



*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 51st 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:

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

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:

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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 “

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:

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

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,

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

- 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,

Gomathy Venkateswar, also from India, wrote:

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: “

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:

“

”

Although international recommendations exist, Virginia Murillo Herrera sees the problems around CDW in a lack of awareness in the local/national level: “

”

quoted the Second Global Report on child labour issued by ILO, the International Labour Organization, in 2004,

Mr. Franzoni added:

Lakshmi Krupa Ginjapalle from Indi

Finally, Ms. Sossou highlighted that

The right to education has been enshrined in many international documents. Ms. Scholz noted:

Advocating for education is however not enough; it has to be quality education:

insisted that Ms. Scholz continued In this context, she

She called for better training of teachers so they are prepared to “

Finally, Mrs. Scholz mentioned that “

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. “

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,

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: "

His conclusion was clear:

Indira Koirala from Nepal also added a list of recommendations, including "

."

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:

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:

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

Busakorn Suriyasarn replied with a look at the positive and the negative side of the media:

4. MONITORING PROGRESS - DATA AND STATISTICS ON THE GIRL CHILD

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:

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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

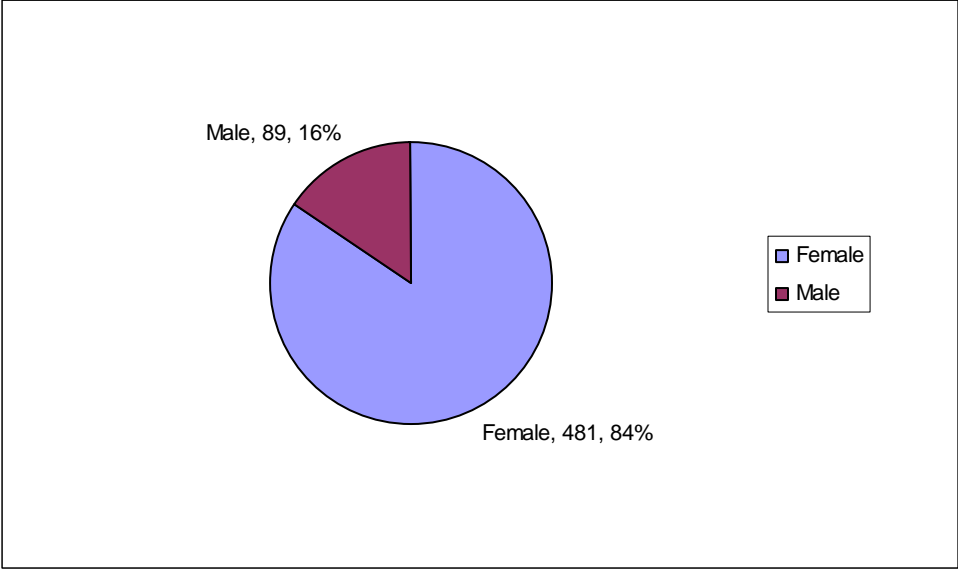
5. CONCLUSIONS

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.

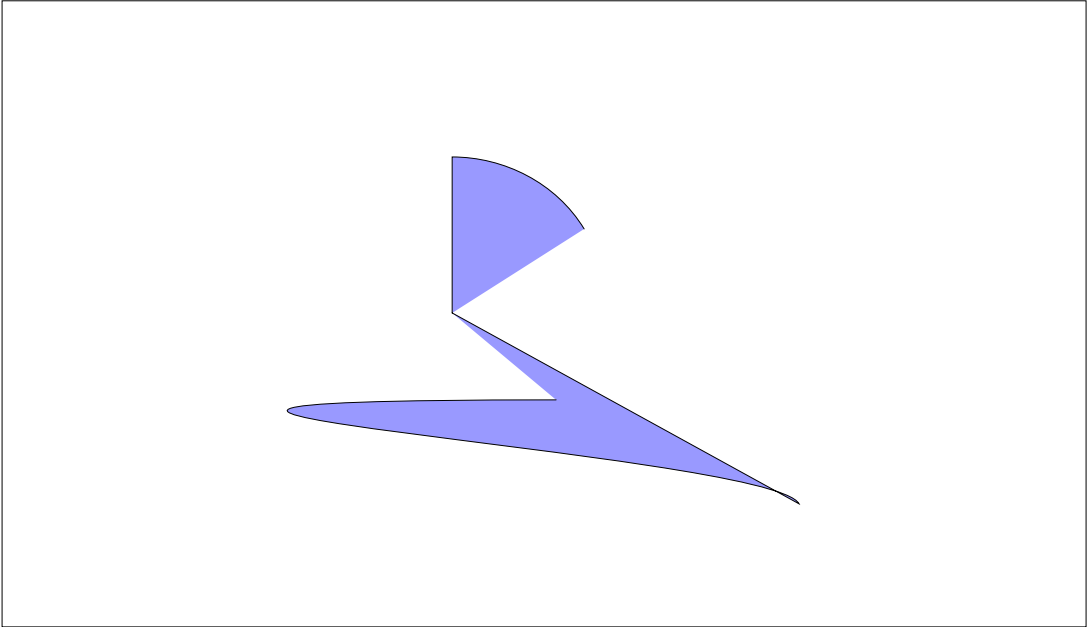
In nearly every contribution that described possible solutions to the different issues facing the girl child, the need for a better cooperation between all stakeholders was emphasized. David Kenneth Waldman described it as follows: “

Annex 1: Participant statistics charts

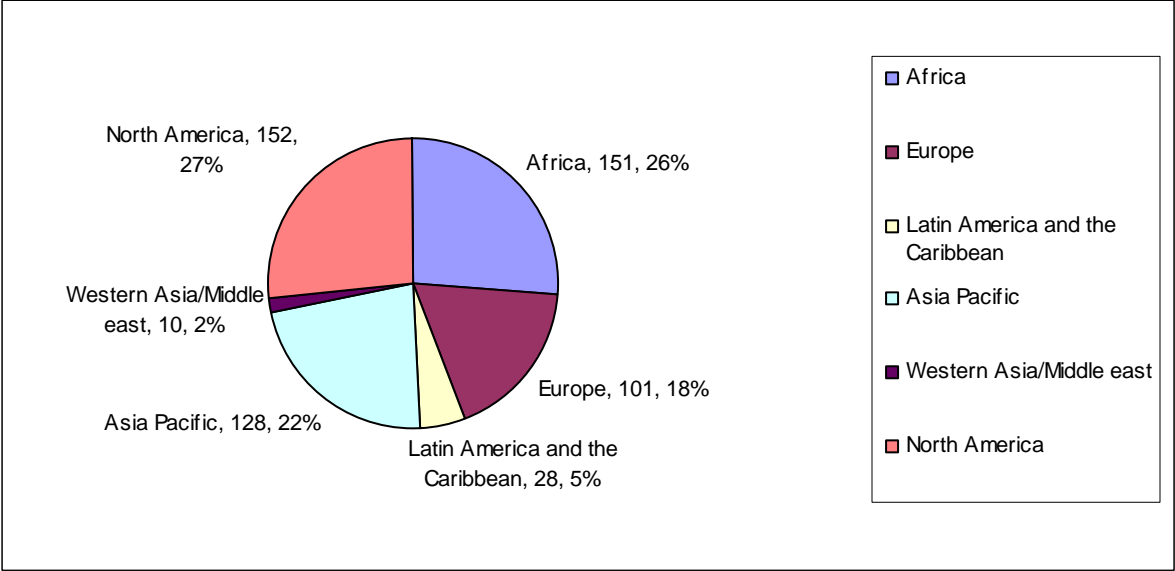
Participants, by sex (total number and percentage)



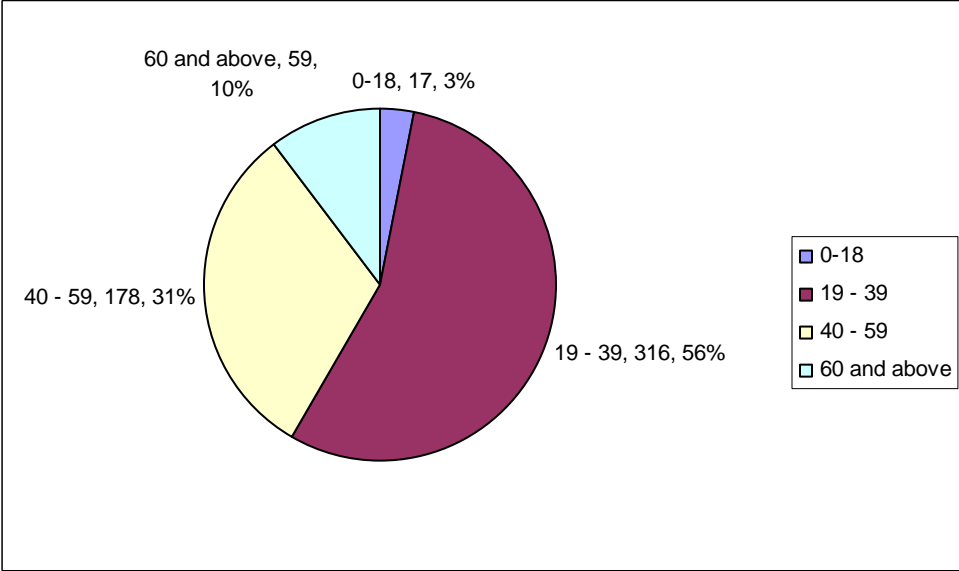
Participants, by affiliation



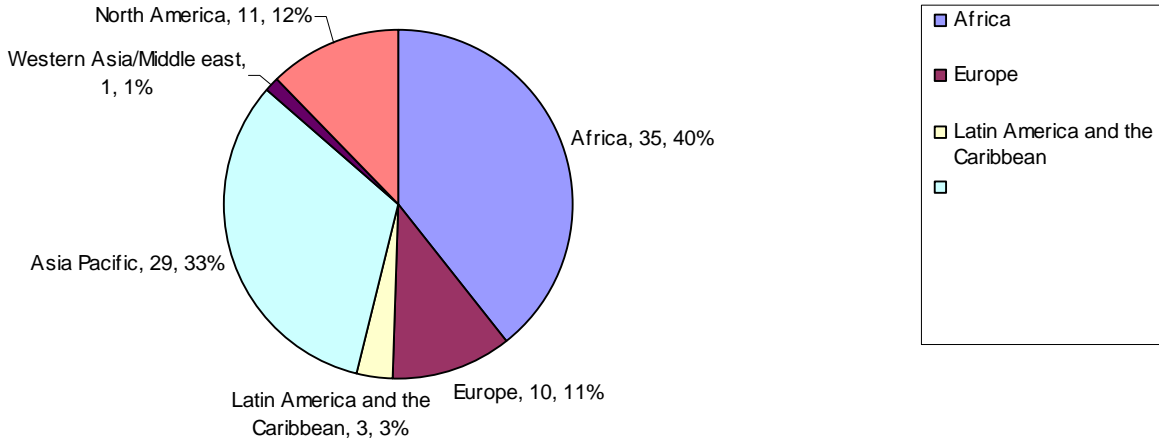
Participants, by region



Participants, by age



Male Registrants by Region



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?

http://www.right-to-education.org/content/age/age_new.pdf

Gender and Development Network of Cambodia

<http://www.online.com.kh/~gad/Networks.htm>

Empowerment for Children, Youth and Families

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/library/pub4d.htm>

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)

<http://www.ungei.org/>

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

<http://www.educategirls.com/>

The Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations Girls Education Initiative - A Guidance Note to UN Country Teams

http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/known_sharing/flagship_initiatives/ungei_guidance.pdf

UNESCO Multimedia gender training kit

http://www.ignou.ac.in/igun_gentr/index.asp

Gender for journalists – Online training toolkit

http://www.cpu.org.uk/cpu-toolkits/gender_reporting/index.html

Female Foeticide in India

<http://www.indiafemalefoeticide.org>

Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages

<http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/convention.htm>

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

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

Woman Stats database
www.womanstats.org