

*Girl Power and Potential:*

# A JOINT PROGRAMMING FRAMEWORK FOR FULFILLING THE RIGHTS OF MARGINALIZED ADOLESCENT GIRLS

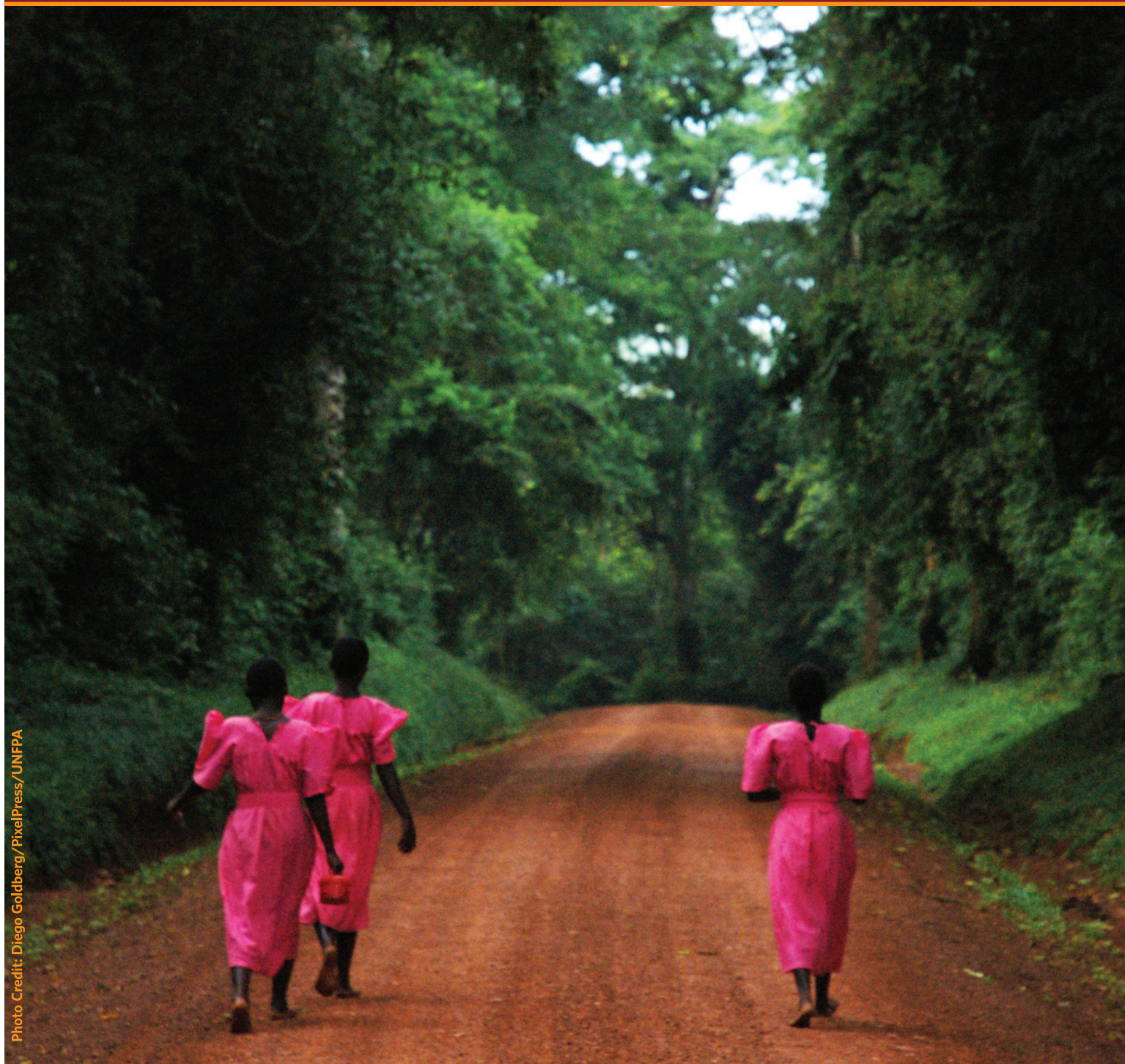


Photo Credit: Diego Goldberg/PixelPress/UNFPA

The United Nations Interagency Task Force on Adolescent Girls

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## A UN INTERAGENCY INITIATIVE FOR MARGINALIZED ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Evaluations of adolescent development and participation programmes in 15 countries from 1999–2006 revealed a segment of the youth population that had been left behind: marginalized adolescent girls.

An Interagency Task Force on Adolescent Girls was established in 2007 to reorient youth programmes to better reach marginalized adolescent girls. Co-chaired by UNFPA and UNICEF, the Task Force includes the ILO, UNESCO, UNIFEM, and WHO. The Task Force supports collaboration at country level—with government ministries, NGOs and women’s and girls’ networks—to identify marginalized adolescent girls in selected communities and to implement programmes aimed at ending their marginalization and enabling adolescent girls to claim their full rights and access to social services, particularly education, health care, employment and human development.

The Task Force identified the need for a clear interagency programming framework specifically addressing the most marginalized and disadvantaged adolescent girls, complementing existing frameworks and programmes on adolescent development and participation. This information brief provides an overview of a UN joint programming framework for marginalized adolescent girls, which will be launched by the end of 2009.

### A call to focus on the excluded

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has concluded, inter alia, that government and UN agencies should identify groups at high risk of discrimination and violence; ensure financial resources and targeted, innovative programmes that address the needs and priorities of girls who have difficulties in accessing services and programmes; enhance opportunities for adolescent girls to develop leadership capacities, networking and secure economic independence; and develop additional indicators for monitoring the situation of vulnerable girls. *(Agreed conclusions, 51<sup>st</sup> CSW, 26 February-9 March 2007)*

## MARGINALIZED ADOLESCENT GIRLS: WHO ARE THEY?

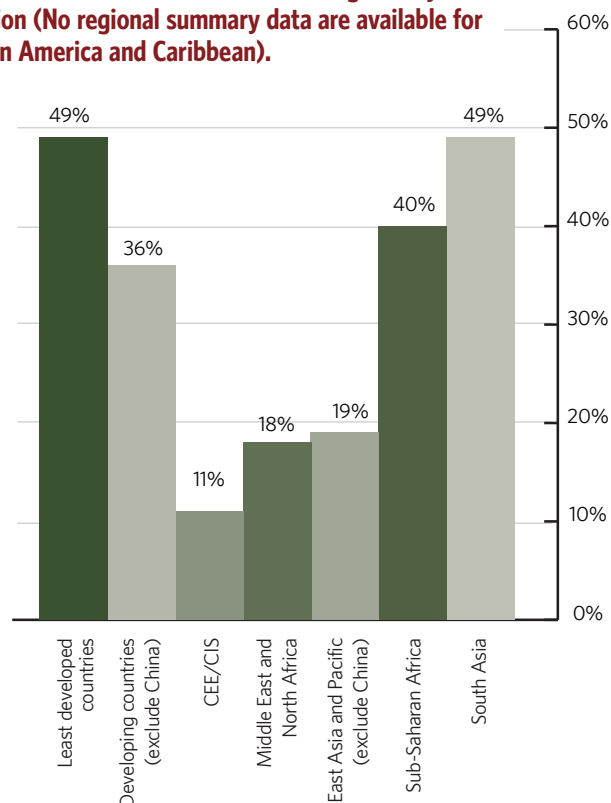
Marginalized adolescent girls have been consistently left out or overlooked in youth programmes over the years. They are adolescent girls who are isolated in their communities, voiceless and “invisible”, lacking access to education, health care, jobs and skills development. With the right opportunities and skills-building, these adolescent girls could **hold the key to breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty** in the world. Some categories of marginalized adolescent girls are:

**GIRLS AFFECTED BY HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES** including female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), child marriage and its consequences, such as early and unattended child-bearing;

**GIRLS BELONGING TO SOCIALLY EXCLUDED AND VULNERABLE GROUPS** such as ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, indigenous and nomadic communities, and populations living in remote areas and urban slums;

**GIRLS LIVING IN AREAS THAT ARE INSECURE AND VULNERABLE** to natural disasters, the effects of climate change, armed conflict, and gender-based and generalized violence, and at risk to HIV infection;

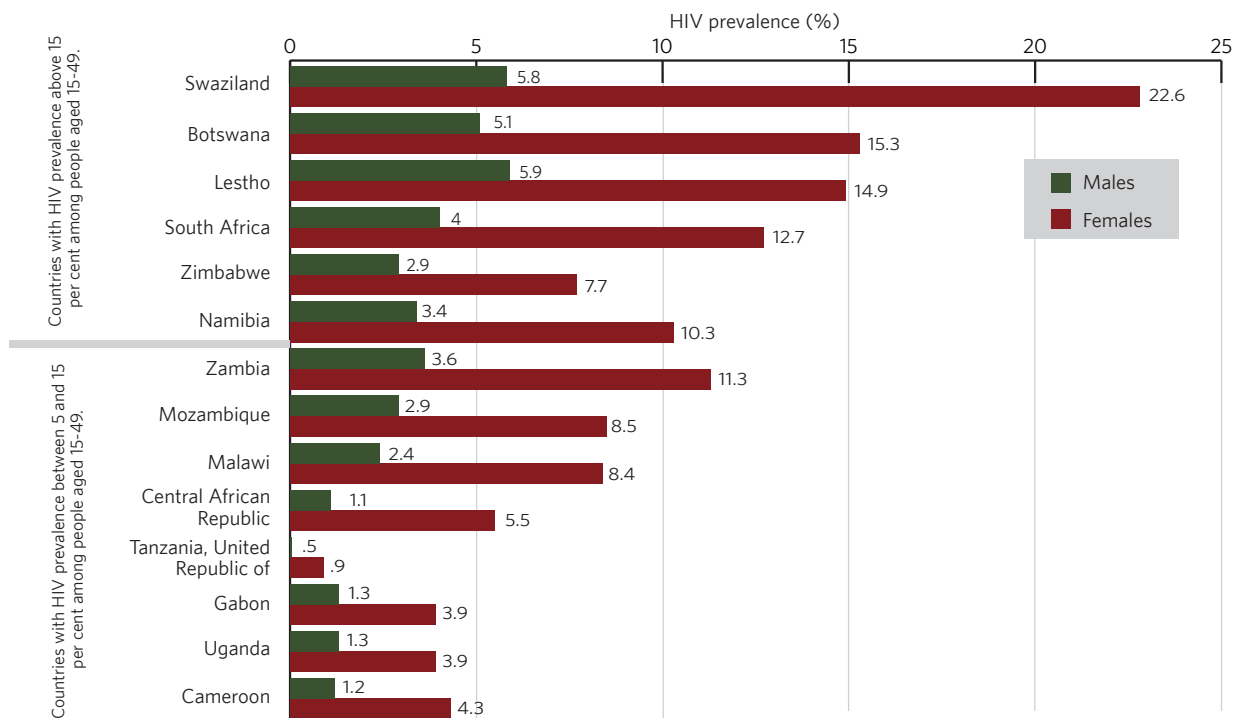
**Child Marriage: Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married or in union before age 18, by region (No regional summary data are available for Latin America and Caribbean).**



Source: MICS, DHS and other national surveys, 1998-2007



**HIV prevalence. Significant number of young people continue to be infected with HIV each year, and girls in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, remain vulnerable. Young women are 3 times more likely to be infected than young men aged 15-24.**



Source: *Children and AIDS, Third Stocktaking report, 2008*

**GIRLS WHO DO NOT HAVE ADEQUATE PROTECTION** at household level, such as girls in institutions, girls living apart from both parents, girls in violent households, girls in domestic labour, girls who are trafficked or living on the street, and girls without families in refugee camps and internally displaced populations;

**GIRLS EXCLUDED FROM EDUCATION** due to poverty, lack of safety and security, disability, having to care for family members with HIV or affected by traditional practices which force them to leave school early;

**GIRLS LIVING WITH PHYSICAL OR MENTAL DISABILITIES.**

Many of these girls do not show up in surveys or statistics and are not served by policy and programme interventions because their communities receive insufficient attention to begin with, because data are sometimes not disaggregated by sex and age, and because they sometimes appear in surveys only as young wives, as domestics, or as girls out of school. This “invisibility” is exacerbated by cultural traditions of low status, stigmatization, and gender stereotypes. These in turn are used to justify the nature of their work and livelihoods, their enforced seclusion and, at times, even their detention. Many girls are marginalized in more than one way, e.g.: HIV-infected single mothers, or girls from displaced minorities, or disabled and out-of-school girls.

**UN definitions of age groups:**

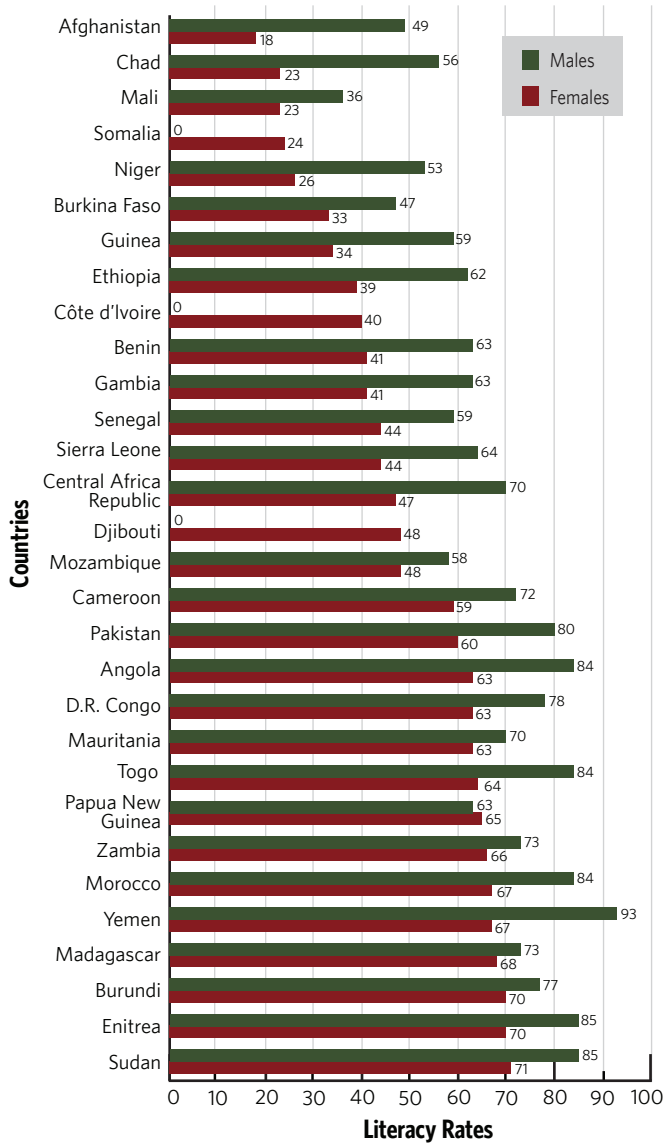
- Children: 0-18 years
- Adolescents: 10-19 years
- Youth: 15-24 years

**WHY FOCUS ON MARGINALIZED ADOLESCENT GIRLS?**

More than 600 million girls live in the developing world. Millions of them lack access to basic services, or are subject to harmful practices, violence, abuse and denial of their human rights and dignity. Still, adolescent girls represent a huge untapped potential. Strategic investments in the social protection, health, education, and livelihoods skills of marginalized girls not only promote social justice but also are essential for achieving internationally-agreed development goals, human rights norms and other global commitments. Opening up opportunities for marginalized adolescent girls can contribute to fulfilling the **Millennium Development Goals** in a number of ways:

**MDG1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.** Establishing a strong economic base requires building girls’ social and economic assets. Research shows that when women have access to and control of income and resources, families and communities benefit as much as the women themselves.

### 30 Countries with Lowest Literacy Rates of Female Youth (15-24 years)



Source: State of the World's Children 2009 UNICEF, Table 5: Education

**MDG2: Achieve universal primary education.** Educated girls are more likely to marry later and to have better maternal and child health outcomes, and are more able and inclined to invest in the health and education of their children. Girls' education is the best development investment in terms of human capital formation, social justice, and economic return.

**MDG3: Promote gender equality and empower women.** Too often marginalized adolescent girls bear the burden of sex discrimination and human rights violations that hinder the achievement of women's empowerment and gender equality. Specific investments are needed to protect marginalized girls and provide opportunities to girls at risk of school dropout and exclusion, child marriage, HIV infection, exploitation and other human-rights violations simply because they are young and female.

**MDG4, MDG5: Reduce child mortality and improve maternal health; MDG6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.** Promoting schooling, building livelihood skills and social assets, and providing better access to sexual and reproductive health education and services for these girls, before they become mothers, will help reduce child mortality and maternal deaths and reduce HIV infection.

**MDG7: Ensure environmental sustainability.** Programmes targeting slum dwellers will positively affect millions of marginalized girls in urban settings.

**MDG8: Develop a global partnership for development.** This must include civil-society partnerships in which the assets and capacities of marginalized girls can be mobilized, and their rights respected.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE FRAMEWORK AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

**The UN Joint Programming Framework for Fulfilling the Human Rights of Marginalized Adolescent Girls** emerged in response to demands from UN Country Teams for guidance on how to reach marginalized adolescent girls. The Framework makes the case for enhanced UN interagency collaboration to focus on marginalized adolescent girls in alignment with international commitments and poverty-alleviation goals. It focuses attention on specific populations of marginalized adolescent girls and defines what have been shown to be the most productive approaches to reaching and empowering them.

The Framework initiative aims to support the UN system in ensuring that joint programmes of cooperation **make known** the situation of the most marginalized adolescent girls and **prescribe** practical action for fulfilling their human rights. The key objective is to **empower** marginalized adolescent girls, enabling them to know, claim and achieve their human rights. This will be done through four main approaches:

**Strengthening Partnerships:** Use of the Framework will facilitate more efficient and effective technical and financial partnerships that directly invest in adolescent girls and aim to lower the barriers—at family, community, and national levels—that thwart their full potential and participation.

**Improving Programmes:** The Framework will help the UN system to support governments in identifying and addressing the needs of marginalized adolescent girls. In practical terms, this will mean improving the amount and quality of data and information about the situation of adolescent girls, to ensure that marginalized girls are counted and included in programming responses.

**Harmonizing Policies:** The Framework will be used to support the UN system’s collaboration with governments and civil society on harmonizing national laws, as well as the management of government programmes, in line with agreed international norms and standards, to enable marginalized girls to fulfil their rights.

**Building Capacity:** The Framework will assist in developing the capacities of governments, communities and civil society organizations to take actions necessary for meeting their obligations towards fulfilling the rights of adolescent girls.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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- **Human rights-based approach.**
- **Integrated approach** (health, education, protection, social and economic asset building).
- **Life-cycle approach** (interventions sensitive to life-cycle transitions).
- **Internal diversity** (adolescent girls are not a homogeneous group).
- **Assets building** (social assets are essential for girls’ protection and development).
- **Evidence-based programming.**
- **Realignment of existing programmes** (to target adolescent girls most in need).
- **Culturally-sensitive programming** (approaching culture as a pool of ingenuity and innovation).

## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

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### IDENTIFYING MARGINALIZED ADOLESCENT GIRLS.

First, make marginalized girls “visible”, analyze and further define subgroups within the marginalized by:

- **Making conscious efforts to “see”** marginalized girls (by asking the right questions).
- **Using mapping techniques** to locate concentrations of vulnerable adolescents.
- **Speaking to girls directly** and incorporating their opinions into situation analyses.
- **Gathering and analyzing data** to develop social profiles of diverse groups of girls.
- **Measuring girls’ social assets, access, and safety.** (Do they have friends and places to meet?)

- **Assessing marginalized girls’ current share** of existing programme resources.
- **Engaging and building the skills of young people** and involving them in programme design.

### REACHING AND INCLUDING MARGINALIZED

**ADOLESCENT GIRLS.** Once they are identified, targeted strategies must be implemented to include them in policy, advocacy and programming responses:

- **Implementing an age-appropriate approach.** Younger adolescent girls require different interventions from older girls; likewise married girls vis-à-vis unmarried girls, even of the same age. Focus on younger adolescents as an effective preventive approach.
- **Promoting girls-only activities** is a good way to increase participation, e.g. in youth centres.
- **Developing local girl leaders as mentors** to be role models for younger adolescents.
- **Assuring access to girls-only spaces**—providing safe havens from trauma, stress, violence and abuse, where girls can develop friendship networks, learn about their rights, and become leaders.
- **Creating livelihoods** by leveraging girls’ capabilities and assets to reduce vulnerabilities and expand opportunities simultaneously.
- **Promoting participation** that will help girls develop self-confidence and skills, build competencies, learn to be active, shape their own lives and expand their own freedoms.
- **Involving families and communities**, including political and social leaders, from the beginning, so that they help support and create opportunities for girls’ empowerment.
- **Working on boys’ and men’s attitudes** to overcome biased gender socialization through education.
- **Involving local and national governments** to factor gender equality and gender-responsive budgeting into development planning.

## HOW WILL PROGRESS BE MEASURED?

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In the agreed conclusions of the 51st Session of CSW in 2007, there was a special emphasis on collecting data on girls. Governments and partners were encouraged to conduct regular surveys of the situation and needs of girls at national and local levels to identify groups at high risk of discrimination and violence, ensuring that all data is disaggregated by sex, age, education, marital status, geographical location, income and other relevant factors.

Once the target populations of girls have been identified, a programme plan should outline how the initiative will influence the factors contributing to their marginalization, as well as actions to mitigate the consequences of it. Intermediate and final outcomes will be crafted and linked to the actions in the plan. All will have indicators to monitor implementation and results at the level of the girl, and changes at the community level. Efforts will be made to relate these indicators to national ones, contributing to countries' achievement of the MDGs.

Together as One UN, the agencies, funds and programmes will join with governments, communities and NGOs under this Framework to improve the lives of marginalized adolescent girls—alleviating their isolation, protecting them from violations and abuse, nurturing their skills, and mobilizing their talents to fulfil their human rights and realize their full potential as young women and as citizens.

### Several areas of intervention already proven effective can be adapted to national contexts and local needs:

**Education:** Keep girls in school through the primary and secondary levels; invest in the quality of these schools and in making them safer and more girl-friendly. For out-of-school girls, build bridges between formal and non-formal education programmes and develop basic literacy skills.

**Health:** Make services more responsive to the needs of different groups and ages of adolescent girls and accessible to the most marginalized groups. Include sexual and reproductive health services.

**HIV and AIDS:** Improve the access of marginalized adolescent girls to a continuum of interventions for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

**Security and Protection:** Strengthen government institutions, policies, laws, standards and guidelines to raise awareness and foster a culture of zero tolerance to violence against girls.

## CASE STUDIES

### **Making marginalized girls visible in Addis Ababa:**

Developing a programme for in-migrant girls in the urban slums of Ethiopia first required finding and recruiting girls who were engaged in domestic work. Home surveys tended to miss these girls. Women from the community who were familiar with the environment were trained to go from house to house, inquiring about the residents by asking: "Who eats here?"; "Who sleeps here?" Answers from such questions enabled mentors to develop a roster of household members—temporary and permanent—by age, gender, and marital status, and invite eligible girls into the programme.

**Creating girls-only spaces in Malawi:** Despite the presence of youth clubs in communities, about 72 per cent of girls did not participate because they thought the clubs were only for boys. To increase girls' participation in youth-led activities, 10 girls-only youth clubs were established and within 5 years this number had increased to 50. Four girls-only youth clubs graduated to being fully-fledged youth-run NGOs.

**Building girls' life skills in rural Bangladesh:** Despite a rapid increase in girls' schooling and young unmarried girls' participation in the workforce, adolescent girls in Bangladesh continue to be held back by the custom of child marriage, particularly in poor rural areas. In 2001, a UNICEF-UNFPA-Population Council intervention provided life skills and livelihoods training. Some 15,000 girls participated in groups of 30. More girls found self-employment and part-time employment opportunities. One lesson learned was

that future programmes to delay marriage should focus on younger adolescents (aged 12-14) in the poorest families and rural districts.

### **Decreasing isolation of married girls in Burkina Faso:**

Child marriage occurs frequently with girls being married to men who are typically substantially older. Married girls have restricted mobility. A UNFPA intervention helped the partners devise an innovative strategy for bringing isolated married girls out into the public with the help of resource persons known as *mères-éducatrices* (mother-educators)—young married women from the community who were already mothers. Their primary role was to provide information and support to newly married adolescents during their first pregnancy and birth. After initial visits by these mentors, the married girls were permitted to leave their homes to meet with their peers for weekly education sessions. After the first year, girls organized themselves and built an informal school that served as a permanent meeting space where functional literacy classes were offered.

### **Playing sports to empower girls in Upper Egypt:**

In villages in rural Upper Egypt—traditional settings where girls' mobility is restricted and early marriage is common—an innovative programme known as *Ishraq* ("enlightenment") combines sports with other activities to empower girls. *Ishraq* challenges traditional concepts of gender-appropriate behaviour by incorporating sports and recreational activities along with literacy, life-skills training, and health awareness. Girls meet for learning and play at a girl-friendly youth centre. Aimed at 11-15-year-old out-of-school girls, *Ishraq* has afforded girls greater participation in community life.