

# Online discussion on Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

# REPORT

Organized by

Division for the Advancement of Women Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations

14 August to 8 September 2006

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The online discussion "Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child" was organized by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), which is part of the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

The discussion was held from August 14, 2006 to September 12, 2006. It was moderated by Mr. Christoph Schuepp, who also prepared this report. Mr. Schuepp presented the report to an Expert Group Meeting on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women in collaboration with UNICEF, and hosted by UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy, from 25 to 28 September 2006.

The report does not give a comprehensive coverage of all inputs received but provides a summary overview of the discussion, with some illustrative examples of contributions.

The results of the online discussion will feed into and contribute to a further understanding of the issue, as the experts' findings will be used as input to the Commission in the Status of Women in its deliberations on the priority theme, "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child", during its 51<sup>st</sup> session in 2007.

The online discussion was spread over four weeks:

Week One: "Protection of the girl child; girls in vulnerable situations" Week Two: "Empowerment of the girl child" Week Three: "Monitoring progress - data and statistics on the girl child" Week Four: "Wrap up and recommendations"

The DAW invited interested parties and individuals to participate in the online discussion on the DAW website. 560 individuals from 105 countries registered and participated (actively and passively) in the discussion. There were 470 female and 90 male participants. The organizational distribution showed great numbers of participants from the NGO sector (more than 300), from academia (85) and the UN (54). Geographically, the United States of America (131, incl. several UN staff), India (40), Nigeria (25), the UK (20), Pakistan (19), Australia (18), Canada (16) and Kenya (15) had the highest representation in terms of numbers (see Annex 2 for a complete list of countries of origin of participants.

During the discussion, a total of 274 messages were posted: Week One had 87 postings, Week Two 90, Week Three 48 and Week Four 49. More statistics concerning the online discussion and the geographical distribution of the discussion members, their organizational backgrounds and gender distribution are to be found in Annex 1.

local/national legislation. Dr. Sagade noted: "My first point is how to use the existing legal instruments such as CEDAW and CRC to stop child marriages. I feel that by and large child marriage is not treated as violation of human rights issue. This needs to be emphatically argued with the governments."

While the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) does not explicitly mention child marriage, it defines "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (Article 1). The CEDAW (Convention on the

could, however, be argued that counties that are Party to it would be expected to comply and therefore enact laws to reflect the CRC's age limit. It is further argued that while Malawi is not categorically in opposition to the CRC on the issue of 18 years as (...) being the majority age when one can give his/her full consent to marriage, for example, it is not taking a strong position which could decrease the occurrence of early marriages that mostly affect young girls."

However, it was also noted by other discussion members that changes in legislation alone are insufficient. In some countries, the socio-cultural context might lead young girls into marriage willingly before they reach the age of 18, a fact which has to be kept in mind, as Asina Omari

Angela Melchiorre concluded that establishing a minimum age for marriage was a complex task, requiring:

"A clear justification of criteria (competence, maturity, puberty, best interest of the couple, etc) and exceptions (parental consent, judicial/administrative dispensation, pregnancy, etc.);

A careful consideration of cultural, religious or traditional values;

A complex evaluation of purposes and implications (is the protection of the child the purpose for establishing such an age? Or is it a way to acknowledge the child's competence and entitle him/her to the full exercise of a right?)

Harmonisation with the general principles of the CRC and its definition of the child, namely that:

- There is no discrimination based on gender
- The best interests of the child are a primary consideration
- Attention is given to the evolving capacity of the child
- The child's point of view and consent is taken into account

#### Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)

Caroline Nalyanya of the NGO Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children NGOs, provided a short introduction to the issue, stating that "female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is common in several countries around the world, predominantly in Africa. It is estimated that more than 100 million women and girls have undergone FGM/C worldwide. A multi-country study was carried out by WHO countries: Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and Sudan. The results of the study showed that women who have had FGM/C are significantly more likely to experience difficulties during childbirth and their babies are more likely to die during the pre-natal period as a result of the practice."

Study results presented by Ms. Nalyanya's show a clear link to Angela Melchiorre's conclusions on child marriage (see above) that put maturity and age into context: "Girls and boys are considered mature upon being circumcised. This rite of passage is mostly done when the girls and boys are between nine and twelve years of age, a time when the majority of them is between classes four and six of primary education. After circumcision, girls are considered mature and ready for marriage. They are thus married off. On the other hand, circumcision makes girls feel that they have reached womanhood, and are uncomfortable among 'younger children.' This forces them to drop out of school to either get married or go to towns where they look for odd jobs such as being house helps or at times engage in child prostitution."

Regardless of the age of the girls, FGM/C is viewed as a rite of passage into the world of adults. However, FGM/C is an act of violence against girls and a violation of rights. Furthermore, Mrs. Nalyanya made the point that apart from the psychological implications, female genital mutilation/cutting also puts the health of the young girls in severe danger as it "threatens the health of girls with infections including HIV/AIDS because of use of unsterilized instruments. Girls' further experience complications during delivery and this endangers the life of the baby and the mother. Girls may loose their lives through death as a result of bleeding and infections from the instruments used." Female genital mutilation/cutting can only be addressed through awareness campaigns that bridge all sectors of society. The Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children (KAACR) is making progress through educational campaigns and has recorded a significant reduction in numbers. According to Mrs. Nalyanya, "32 per cent of Kenyan girls and women aged 15-49 have been 'cut' (2003 Kenya Demographic Health Survey). A reduction of 30 per cent has been reported after education, female economic empowerment and alternative rites of passage."

This success has only been possible through a holistic approach in which KAACR advocated for the elimination of FGM/C through educating children, girls and boys, religious leaders and community leaders on the need to protect children against this practice. Mrs. Nalyanya stressed

colonialism, the misuse of science and technology, and gender are some leading factors in the oppression of, the domination of, the neglect, exploitation, abuse, torture, and other forms of maltreatments inflicted against the girl child. While this is so, it must be identified that embedded in each of these contributing factors is the ul

- Misuse of modern technology of sex selection
- Two-child norm policy of certain state governments.

According to Mr. Rai, the alarming rate of female foeticide has led to a dangerously declining sex ratio, "with negative results that are already making themselves apparent in India. These include an increase in sexual and social crimes against women, such as rape, abduction, bride selling, etc., which in turn will lead to an in increase in prostitution and sexual exploitation and cases of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS, with a resulting increase in physiological and psychological disorders, particularly among women, as well as unwanted pregnancies and forced abortions."

Gomathy Venkateswar, also from India, wrote: "Horrifying newspaper reports in India in some of the leading news dailies, have in recent weeks brought to light how female foeticide is being practiced in some Western States in India. The patriarchal family systems look down on the birth of a first born girl, and mothers are then treated horribly for having delivered a daughter. As a result, women secretly get amniocentesis done in spurious Nursing Homes (though the government prohibits under law such practices). (...) In India as is the custom the pregnant woman comes to her paternal home for the delivery, and where no earlier tests have been undergone on the sex of the child, the entire family is under tremendous strain and anxiety that their daughter delivers ...a boy. Last week in Kolkata, in West Bengal, a neo-mother strangled her baby daughter soon after birth, and buried it in the garden fearing reprisals from her-in-laws on the birth of a second daughter. Age-old mindsets and attitudes towards girls have to change through strong governmental measures to change society."

As lessons learned / recommendations, Vijay Rai named the following points:

- Campaigns targeting awareness on female foeticide should be run in connection with awareness building for the importance of birth registration, as it will be an effective tracking mechanism.
- Working with self-help groups) helps to reach the community in an effective way.
- Use of audio/video media helps in environment building around the cause.
- Capacity building of staff including Govt. and NGOs, help in better understanding of the concept.

It is important to note that in this contribution the role of the media is again highlighted. Gomathy Venkateswar of India suggests that even the film industry (in India) could make a major impact by promoting positive images of women and girls rather than engaging in a further manifestation of negative gender stereotypes: "The pleasure of having a daughter in the house must be highlighted through media coverage and through messages in Bollywood films which weave so much influence on the minds of the millions of Hindi film buffs across the country be it in the cities or the rural areas, especially if this is portrayed through the much loved popular film heroes and heroines."

Vijay Rai (PLAN International India) also suggested a set of measures, including female foeticide campaigns, in connection with awareness-raising for proper birth registration, working with self-help groups in reaching the community in an effective way, the use of audio/video media to generate interest in the cause, and capacity building of NGO staff and government workers.

#### Child labour

Child labour was identified as another area where protection is critical. In the discussion, child domestic work (CDW) was mentioned repeatedly as one of the most invisible and therefore underreported issues. Virginia Murillo Herrera, Vice President for the Americas with Defence for Children International (DCI), provided a useful overview on Child Domestic Work:

"Child Domestic Work (CDW) constitutes one of the most invisible forms of child labour and takes place in work places where children are in vulnerable conditions. Girls and adolescent women are the most affected by this kind of work. The child domestic work belongs to the informal sector with informal conditions because these children work out of sight in public spaces, contrary to other children. Child domestic workers work in private family homes (third houses) on their own, where it is not possible to see them and to have access to them. (...) Poverty and migration are common causes for child domestic work. The children's families are facing marginalization and vulnerable conditions of their native communities. These children start working at 5-6 years of age, work during long hours (more than 12 hours a day), receive no or very little income, have no contract, have no access to school, their rights are not recognized, have no opportunities to play with other children and are exposed to mistreatment, sexual abuse and labour accidents."

Although international recommendations exist, Virginia Murillo Herrera sees the problems around CDW in a lack of awareness in the local/national level: "Even if the CRC, CEDAW and ILO Convention 182 provide dispositions and elements to protect children, there are still many cases to address and a need to combat the lack of political will to recognize the important dimension of these figures and international standards fail to see CDW as a problem, the weakness of domestic law and the difficulties to combat work at private places such as homes."

Luc Franzoni, who works with UNDP in Switzerland, quoted the Second Global Report on child labour issued by ILO, the International Labour Organization, in 2004, which "reminds us that (...) 218 million children are trapped in child labour of which 126 million were in hazardous work. " Mr. Franzoni added: "The little girl from West to East, South from North, seems to be

Lakshmi Krupa Ginjapalle from Indi

for obvious reasons, one being that the juvenile court process is too cumbersome for them to deal with. In such situations, it is the duty of social workers or probation officers to appeal such sentences with proper documentation of their ages and request for their transfers to juvenile institutions.

Finally, Ms. Sossou highlighted that incarcerating both young boys and girls under the age of 18 years in adult prisons anywhere in the world is a human rights abuse of these children and should be prevented by judges, magistrates, social worker/probation officers, the police and legal aid officials."

The right to education has been enshrined in many international documents. Ms. Scholz noted: "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantee the right to education. In 1990 governments promised that Education for All would be reality by the dawn of the new millennium. That commitment was reaffirmed, by the Dakar Framework for Action, which placed a particular emphasis on girls' education. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action assured us that action would be taken to eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training. Those promises were repeated yet again in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals include commitments to end gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005."

Advocating for education is however not enough; it has to be quality education: "If education is to be truly empowering it must be quality education, Ms. Scholz continued." In this context, she insisted that "educational facilities must be safe and the environment gender sensitive and that educational institutions must put in place policies aimed at preventing violence and harassment of girls and include mechanisms which protect complainants and monitor effectiveness

She called for better training of teachers so they are prepared to "address the underlying causes of gender inequality, violence and discrimination. Finally, Mrs. Scholz mentioned that "gender bias in curricula and teaching practice that perpetuates gender inequality must be eliminated and educators develop engendered curricula and materials that empower girls to act on their own behalf and contribute to the transformation of the social, cultural, and economic structures, which perpetuate patriarchy and inequality."

This comprehensive look at the benefits and challenges of education showed that education has to be seen as a process and a goal. Education is not limited to learning in schools or other institutions, but also includes the learning of life-skills. David Kenneth Waldman, Founder and CEO of a US-based NGO To Love Children Educational Foundation International Inc noted that it is also important to educate and train others on the rights of the girl child. "Education that is sustainable for the girl child, sensitivity training for males, along with creating opportunity is the best investment we can make. We need to act cohesively as a world body of girl child advocates to bring clean water, security, micro finance for women, health education and clinics to name a few and to stand behind the force of our UN conventions but also to work to get all sectors to see this as a priority that is essential for world peace and prosperity. Am I naive or setting the impossible goal of reaching all girls? (...) Imagine if all of us [participating in this online discussion] pooled our resources, funding, ideas, volunteers and expertise to come together and create as a first step a sustainable world wide media campaign to solicit many more millions all over the world dedicated to working for the girl child, imagine what can change."

While these views were voiced from the perspectives of the industrialized world, the problems in the developing countries are even more serious. Here, even basic education is lacking and the question of how girls and women can raise their voices and fight for their rights is an important one. Illiteracy can be a major constraint to the empowerment of girls.

Marie Mathilde Manga from the NGO: African Women's Association in Cameroon posited, "It seems evident that the crucial issue is illiteracy, especially in our Countries in Development Process. Illiteracy is a vulnerability factor, in so far as it exposes the Girl Child to prostitution and any kind of work, demeaning or not, just for her survival. So, it would be advisable to encourage the Education of the Girl Child of Countries in Development Process."

In many parts of the world, children (and especially girls) have to start working at a very young age to support their families. Poverty can cause lack of access to education – lack of education results in a lack of empowerment, which in turn leads to more poverty, discrimination and violence.

Gomathy Venkateswar from Kolkata, India, added this perspective when he asked: "How are these problems to be solved except through gigantic poverty alleviation programs by Government and NGOs and civil society?" His conclusion was clear: "As a teacher for the last 34 years, how else but through education, spread of information and knowledge of one's own rights can we hope to tackle this almost insurmountable evil problem that besets us not only in South and South East Asia, but throughout the Western World in some form or the other where there is the huge influx of cultures, beliefs and practices?"

Indira Koirala from Nepal also added a list of recommendations, including "Increase awareness among girls - through school education and also through other mechanisms such as mass awareness campaigns etc about the CRC - right to participate, right to non-discrimination, right to be free from abuses and exploitation and right to growth and development. Many girls in developing countries don't even know that they have these rights that must be fulfilled by family, community and state."

A controversial issue in the discussion arose regarding affirmative action, in particular on the issue of admitting girls to university with lower grades than boys. Lea Mwambene from Cape Town wrote in this context: "Apart from been ridiculed by other students, it is indeed very demeaning to feel, as a woman myself, that you are educated because your passing mark into the University system was reduced, for example. This would, in my opinion, have an effect on the completion of that programme. What is ideal, as a suggestion, are policies that will champion equal entry and retention of both boys and girls into the educational system. What we also need are positive initiatives that will achieve the goal of educating and empowering girls for a better world. Initiatives that will instill confidence in a girl child throughout the education system and after graduating."

Finally, Lea Mwambene from the University of Western Cape in South Africa did not leave any doubt that education plays a central role in the elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child and recalled the text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: "Article 28 of the CRC provides for education as a basic right and for free and compulsory primary education as a matter of urgent priority. Although the term girl child does not appear anywhere in the CRC, it has been argued that several provisions of the CRC speak to the situation of the girl child and can be used as an agenda for action to identify persistent forms of inequality and discrimination against the girl child in all fields, including education. The CRC is g5105 Tw[(i; 14.62 0 TD0.0001 TcoeO

girls. It is the starting point from which all campaigning and advocacy starts. Only educated girls can stand up for their rights and take the future in their own hands.

#### Changing stereotypical attitudes and behaviour

The empowerment of girls requires positive change for girls themselves. It also requires change in the attitudes and behaviour of others in families, schools and other institutions in the community. Participants in the online discussion agreed that changing stereotypical attitudes and behaviour was one of the main issues surrounding girls' empowerment.

Examples from developing countries were presented that demonstrate how positive change can be brought about when different groups in a community

"Each neighborhood parliament has a neighborhood cabinet, with a neighborhood chief minister and ministers for various concer portrayal of women... Such issues also necessitate debates on freedom of expression, of media, of arts and performance etc. "

Busakorn Suriyasarn replied with a look at the positive and the negative side of the media: "I think the role of media is of

### <u>4. MONITORING PROGRESS - DATA AND STATISTICS ON THE GIRL</u> <u>CHILD</u>

Collecting data for statistics is always a difficult, rather expensive and time-consuming issue. Quality and quantity have to be balanced, and even then access to information sources can Indira Koirala from the Tribhuvan University in Nepal agreed with the rather negative picture regarding current monitoring situation: "Monitoring on aspects that particularly relates to women and girls has suffered from high resistance ... [In some countries,] organizations even need to fight to put simple Male/Female disaggregate database column. (...) Similarly, there is also a very high resistance among donors to allocate resources for monitoring. They often allocate funds for "activities" (that are visible), but where monitoring the implications of such activities on women and girls are concerned [the argument is made that resources] should come from the budget of implementing organizations. On the other hand, they (donors) are happy to bring teams (with a large amount of resources allocated) for evaluations."

Lack of resources, methodologies and cooperation were quoted as the main reasons for insufficient data collection, dissemination and use and therefore also a lack of monitoring of progress. Research data has also to be fully utilized to develop new approaches to tackle the

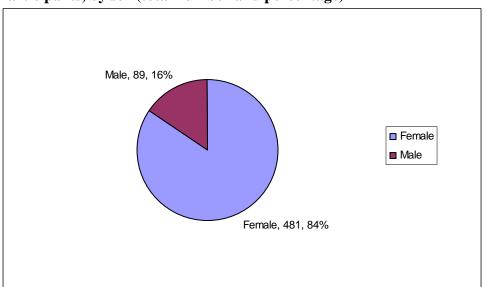
the incidence of rape, laws concerning rape, laws concerning who can testify in a rape case, estimates of the level of enforcement of rape laws within the society and across various sub national regions, customary practice after rape (ostracism, honor killings, effect on marriage ability or on divorce), laws concerning abortion in the case of rape, laws on marital rape, customary practices regarding marital rape, presence of resources for women who have been

### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The online discussion clearly showed that there is an urgent need to take further steps to achieve the goal of eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child. Progress has been made over the last few decades in working on this situation, but major inequality persists, including through harmful traditional practices, child marriage, lack of educational opportunities for girls, negative stereotypes in the media and the use of girls as child domestic workers and sex slaves. Violence against girls is far reaching and affects millions of girls even before they are born.

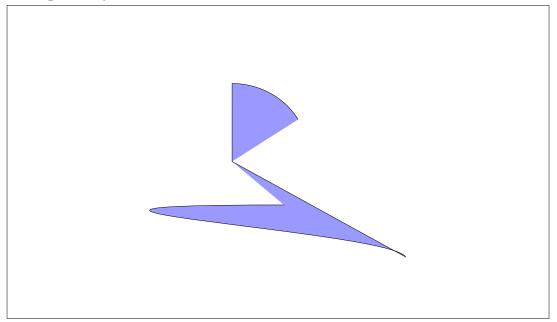
In nearly every contribution that described possible solutions to the different issues facing the girl child, the need for a better cooperation between all stakeholders was emphasized. David Kenneth Waldman described it as follows: "There are tens of thousands of NGOs, individuals, government officials, private businesses that are now working to improve the human rights of children. We need to find ways to better coordinate our efforts. The task now as I understand it to be, is to bring together this army of private, education, Non Governmental Organization, government and international government sectors in a coordinated and cohesive way - a federation that will not only educate and safeguard the needs of the girl child with the international community at large and will also will work in a concerted manner to create a grassroots awarenessw[(ildAsl chgnn a cos4r3oTD4/e

## **Annex 1: Participant statistics charts**

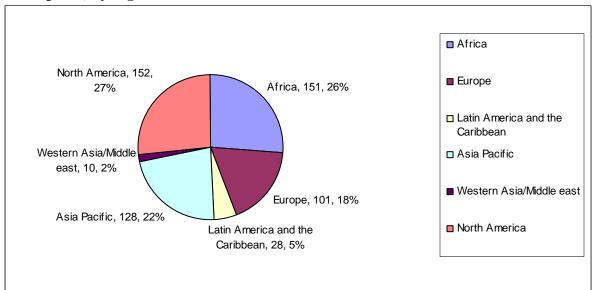


Participants, by sex (total number and percentage)

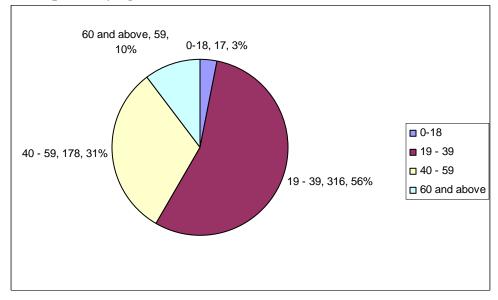
### Participants, by affiliation

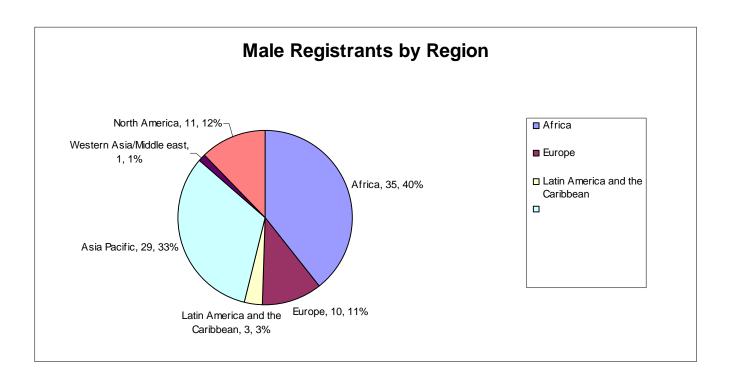


#### Participants, by region



#### Participants, by age





# Annex 2: Numbers of participants

### **Annex 3: List of recommended links**

The following list of links is compiled from links mentioned in the online discussion and/or sent by discussion participants to the discussion moderator by email.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm

Convention on the Rights of the Child

http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm

Melchiorre, Angela: At what age? ... are school-children employed, married and taken to court? <u>http://www.right-to-education.org/content/age/age\_new.pdf</u>

Gender and Development Network of Cambodia <u>http://www.online.com.kh/~gad/Networks.htm</u>

Empowerment for Children, Youth and Families <a href="http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/library/pub4d.htm">http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/library/pub4d.htm</a>

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) <u>http://www.ungei.org/</u>

Girl Child Quiz (on Voices of Youth) http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/rights/711\_girlchildquizen.php

BBC report on "breast ironing" in Cameroon http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5107360.stm

Girls' Education Monitoring System <u>http://www.educategirls.com/</u>

The Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations Girls Education Initiative - A Guidance Note to UN Country Teams http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/know\_sharing/flagship\_initiatives/ungei\_guidance.pdf

UNESCO Multimedia gender training kit <u>http://www.ignou.ac.in/igun\_gentr/index.asp</u>

Gender for journalists – Online training toolkit <u>http://www.cpu.org.uk/cpu-toolkits/gender\_reporting/index.html</u>

Female Foeticide in India http://www.indiafemalefoeticide.org.

Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages <u>http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/convention.htm</u>

Ritual abuse torture – Jeanne Sarson and Linda MacDonald <a href="http://www.ritualabusetorture.org/">http://www.ritualabusetorture.org/</a>

The Gender and Development Center (GAD/C) and Cambodian Men's Network (CMN) <u>http://www.online.com.kh/~gad/Networks.htm</u>

Woman Stats database <u>www.womanstats.org</u>