge of children's rights, child-oriented teaching methods (such as active learning and child participation), counselling, and promoting the de-institutionalisation of children.
4. Create a regular accreditation programme of high standards for teachers working in special institutions and strengthen the traditional schooling system to cope with children who have special needs or behavioural difficulties.
5. The Ministry of Health should establish youth-friendly and child-friendly health services within communities and ensure access for children in institutions.
6. Ensure girls and women have access to social services after they graduate from institutions and special schools. This may require scholarships, internships, organising job fairs and establishing initiatives and programmes to encourage and create incentives for private sector enterprises to gainfully employ young people coming out of special institutions.
7. Raise public awareness through events and mass media to highlight problems of children in especially difficult circumstances and the need for gender equality from early childhood.
8. Organise regular training on the Convention on the Rights of the Child for children and parents of institutionalised children. Work with parents to develop a rights-based approach to parenting, build gender equality and introduce new parenting skills, including non-violent forms of discipline that will enable children to develop self-confidence and a will to achieve.
9. Support the formation of community-based abuse prevention activities including the formation of child protection committees, mentoring and monitoring programmes, provision of day care centres for children of working parents, and psychological, legal and social support to families.
10. Raise awareness of the great potential of girls and women to contribute to the economic and social advancement of the country.



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Commercial sexual exploitation: one of the worst forms of violence against the Indian girl child

World Vision India

There is an age-old belief that a woman must be in her father's shadow during childhood, her husband's in her youth, and her son's in her old age. Her role is dictated by numerous male actors around her. Over time, the attitudes, values, behaviours and culture of nations have been moulded to perpetuate and condition the girl child to perform her submissive role.

This patriarchal structure has combined with the ills of globalisation and liberalisation and given rise to numerous problems for women in India and especially our most vulnerable citizens: girl children. Female feticide and infanticide are the result of such negative forces, and have produced the sex ratio imbalance across the nation of India.

There has been much progress made by the stakeholders of civil society in India for the protection of the human rights of the girl child and to curb the contemporary form of slavery known as commercial sexual exploitation. The government of India supports a child's right not to be used in sexual exploitation and has taken legal action to protect children. Yet the problem is pervasive and deeply rooted in tradition and culture and therefore requires redress from all angles and the support of the government, NGOs, civil society and the international community.

According to the annual publication of the National Crime Record Bureau, the sexual abuse of children in India is a growing and disturbing phenomenon. In response in part to commercialisation, children, especially young girls, are being sold and trafficked across state and transnational boundaries for the purpose of prostitution and child pornography.¹

The US Department of State estimated in 2004 that there were 500,000 commercially sexually exploited

children nation-wide in India and at least 2.3 million girls and women believed to be in the Indian sex industry.² Sex tourism is widespread.³

The prostitution of children is flourishing not only in Asia but all around the world. Girl children are abducted, sold and coerced into the sex industry. The commercial sexual abuse of children has become a highly profitable activity of organised crime rings. Commercial sexual exploitation has become a global plague and is found in varying intensity among both developed and developing nations. It is one of the worst forms of violence and discrimination suffered by the girl child.

Experts world-wide blame poverty as a key factor responsible for the sexual abuse of children. However, other demand and supply factors play a significant role in the creation and aggravation of the problem.

The basis of this exploitation is the unequal power and economic balance between a girl child and a male adult. Patriarchy often dictates the sexual and economic relationships of a society. This is true in India where many of the rituals, practices and customs are gender biased and discriminatory and yet sanctioned by religious forces and authorities. Many of the harmful religious traditions place girls and women in a subservient position, degrade their status, and result in sexual exploitation. In India, the religious tradition of Devadasi (where girls are dedicated as temple prostitutes) violates the dignity of women and girls and turns them into economic commodities instead of human beings.

Failure of traditional safety nets (including the breakdown of the traditional family), migration, superstition, rituals, cultural practices, and beliefs, make girl children more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Prostitution and the girl child

There has been a great demand for prostituted girls due to various factors like the fear of diseases including HIV, prevailing cultural perceptions that sex with a girl child provides strength, girls' profitability and greater earning potential, the fact that girls can be easily lured in the name of marriage and easily suppressed and manipulated, and finally the cultural support for practices like the Devadasi tradition.

Prostituted girls under the age of 18 are deprived of their childhoods and education and suffer exploitation, discrimination, and the worst forms of violence. While girls face even greater vulnerability, exploitation and deprivation than adult women in the commercial sex trade, it is significant to note that most adult "female sex workers"⁴ begin before the age of 18.

The sex trade has adverse effects on girl children's health leading to many physical problems, including diseases (like skin diseases, tuberculosis, HIV, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)), aches, pain, various types of uterine infection, and vaginal injuries, which later combined with STDs can create problem in conception. Most of the women and girls used in the sex trade are physically abused and beaten, raped and even killed.⁵ Prostitution also causes long-term damage to their psycho-social, spiritual and emotional well-being. Girls in prostitution suffer post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, humiliation, rejection, anxiety, suicidal tendencies, shame, guilt, and live in fear and pain.

The threat of HIV for girls in the sex trade is very real and serious. According to the National AIDS Control Organization, an estimated 5.2 million people aged 15–49 were living with HIV in India in 2005. The UN *Report on the global AIDS epidemic* (2006) warns the "future size of India's HIV epidemic will depend particularly on the effectiveness of programmes for sex workers and their clients, men who have sex with men (and their other sexual partners), and injecting drug users (and their sexual partners)."⁶ The Indian sex trade puts not only the girls at risk of HIV, but increases the vulnerability of the entire nation.

To achieve the Millennium Development Goals, adopted by world leaders as a global agenda for poverty reduction, we must focus on the prevention of child sexual exploitation and the restoration of children



Twelve-year-old Thirupathamma's parents both died of AIDS in 2005. Her two younger siblings are both HIV-positive. She does not go to school but spends her days sifting through garbage for recyclables, a practice known as "rag picking". Experts world-wide say poverty is a key factor responsible for the sexual abuse of children.

photo: Sheryl Nadler/World Vision

who have been abused. Three of the eight goals call for children everywhere, boys and girls alike, to be able to complete a full course of primary and secondary schooling, for gender equity and the empowerment of women, and to have halted and begun to reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS by 2015. These goals cannot be accomplished without focusing on the sexual exploitation of girls.

Indian national policies and laws

Sexual abuse of children is unquestionably a violation of basic human rights. The government of India supports a child's right not to be used in sexual exploitation and has taken action to protect children through adopting international conventions like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), constitutional provisions like articles 21, 23 and 24 of the Indian Constitution to Fundamental Rights, and domestic laws and policies such as the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001), the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (1956), the Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act (1982), the Criminal Procedure Code and the Juvenile Justice Act (1986), to prevent and punish trafficking, sexual exploitation, discrimination against the girl child and the cultural practice of Devadasis.

However, crimes and human rights violations against girls and women are often unreported. The reason for non-reporting or under-reporting these crimes again lies within the social structure. Incest persists and children

are too afraid to report their abusers because of a fear of authority. Social stigma, concerns for inviting shame, consequences of reporting the crime on the future of the victim, and an inability to express and comprehend the problem are a few of the reasons which prohibit young girls and women who are abused from making complaints against abusers. There is also widespread ignorance about the law and the legislative measures, coupled with procedural delays, which lead to non-reporting of such cases.

Devadasis

Devadasis are girls and women who have been usually forced into prostitution in the name of religion. The name signifies servant of god: Dev means “god”, Dasi means “slave”. This localised practice is an ancient Indian tradition where girls, as young as 10 and 11 years old, are married to gods and goddesses. It grows



Mani lost her Devadasi mother to HIV. Her grandmother, also a Devadasi, died as well. Now she lives with her great-grandmother, aged 80.
photo: Jan Warren/World Vision

out of a time when girls were used in temple rituals to sing and dance while praising gods.

For this ritual practice, families dedicated their younger girl children to the temple. The status of Devadasis was high in the society and they were known as divine girls. The marriage to gods usually occurs before the girl reaches puberty and requires her to become a prostitute for upper-caste community members. A Devadasi cannot belong to any one particular husband, as she is considered “common property”.

Due to the religious beliefs, girls are still dedicated even today. Young children are still sexually exploited when they reach puberty. The girls are often from the low castes and tribal groups with a family history of involvement and are forced to this practice under the cover of religion. Despite the fact that police have been posted outside the Yellamma Temple in Karnataka, where the dedication ceremony takes place, few seem to be held accountable.⁷

Reaching out to the Devadasis can be a challenge. The girls involved in the ancient tradition are difficult to identify as they are young and must bravely come forward or register a case against the priests in order to be helped through the legal system. The dedication ceremonies are carried out in secret.

Miraj, located in the central western part of India, is known for the Devadasi system, which has turned many young girls and women into temple prostitutes. This practise also exists in the Bellary district in the south of India, where many girls are dedicated to goddess Yellamma on a full moon.⁸

This religious practice makes the communities, and especially the girls and women involved, highly vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. Bellary has a high level of “cross border migration” of women who are forced into prostitution in Andhra Pradesh, a neighbouring state.

The women come to Bellary for anonymity and there, among the ruins of famous stone temples and the great numbers of tourists, they are infected with HIV. The district now has a very high prevalence of HIV infection (over 4,000 people were reported HIV-positive by December 2004). In Bellary, 1.8% of pregnant women tested positive for HIV at ante-natal clinics during the 2005 Sentinel Surveillance.⁹

World Vision's response

In both Bellary and Miraj, World Vision (WV) India is working among the Devadasi community.

We provide care and support and work with faith-based organisations to transform lives by bringing Devadasis out of the sex trade and providing them with skills training and alternate livelihood for their survival.

Our Area Development Programme in Miraj city also works among women and girls in the Miraj red light area on issues of HIV and AIDS and caring for their young children. Sadly, stigma often curbs sexually exploited women and children's restoration and integration back into society. WV India focuses on challenging the taboos and stigma engrained in the society that often discriminates against the victim rather than empathising with her.

WV India works especially with the daughters of Devadasis to equip them with skills and the opportunity for a better life than their mothers. These girls so often are forced into the same cycle of abuse as their mothers. WV partners with other faith-based organisations to provide shelter for the girls and education, such as a health worker courses, to give these girls alternatives.

Some of the additional programmes and activities WV India has instituted to protect, care for, and rehabilitate girls associated with Devadasi include:

Prevention:

- Partnering with Devadasi women who volunteer as peer educators, talking and sharing on the issues of HIV and the relevance of education for the children of Devadasis; meeting with the Devadasi women, especially those who have young girl children, as they are at high risk of being dedicated.
- Providing recreational activities and other educational programmes to engage children and develop their interest in pursuing their education. Children, especially daughters of Devadasis, usually drop out of school and are dedicated to the gods at an early age.
- Training HIV-positive mothers in the prevention of parent-to-child-transmission (PPTCT) and nevirapine (anti-retroviral) drug use.
- Creating awareness and sensitisation of HIV and AIDS, training girl peer educators and using an adolescent girls' training module.

Care:

- Providing food supplies and skills training to women living with HIV and AIDS, who have lost their income source due to infection.
- Running a health clinic in Miraj for women and children for various ailments, including HIV and AIDS, STIs and opportunistic infections.
- Equipping children with life skills to protect themselves, to care for their chronically ill parents, and counselling and engaging with their families to plan and make decisions about their care and needs after their parents are gone.
- Improving access to basic health education, which leads to an improved quality of life for children and economic resources for the family.
- Partnering with the state government, hospitals and community-based organisation's through technical support and resources, enhancing their capacity to continue to address the issue of HIV and AIDS.
- Caring for children away from the red light area; children of women in the commercial sex trade benefit from the night shelter.

Advocacy:

- Forming self-help groups of women in the Devadasi system to save money and build up their economic condition, help leave the system, and empower them with training on their rights.
- Increasing awareness among local community leaders and community members about the practise of Devadasis and the impact of HIV and AIDS on children and families; working to develop a broad sense of responsibility for a shared action to reduce the stigma and discrimination that surrounds people living with HIV and AIDS.

Protecting girls from prostitution

The Rajnut community in Rajasthan celebrates the birth of a girl child. Unlike the rest of the country where girls are often considered a burden, here they are seen as a blessing. Girl children are given special treatment and are visibly indulged throughout their early years. They receive special food, clothes and jewellery and the entire community attends to their physical well-being. Ironically, this care is only in preparation to send them into prostitution. The eldest daughters are raised with the full awareness that the community's survival depends on the money they will make in the sex trade.



Non-formal Education class for Mumbai children who are unable to go to regular school. Staffed by enthusiastic volunteers, the programme prepares kids to be able to attend regular schools. The classes are held at night, from 7-9.

photo: Jon Warren/World Vision

Education or alternative ways of earning money are not seen as options for the girls of Rajnut community. The community's economic and social organisation ensures that these girls do not question their fate.

Girls remain sequestered in the village waiting to reach puberty, when they may enter the sex trade. Gradually they are groomed to enter the sex trade and to accept responsibility for the upkeep of the family. In time, they take over from their mothers whose earning power diminishes with age or due to HIV and AIDS.

Education of girls was never a priority for this community as it is felt that it would make them too smart for the trade and they believe there is no other use for girls.

This community lives in scattered villages along the highways of Jaipur district in Rajasthan and its economy is organised around prostitution.

The women in the community historically sold sex acts to the many maharajahs (kings) and princes in the region. With the decline of the royal families, and few other skills among the community, they now sell sex to travellers along the highways, farmers and merchants conducting business in nearby towns, truck drivers and rural landowners.

The men and boys of the Rajnut community primarily act as pimps for their mothers and sisters. Ostracised by the rest of society, they are not allowed to stay within the villages. The boys are sometimes even refused purchases in local shops. Teased and assaulted in school, the boys often drop out or are dismissed.

Village parents not in the Rajnut community do not wish their children to mingle with children whose parents work in the sex trade, so there can be no friendships with children outside their world. Faced with such humiliation, many boys run away or turn to soliciting for the women of the family.

Communities like Rajnut have become some of the nation's worst HIV- and AIDS-affected areas. This exploitation of girls not only hurts them as individuals, but has become a social, physical, psychological and economic problem for the entire community and surrounding areas.

World Vision India's involvement

These social practices led WV India in 1996 to begin developmental projects with a focus on integrating these ostracised people into mainstream society and equipping the girls especially with alternate income-generating skills. The efforts are multi-pronged, aimed at keeping children in school through the education of mothers, providing vocational training for youth, and working to increase acceptance of the community members among the other villagers.

WV India works with women and children of school age through children's clubs, coaching programmes and other means to build awareness on the value of education, show children that education can be joyful and that they can participate without fear of harassment. Some additional results include:

- Self-help groups help the women generate more income for their families and identify alternate livelihood sources. WV provided vocational training programmes like tailoring and purse painting for women and girls to increase employment opportunities.
- Girls and boys of the community are empowered as agents of change to achieve transformational development in their own community and they have created awareness of HIV for their family members.
- An inter-village sports event was conducted which allowed other caste villagers to mingle with the community. This led to greater acceptance of the community in day-to-day life, including at the children's school.
- Focusing on the children, particularly the girl children, WV India teaches life skills to provide opportunities for alternate livelihoods and options away from the

Rajnut community's traditional sex trade.

- To ensure a girl's right to protection, four child protection committees are in place. WV has also formed six children's clubs, which give children an opportunity to express themselves, learn and play together.

Freedom, rights and the fullness of life

WV India has been working in India for over 50 years for the betterment of children. We draw on our experience working with children who are sexually abused under the pretext of culture and religion in this paper to demonstrate the discrimination suffered by the girl child in India and share lessons learned.

In the practices of the Devadasis and through prostitution, girls are not valued as precious human beings but instead suffer discrimination and violence; they are denied the freedom, rights and the fullness of life to which they are entitled.

Prostitution of girls is a consequence of the interplay between various factors within the society that drive the demand for commercial sex, and disempower and discriminate against girl children. High-risk behaviour, the Devadasi system, migration, disintegrated family ties, promiscuity, poverty and illiteracy all play a role in the exploitation of the girl child.

Therefore, advocacy and poverty reduction programmes through integrated Area Development Projects are potent antidotes. Legislative measures are inadequate in providing the entire solution to the problem. Prevention and restoration must be done at international, national and local levels simultaneously, without which a programme will prove ineffective. A law will do little if we do not have concern for these girls and women as fellow human beings, deserving of rights, our protection, and care.

In particular, World Vision recommends that the government:

1. Declare the custodial rights of children to mothers. Fathers' or male family member's names should not be required for the provision of rights and services, especially in hospitals, schools, colleges and other public services.
2. Work together with non-governmental organisations and combine social and political will with effective responses to eliminate the problem of child abuse. Every community should have an active and effective child protection committee that includes relevant professionals.
3. Sensitise law enforcement to be gender sensitive and understand and identify human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children. The implementation of laws to protect children and women from violence and all forms of sexual exploitation must be strictly monitored; punishment must be ensured to those who violate the laws.
4. Create, fund and partner with multinational and regional coalitions to stop human trafficking, prevent child sex tourism, and identify and prosecute traffickers and abusers of children.
5. Use educational and information campaigns to create public awareness of religious and culture practices that exploit girl children. Social, political and cultural gender equity is essential for the prevention of the sexual exploitation of girls and women; community awareness and participation has to be supplemented with law enforcement.
6. Ensure free, quality, compulsory, inclusive education for all children, especially girls; provide housing for children studying away from their homes and closely monitor children's enrolment and retention. Simultaneously, the Parent-Teacher



Sahina, 7, at the Kahnkana Tombs, next to Barapula Slum, holding out a bouquet of flowers. She has now been admitted to a public school and will be in first grade. She'll be older than most of the other kids in her class. She comes from the poorer side of the slum.
photo: Jon Warren/World Vision

Association should be strengthened with community-based organisations and local governments to ensure basic infrastructure, quality education, water, and bathroom and sanitation facilities, especially for girl children in all schools, to prevent school dropouts.

7. Allocate resources to women's groups, to the vocational training of women entrepreneurs, and to building the capacity of these groups to become agents of change in society.
8. Prevent parent-to-child-transmission of HIV by administering medications and appropriate behaviours in all government and private hospitals, and create monitoring systems to hold hospitals accountable for compliance.



by Reena Samuel, Communication Coordinator, with
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Advocacy, World Vision India

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2. Bureau of Democracy, *Human Rights and Labor, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2004*, February 2005.
3. ECPAT, op.cit.
4. WV acknowledges some adult women's preference and choice to be called "commercial sex workers" or "female sex workers" but also acknowledges that for many women it is not a choice nor truly work, but oppression.
5. M Farley, A Cotton, J Lynne, S Zumbeck, F Spiwak, ME Reyes, D Alvarez, U Sezgin, "Prostitution and trafficking in nine countries: An update on violence and posttraumatic stress disorder", in M Farley (ed.) *Prostitution, trafficking and traumatic stress*, Birmingham, NY: Haworth Press, Inc; 2003. pp. 33–74
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Empowerment: the key to girl child equity

World Vision Ghana

Gender equality is an issue of development effectiveness, not just a matter of political correctness or kindness to women. Evidence demonstrates that when women and men have equal opportunities, economies tend to grow faster, the poor move more quickly out of poverty, and the well-being of men, women, and children is enhanced.¹

International conferences, conventions and goals, as well as local, national, and regional conferences and seminars of the past decades have drawn attention to the need to address gender inequity in the alleviation of poverty. In Ghana, gender inequity, patriarchy and discrimination against women is perpetuated and has become a vicious cycle which needs to be broken in order to give way to sustainable development.

Ghana has intentionally and strategically put in place mechanisms and government organisational changes aimed at bridging the gap between male and female equity and facilitating greater attention to gender and development issues. However, as demonstrated through the following examination of the status of the girl child in Ghana, most nations still require a significant change of deeply-held cultural attitudes and practices before girls will truly be empowered and free of discrimination and violence.

The status of the girl child in Ghana

Historically, women in Ghana, like in many parts of the world, have not been treated equally to men in opportunity, dignity or power.²

Gender discrimination is still experienced in decision making in the home, family, community, politics, religion and all areas of social life. Several studies have shown that significant gender inequalities continue

to limit women and girls' ability to participate in and contribute to national development. In Ghana, of the 277 assembly members in the Upper East region of the country, only 18 are women.³ This picture is the same in all the ten regions of the country and also in the national leadership.

Despite the global movement for gender equality, girl children are still confronted with issues that retard their development. Harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation/circumcision, widowhood rites, early child marriages and food taboos, which adversely affect the health, well-being and dignity of women and girls, are still being practiced, often by women themselves in the name of tradition or through ignorance of their adverse effects.

Rape cases are now common in Ghana, as in many parts of Africa. Women and girls go through great trauma and, at times, die as a result of rape. The HIV and AIDS cases among young women and girls in Africa continue to grow, bringing with this tragedy additional social problems.



Villagers tend their cassava farm, which is 9 miles one way from their home plots. One man rides a bike each day on this journey but his wife walks the distance three times a week, after fetching water and cooking.

photo: Jon Warren/World Vision

Children's voices

World Vision asked children what they want from their government and civil society. These are their responses:

“Advise our parents to be more responsible and take our education more seriously.”

“We want our teachers to be more regular at school and show more commitment to their work.”

“My school should have clean and safe toilet facilities.”

“We need school uniforms, sandals, a computer laboratory, a library and – if possible – electricity in our towns and villages to enable us to study during the night.”

“We need safe drinking water.”

“We do not like the immoral lifestyles such as prostitution, drunkenness and theft, which are common in our communities.”

“We want the freedom to express our views.”

“We need recreation centres where we can play.”

“Every child must go to school.”

“In school, girls should be treated with the same respect as boys.”

The traditional balance of labour between women and men has been disturbed in Ghana by significant levels of social change, and as a result, the responsibilities shouldered by women and girls far outweigh their current access to resources. Men and women, boys and girls do not equally share the domestic burdens. This has weakened the capacity of women to fulfil the demands of their productive, reproductive and community service roles. This has implications for their children and the well-being of society as a whole.

The burden of women and girls is usually unappreciated, unrecognised and unrewarded. Hence, women and girls are most affected by poverty due to their numerous roles.

Girl children are especially discriminated against and disempowered even in their own homes. In Ghana, the extended family, even domestic maidservants in

urban areas, have important influence on a child's development. Cultural and social ceremonies and rites are also an important part of a child's upbringing.

When a girl is born, she is seen as one who belongs to another family, whereas a boy is seen as one who will continue the family tree. Large portions of Ghanaian society prefer to educate boys over girls, as they believe that the girl's place is in the kitchen. They claim she will marry and leave her parental home to join her husband's family, but the boy will stay in his parents' home to continue the family line. Therefore, some girls are not enrolled in schools or are withdrawn or drop out at an early age.

Because gender issues are so culturally stratified in Ghana, understanding and acknowledging the inequity and relationships between men and women are rare. Many cultural norms that impede or hinder the progress of women and girls still exist and are practiced regularly.

World Vision Ghana's child rights survey

World Vision (WV) has provided relief, development and advocacy operations in Ghana since 1979. We work with communities and governmental and non-governmental agencies to promote holistic, integrated, people-focused development with a special emphasis on children. Our model of development is practiced through Area Development Projects (ADPs), which aim to bring fullness of life to communities through focusing on children and their families. WV Ghana is currently operating in 27 of the 138 districts in Ghana.

WV Ghana conducted a large-scale child rights survey in 11 districts of Ghana in 2005. The survey used both quantitative and qualitative techniques to gather data.

Two questionnaires were used for the quantitative survey; one for adults over 18 years of age and the other for children aged between five and 17 years. In each area surveyed, 75 questionnaires were administered to adults and 75 questionnaires to children, representing 150 households.

The survey revealed a number of critical issues, especially concerning the status of the girl child in Ghana. WV Ghana's survey identified the need to empower children, particularly girls, by educating the

public on children's rights and the effects of gender inequity, child labour and abuse on the growth and development of children.

One may note that most of the findings of the child rights survey also stand true for boys and recommendations may be drawn for the improvement of the status of boys as well. This only serves to remind us that girls' and women's rights are human rights and all human rights, of men, women, boys and girls, must be protected.

WV Ghana found that teenage pregnancy, early marriage and child labour are the main challenges to the development of the girl child in our communities.

Teenage pregnancy, early marriage

A significant number of girls in some rural communities become pregnant at as young as 13 years and they usually have no other options but to marry early. On average, girls marry at around age 15, while boys marry from 18 years.⁴ It is very common to see children carrying and nursing their own children in some rural communities and towns. The results are widespread early marriages, a rapid increase in population and increasing incidences of child neglect.

Sadly, many of these teenage pregnancies and early marriages are results of the rape of young girls. WV Ghana found that child defilement (rape) is widespread but residents consider it a norm. Although most respondents to the WV survey said some of the girls do get pregnant at age 13, they insist that there had never been a legal case for child defilement or rape. People in some parts of the district believe that it is not an offence for a man to impregnate a girl no matter what her age, so long as he then marries her.

Widespread child labour

The survey also revealed widespread child labour. Due to poverty, irresponsible parental practices, and sometimes peer influence, some girls engage in child labour activities (such as farming, selling firewood, petty trading and even trade sex) to raise money for their school fees. These activities take much of their time and so they spend very little time studying after school. Often, these girls are unable to combine schoolwork and their activities and therefore drop out of school. Because of the preference for sons, it is often the girls who leave school to support their families. In fact, some

Stories of empowered girls and women

Ruth

Ruth has an unusual story to tell. "My life changed just because I picked up courage, walked up to the World Vision Asante Akim Area Development Project (ADP) Manager when she was in my community three years ago, and got myself a higher education."

Eighteen-year-old Ruth is the first born of five children. After completing her junior secondary school her father died. His death also put an end to her academic dreams, and her mother soon arranged for her to work at a local bakery.

"It was during one of my sales rounds that I saw the World Vision manager. I have always admired the work World Vision is doing in my community and knowing about their sponsorship programme, I prayed that my request would be granted," explains Ruth.

Through WV assistance, Ruth was admitted to secondary school half way through the first term. With determination she finished Agogo State Secondary School as the Assistant Girls Prefect, Vice President of the Scripture Union, President of the Science Club, 1500 metre running champion and second best in 100 metres sprinting, and – most importantly – as a role model for her peers.

The school headmaster said, "I admitted her because World Vision was involved and also because I saw a determination and the will to succeed in her. True to my convictions, Ruth has proven to be a leader to most of the girls here."

WV Ghana only provided the support, it was Ruth's hard work, ambition and the support of the community that made her succeed. More girls like Ruth need to be given a chance at education and a better life.



Ruth

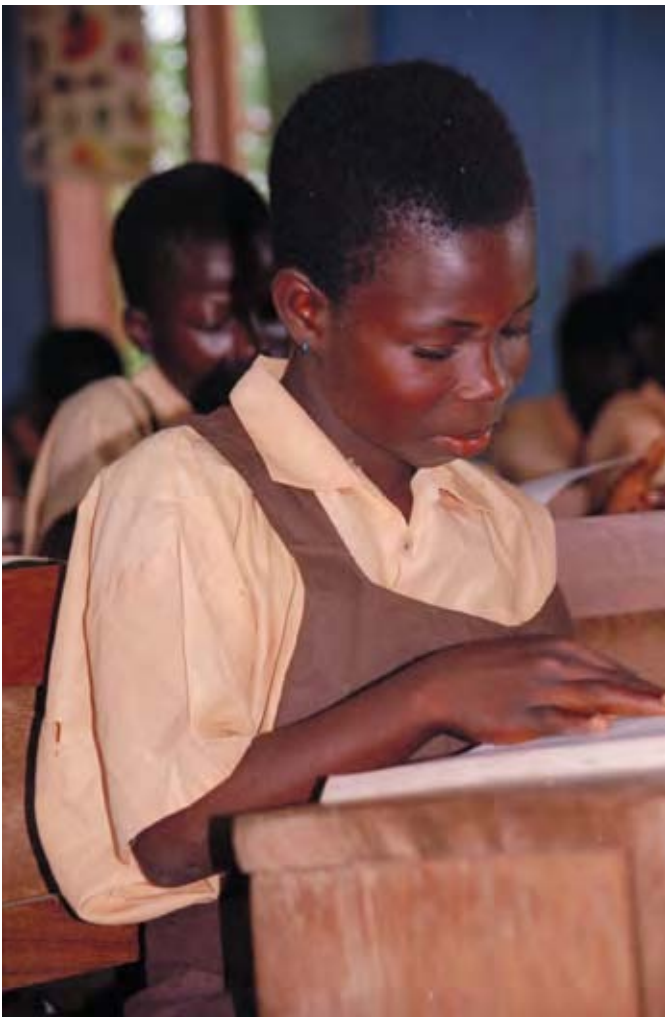
parents no longer provide basic needs for their working girl children; the girls are left to fend for themselves.

In West Mamprusi District, Northern Region, about 3% of girls between the ages of nine and 12 years migrate to the south to work as porters (they carry goods from shops to other places for a fee) to raise money for their parents back home, while their brothers remain in school. In most cases, these girls live on the streets and are exposed to a lot of criminal activities. Some of them are raped and become pregnant.

The causes of child labour were identified as:

- poverty
- parental negligence
- peer group pressure
- livelihood needs
- broken homes

Poverty appears to be the main factor causing the widespread child labour and high school dropout rates



A young girl in class. Education is key to empowering girls in Ghana.
photo: Esperanza Ampah/World Vision

in the rural communities. Parents have no economic means and are unable to prevent their children from working (sometimes at risk to their health.) Most families benefit from the income earned by children and, as such, stopping them from working means reducing the family income.

Girls' education

A significant number of children are not in school because of their inability to pay school fees. Even though Ghana now operates the Free Compulsory Basic Universal Education (FCUBE) policy, which is supposed to ensure free primary school for all children, some girls are still not in school.

In some of the districts, respondents admitted that girls drop out of school very often. They attributed this to more than just poverty but also to poor teaching and learning conditions. In some of the communities, there are no school buildings or they are in a deplorable state. Sometimes, girls have to walk long distances to attend classes, to communities where there are schools.

Teachers also refuse postings in rural communities because of the lack of accommodation. Attracting and maintaining teachers in the rural communities is a big challenge and needs critical attention.

The government also needs to provide quality education and schools so that parents value sending their girls to school. Some respondents shared how their increasing number of dependant children makes it difficult for them all to attend school. This has resulted in many girls dropping out of school and engaging in various economic activities to fend for themselves and also support their families.

Most communities do not have playgrounds or child-friendly spaces for children. It is therefore not surprising that most children spend their leisure time working for money.

Children's welfare

Most respondents admitted that children sometimes suffer abuse in the hands of adults. The abuses include beating, carrying heavy loads, denying children food and other basic rights, insults and other verbal attacks and forced marriages. Harassment of girls by adults is also commonplace. Girls especially suffer the extreme form of child sexual abuse. Some respondents

also reported that a number of adult men in their communities rape schoolgirls.

In light of these issues that harm the girl child and prevent her from achieving a quality education, children, parents and development practitioners call for the enactment of laws to allow students to attend school regularly.

Health concerns for girls

Most of the communities identified malaria, fever, diarrhea and meningitis as the leading causes of death. Child survival is threatened by the prevalence of these diseases and the limited number of health facilities and workers in the rural communities. This has obvious negative implications for child survival. People in the districts often resort to herbal medications and other forms of traditional

Stories of empowered girls and women

Janet

Poverty makes women vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Janet recounts that, "I was forced to mingle with men even while in secondary school, thinking they could provide my material needs. But there is no 'free lunch' and the providers would exact their investment. I became pregnant and a dropout at the second year of my secondary education. Sitting at home with a child, without financial support, was frustrating. So I drifted south to do menial jobs in Kumasi. But menial jobs are never permanent. When I heard that World Vision was ready to assist needy dropouts, I believed that would end my woes. I responded and was assisted to attend the Bongo Women's Training Institute from 2002 to 2005."

Janet, now 28 years old, began learning catering skills. She was assisted with fee payment, provisions for practical work, sustenance allowance, and other needs. WV Ghana staff educated Janet on HIV and AIDS, encouraged her to make values-based decisions and provided her spiritual nurture and social education. After the course, she was given the start-up capital and catering equipment to start her own business.

A single mother of two, she now works as a caterer and cares for her children, mother and herself. She believes girls should not depend on men if it leads to exploitation, but instead should be empowered with the skills and resources that give them control of their own lives. She has employed two young mothers through her business who are then able to provide for their own children.

Janet says, "I am now a person." She encourages governments and NGOs to support mothers to undertake income-generating activities to take care of their children's needs.

practices that often are not sufficient to treat diseases. The lack of health care also degrades the reproductive health of the community. Many girls, especially young mothers, suffer and even lose their own lives or their babies because of this lack of health care access.

WV Ghana learned that most households do not have sanitation facilities. There are also no public toilets in most communities and this creates health problems. Private sanitary facilities are especially important for menstruating girls. The children indicated that they did not like the filth that engulfs their communities, noting that people defecate just anywhere resulting in poor sanitary conditions.

Recognition of children's rights

Most children, girls and boys, are not aware of their rights. Although some of the adults indicated awareness of children's rights and laws that exist to protect them, most could not provide specific information.

Children, especially girls, seldom participate in decision making both at the household and community levels. Decisions on the future careers and family lives of most children are largely in the hands of their parents.

A significant proportion of births in these districts were not registered. Without registered birth dates, many children are deprived of government services to which they are entitled. Since people are becoming aware that children have the right to a legally registered name, this is a good opportunity to promote birth registration in the districts. Increasing the number of births attended by Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA) will protect the well-being of mothers and newborns and increase birth registration. The government is embarking on a national programme that requires all citizens to have a valid birth registration card. Registration is a must if the country is to ensure a girl's education, nutrition and health care, and protection from early marriages, trafficking and child labour.

Empowering girls

WV Ghana, like other development agencies and the Ghanaian government, has acknowledged the positive link between gender equity, poverty alleviation, girls' empowerment, and the well-being of all children.

We have worked to empower both women and men to obtain equal access to and control over key resources

Stories of empowered girls and women

Mary

Mary lost her father when she was three years old. Her mother had to provide for six children, as well as take care of their educational needs. Mary's chances of receiving an education were slim because her three brothers were first in line for education when the family had to decide who would go to school. Fortunately, WV was able to offer Mary sponsorship that allowed her to stay in school.

The provision of material things such as livestock (for generating nutritious food and income), school uniforms, educational materials, and other basic necessities were crucial to Mary's continued education and the well-being of her family. Even certificate examinations present a financial burden for her family. Mary's story illustrates the need for free, quality education for all children.

Today, Mary attends secondary school. WV covers her tuition in response to her academic achievement.

Her dream now is to enter the university to pursue business education. She believes that students who are needy but want to go to school should be supported so that they can realise their potential.

such as land, credit, food, health, education and legal rights. We encourage them to speak out and challenge the exploitive structures that cause their poverty. Many of these activities focus on the girl child, who will either continue the poverty cycle or be empowered to break it.

To break the cycle, projects such as the education funds for promising but needy girls, the provision of improved education infrastructure, youth skill training for school dropouts, children's rights education, and HIV and AIDS education are being undertaken to empower children in 27 districts across the country.

Nelson Mandela taught us that, "Education is the most powerful weapon that can be used to change the world."⁵ Gender and poverty issues must be addressed together through education and socialisation. The children of today will grow to become adults of tomorrow and produce what society invests in them. Empowering the girls now could turn them into empowered women who will make informed decisions about their development.

We can break the harmful cycle of gender inequity and discrimination by starting with children and youth. The most effective tool for empowerment is education. Through both formal and informal education

girl children can be empowered to free themselves from negative societal structures and laws that marginalise them. In formal education, child rights and gender equality can be included in the school curricula to enable children to know their rights and how to relate to the opposite sex. Through informal education, there should be gender sensitisation programmes to enable households to create gender equitable environments for the socialisation of both girls and boys. Children learn from their parents and their environment and communities must be made aware of their human rights.

World leaders, national leaders, development practitioners and parents, let us end illiteracy, empower the girl child and end poverty.

The rights of children to survival, development, protection and participation are hampered by a series of compounding factors, which include ignorance of their rights. It is therefore not enough for governments to ratify all the human rights and other international conventions documents without sharing the information with the men, women, boys and girls whom these agreements are meant to protect and empower.

In designing programmes to protect the rights of girls, it is important to ensure that these programmes are effective in addressing gender equity issues and empower all people to become aware of children's and women's rights and gain access to the resources and information they need to achieve fullness of life.

In particular, World Vision recommends that the government:

1. Educate parents on children's rights and their own human rights; boys and girls, men and women must all be educated on their rights and roles in building gender equity and the laws protecting them.
2. Collaborate with NGOs on a massive campaign, employing educational tools such as film and drama, to sensitise communities to child rights and the effects of child labour and abuse on the growth, empowerment and development of children.
3. Enforce laws on child abuse and gender-based violence; employ political will, funding and proper reporting mechanisms



Children playing. World Vision encourages individuals to speak out and challenge the exploitive structures that cause their poverty. Many of these activities focus on the girl child, who will either continue the poverty cycle or be empowered to break it.

photo: Jon Warren/World Vision

that do not undermine the security of those who report such cases.

4. Educate men and boys on their roles in preventing violence and the rights of the girl child not to be sexually exploited. Girls also need to be educated on their rights and empowered to prevent abuse and unwanted sex.
5. Include sex education in school curriculum as a part of the socialisation process. It should encourage values-based decision making, challenge harmful and risky behaviours, and empower children and youth to resist unwanted sex and delay sexual activity, with the prevention of HIV and AIDS as a central tenant.
6. Enhance health care delivery in the districts by providing facilities and medical personnel. The Ministry of Health should train Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) in communities to ensure quality service,

reduce infant and mother mortality, and prevent the spread of HIV. They should also be sensitised to the importance of birth registration.

7. Encourage communities to devise strategies that enable children to effectively participate in community decision making. This can be done by encouraging the formation of children's associations/clubs and building their capacity to advocate for children.
8. Improve teaching and learning in the schools to ensure high retention and completion rates through the removal of all fees and the provision of better and more school buildings, textbooks, teaching and learning materials, and incentives that attract and maintain quality teachers, especially in rural districts.



by Joyce Jackson, Gender and Development Coordinator, with Benedicta Pealore, ADP Manager, Esperanza Ampah, Communications Coordinator, Stella Nkrumah-Ababio, Child Rights Coordinator and Victor Bampo, Communications Officer, World Vision Ghana

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hope for the girl child

a briefing paper

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