



SUMMARY

Gender equality is central to realizing the Millennium agenda, which risks failure without the full participation of all members of society. Within the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, and at the heart of the United Nations itself, is the acknowledgement that the vulnerable, especially children, require special care and attention. Gender equality will not only empower women to overcome poverty, but also their children, families, communities and countries. When seen in this light, gender equality is not only morally right – it is pivotal to human progress and sustainable development.

Moreover, gender equality produces a double dividend: It benefits both women and children. Healthy, educated and empowered women have healthy, educated and confident daughters and sons. The amount of influence women have over the decisions in the household has been

shown to positively impact the nutrition, health care and education of their children. But the benefits of gender equality go beyond their direct impact on children. Without it, it will be impossible to create a world of equity, tolerance and shared responsibility – a world that is fit for children.

Yet, despite substantial gains in women's empowerment since the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, gender discrimination remains pervasive in every region of the world. It appears in the preference for sons over daughters, limited opportunities in education and work for girls and women, and outright gender-based violence in the forms of physical and sexual violence.

Other, less obvious, forms of gender discrimination can be equally destructive. Institutional discrimination is

harder to identify and rectify. Cultural traditions can perpetuate social exclusion and discrimination from generation to generation, as gender stereotypes remain widely accepted and go unchallenged.

Eliminating gender discrimination and empowering women will require enhancing women's influence in the key decisions that shape their lives and those of children in three distinct arenas: the household, the workplace and the political sphere. A change for the better in any one of these realms influences women's equality in the others and has a profound and positive impact on children everywhere. This report intends to provide a road map to accelerate progress towards gender equality and empowering women through education, financing, legislation, legislative quotas, engaging men and boys, women empowering women and improved research and data.

A call for equality

Equality between men and women has been a goal of the United Nations since its inception. The 1945 Preamble to the UN Charter notes its objective “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.”

These words link equality to human development, recognizing that both women and men are essential for the social and economic progress of nations. More than 60 years ago, global leaders envisioned a world where all people shared equally in rights, resources and opportunities, where abundance ruled and every man, woman and child was free from despair and inequity.

The call for equal rights evolved into a quest for gender equality when a distinction was made between gender and sex. Sex is biological: Females have two X chromosomes and males have one X and one Y chromosome. Gender, on the other hand, is a social construct that describes what is feminine and what is masculine. Recognizing that gender roles are not inborn but rather learned, proponents of gender equality challenged the stereotypes and pervasive discrimination that kept women and girls socially and economically disadvantaged.

Despite calls for gender equality in such documents as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, and other related proclamations, the cause of women's rights did not take its rightful place in the international agenda until 1974. Then, the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which had been established in 1946 and already succeeded in having sev-

eral legal instruments adopted, was tasked with preparing an internationally binding instrument that would protect human rights and fundamental freedoms for women. The result of its work, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979.¹ The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which focuses on the inalienable rights of children, was adopted a decade later.

World leaders know that human development is stunted by entrenched discrimination and injustice. Yet although 27 years have elapsed since CEDAW was adopted – and despite the fact that the convention has received 184 ratifications, accessions and successions by States parties – millions of women and girls throughout the world remain powerless, voiceless and without rights. The negative consequences of women's inequality reverberate throughout society.

The State of the World's Children 2007 examines the discrimination and disempowerment women face throughout their lives – and outlines what must be done to eliminate gender discrimination and empower women and girls. It begins by examining the status of women today, and then discusses how gender equality will move all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) forward, and how investment in women's rights will ultimately produce a double dividend: advancing the rights of both women and children.

The rights of women and children are mutually reinforcing

A logical question that arises from the topic of this report is, “Why does UNICEF, an



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organization that advocates for children, monitor women’s rights?” The answer is twofold.

First, as this report demonstrates, gender equality furthers the cause of child survival and development. Because women are the primary caregivers for children, women’s well-being contributes to the well-being of their offspring. Healthy, educated and empowered women are more likely to have healthy, educated and confident daughters and sons. Women’s autonomy, defined as the ability to control their own lives and to participate in making decisions that affect them and their families, is associated with improved child nutrition (*see Chapter 2, pages 24*). Other aspects of gender equality, such as education levels among women, also correlate with improved outcomes for children’s survival and development.²

By upholding women’s rights, societies also protect girl children and female adolescents. Gender equality means that girls and boys

have equal access to food, health care, education and opportunities. Evidence has shown that women whose rights are fulfilled are more likely to ensure that girls have access to adequate nutrition, health care, education and protection from harm.

Second, gender equality is essential to creating the world envisioned in the Millennium Declaration, a world of peace, equity, tolerance, security, freedom, respect for the environment and shared responsibility, in which special care and attention is given to the most vulnerable people, especially children. This is the world that the international community has pledged to strive for – a world fit for both women and children.

Nothing less than the full participation of all members of society is needed to ensure sufficient human progress to meet the Millennium Agenda. World leaders at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 understood this. They acknowledged that gender equality will empower women to overcome poverty, with multiple benefits for their families, communities and countries.

The Millennium agenda reflects this recognition of the centrality of gender equality to human development. The Millennium Declaration specifically calls for the full implementation of both the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the conventions are identified as key human rights standards for meeting the Millennium Development Goals. These goals, the international community’s guides to sustainable development, set time-sensitive benchmarks for promoting gender equality and empowering women. But gender equality, according to the Millennium agenda, is not simply a method for accelerating human development: It is also morally right.

Complementarities and tensions between the two conventions

Since the status of women and the well-being of children are deeply intertwined, advocates for children would be remiss if they failed to champion the cause of gender equality. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms

of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are sister treaties – inexorably linked in moving communities towards full human rights. Each delineates specific entitlements that cannot be abrogated due to age, gender, economic class or nationality. The two treaties are complementary, overlapping in their call for precise rights and responsibilities and filling in crucial gaps that may exist when either stands alone.

Several articles of CEDAW address rights pertinent to children, including equality (articles 2 and 15), protecting maternity (article 4), adequate health care (article 12) and shared parental responsibility (article 16). The CRC calls for equal access for girls and boys to education and health care. Both conventions demand freedom from violence and abuse and are based on principles of non-discrimination, participation and accountability.

The treaties are not perfectly harmonious: There are areas of tension. For instance, some supporters of gender equality believe that the CRC stereotypes women as mothers, limiting their life

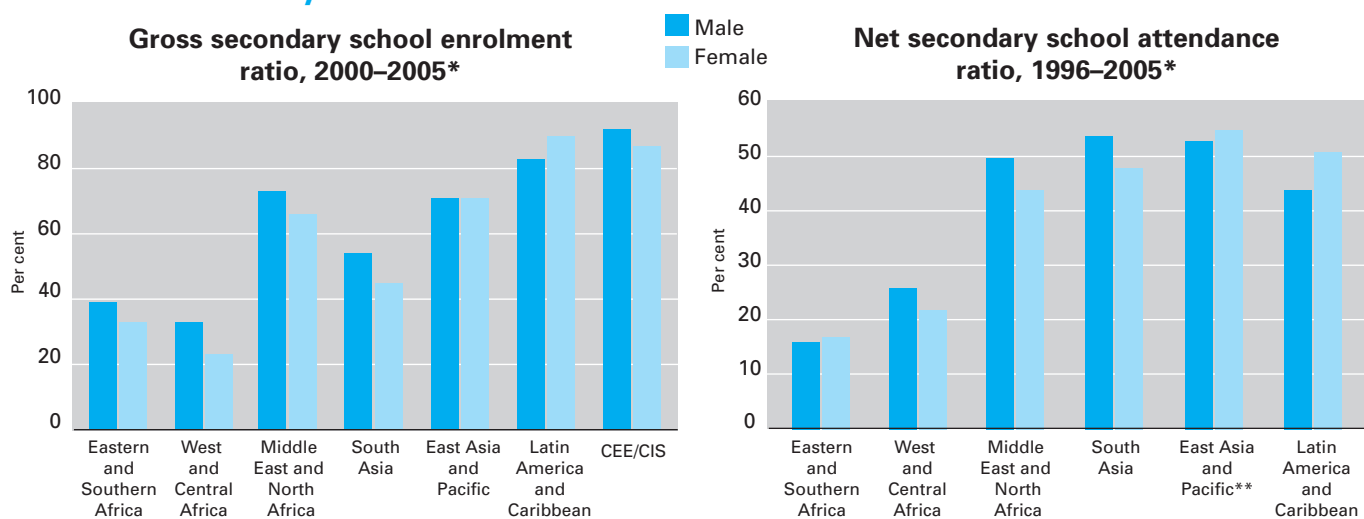
options. Some child rights advocates think that CEDAW focuses too much on a woman’s right to self-actualization and may unintentionally subvert the importance of motherhood. Despite these differences, the two conventions hold more in common than in opposition – they set the standards for an equitable world in which the rights of every human being – female and male, old and young – are respected.

The rights of women are less widely accepted than those of children

Although both treaties have gained widespread endorsement, CEDAW has had the tougher road to acceptance and ratification. Some nations that readily accept the concept that children have rights are less willing to concede that women also have rights. And while 184 countries are parties to CEDAW, many of the signatures were submitted with reservations to specific articles. In fact, CEDAW contains among the highest number of reservations of any United Nations treaty, underscoring worldwide resistance to women’s rights.³

Rhetorical support for CEDAW and the CRC has been strong. In practice, however, neither

Figure 1.1 In many developing regions, girls are more likely than boys to miss out on a secondary education



Notes: Gross secondary enrolment ratio refers to the number of children enrolled in secondary school, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the total number of children of official secondary school age. Net secondary school attendance ratio refers to the number of children attending secondary school who are of official secondary school age, expressed as a percentage of the total number of children of official secondary school age. These data come from national household surveys.

* Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified.

** Excludes China.

Sources: *Gross secondary enrolment ratio:* UNESCO Institute of Statistics. *Net secondary school attendance ratio:* Demographic and Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. The underlying data can be found in the Statistical Tables of this report, page 98.

Gender discrimination across the life cycle

Foeticide and infanticide

Gender discrimination begins early. Modern diagnostic tools for pregnancy have made it possible to determine a child's sex in the earliest phase. Where there is a clear economic or cultural preference for sons, the misuse of these techniques can facilitate female foeticide. Although there is no conclusive evidence to confirm such illegal misuse, birth histories and census data reveal an unusually high proportion of male births and male children under five in Asia, notably in China and India, suggesting sex-selective foeticide and infanticide in the world's two most populous countries – despite initiatives to eradicate these practices in both countries.

The middle years

A principal focus of the middle years of childhood and adolescence is ensuring access to, and completion of, quality primary and secondary education. With a few exceptions, it is mostly girls who suffer from educational disadvantage.

Primary education

For every 100 boys out of school, there are 115 girls in the same situation. Though the gender gap has been closing steadily over the past few decades, nearly 1 of every 5 girls who enrolls in primary school in developing countries does not complete a primary education. Missing out on a primary education deprives a girl of the opportunity to develop to her full potential. Research has shown that educated women are less likely to die in childbirth and are more likely to send their children to school. Evidence indicates that the under-five mortality rate falls by about half for mothers with primary school education.

Secondary education

Recent UNICEF estimates indicate that an average of only 43 per cent of girls of the appropriate age in the developing world attend secondary school. There are multiple reasons for this: There may simply be no secondary school for girls to attend – many developing countries and donors have traditionally focused on offering universal primary education and neglected to allocate the resources to increase enrolment and attendance in secondary education. A girl's parents may conclude that they cannot afford secondary education or may take the traditional view that marriage should be the limit of her ambitions.

Secondary education has multiple benefits for women and children. It is singularly effective in delaying the age at which a young woman first gives birth and it can enhance freedom of movement and maternal health. It also strengthens women's bargaining power within households (*see Chapter 2*), and is a crucial factor in providing opportunities for women's economic and political participation (*see Chapters 3 and 4*).

Adolescence

Among the greatest threats to adolescent development are abuse, exploitation and violence, and the lack of vital knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS.

Female genital mutilation/cutting

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) involves partial or total removal of, or other injuries to, female genitalia for cultural, non-medical reasons. The practice of FGM/C mainly occurs in countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East

and North Africa and some parts of South-East Asia. It is estimated that more than 130 million women and girls alive today have been subjected to FGM/C. FGM/C can have grave health consequences, including the failure to heal, increased susceptibility to HIV infection, childbirth complications, inflammatory diseases and urinary incontinence. Severe bleeding and infection can lead to death.

Child marriage and premature parenthood

Child or early marriage refers to marriages and unions where one or both partners are under the age of 18. Globally, 36 per cent of women aged 20–24 were married or in union before they reached their 18th birthday, most commonly in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Child marriage is a long-standing tradition in areas where it is practised, making protest sometimes barely possible. Parents may consent to child marriages out of economic necessity, or because they believe marriage will protect girls from sexual assault and pregnancy outside marriage, extend girls' child-bearing years or ensure obedience to their husband's household.

Premature pregnancy and motherhood are an inevitable consequence of child marriage. An estimated 14 million adolescents between 15 and 19 give birth each year. Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than women in their twenties. If a mother is under 18, her baby's chance of dying in the first year of life is 60 per cent greater than that of a baby born to a mother older than 19. Even if the child survives, he or she is more likely to suffer from low birthweight, undernutrition and late physical and cognitive development.

Sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking

The younger girls are when they first have sex, the more likely it is that intercourse has been imposed on them. According to a World Health Organization study, 150 million girls and 73 million boys under the age of 18 experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of physical and sexual violence in 2002. The absence of a minimum age for sexual consent and marriage exposes children to partner violence in some countries.

An estimated 1.8 million children are involved in commercial sex work. Many are forced into it, whether they are sold into sexual slavery by desperately poor families or abducted and trafficked into brothels or other exploitative environments. Children exploited in the commercial sex industry are subjected to neglect, sexual violence and physical and psychological abuse.

Sexual and reproductive health

Because unprotected sex carries the risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection, including HIV, knowledge of sexual and reproductive health is essential for the safety of young people. Information alone cannot provide protection, but it is certainly a first step. Nonetheless, adolescents around the world continue to have limited knowledge of reproductive health issues and the risks they face.

HIV/AIDS

By 2005, nearly half of the 39 million people living with HIV were women. In parts of Africa and the Caribbean, young women (aged 15–24) are up to six times more likely to be infected than young men their age. Women

are at greater risk of contracting HIV than men. One important explanation is physiological – women are at least twice as likely as men to become infected with HIV during sex. The other crucial, and largely reversible, factor is social – gender discrimination denies women the negotiating power they need to reduce their risk of infection. High rates of illiteracy among women prevent them from knowing about the risks of HIV infection and possible protection strategies. A survey of 24 sub-Saharan African countries reveals that two thirds or more of young women lack comprehensive knowledge of HIV transmission.

The dramatic increase in infection among women heightens the risk of infection among children. Infants become infected through their mothers during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding. In 2005, more than 2 million children aged 14 years or younger were living with HIV.

Motherhood and old age

Two key periods in many women's lives when the pernicious effects of both poverty and inequality can combine are motherhood and old age.

Maternal mortality

It is estimated that each year more than half a million women – roughly one woman every minute – die as a result of pregnancy complications and childbirth. Some 99 per cent of all maternal deaths occur in developing countries, with over 90 per cent of those in Africa and Asia. Two thirds of maternal deaths in 2000 occurred in 13 of the world's poorest countries. The same year, India alone accounted for one quarter of all maternal deaths. One out of every 16 sub-Saharan

African women will die as a result of pregnancy or childbirth, compared to just 1 out of every 4,000 in industrialized countries. Moreover, motherless newborns are between 3 and 10 times more likely to die than newborns whose mothers survive.

Many of these women's lives could be saved if they had access to basic health care services, including skilled attendants at all births and emergency obstetric care for women who develop complications.

Women in old age

Elderly women may face double discrimination on the basis of both gender and age. Women tend to live longer than men, may lack control of family resources and can face discrimination from inheritance and property laws. Many older women are plunged into poverty at a time of life when they are very vulnerable. Only a few developing countries have safety nets for older people in the form of non-contributory or means-tested pensions.

Grandmothers in particular possess a great deal of knowledge and experience related to all aspects of maternal and child health and care. In many families, they are a mainstay of childcare for working parents. Experience has shown that children's rights are advanced when programmes that seek to benefit children and families also include elderly women.

See References, page 88.

convention has been fully implemented. While giving lip service to equality, governments often fail to invest often limited public resources in women and children or to challenge discriminatory customs, attitudes and beliefs.

Too often, legal watchdogs, civil society organizations and the media also shirk their responsibilities when they fail to monitor, publicly scrutinize or hold officials accountable for unfulfilled promises.

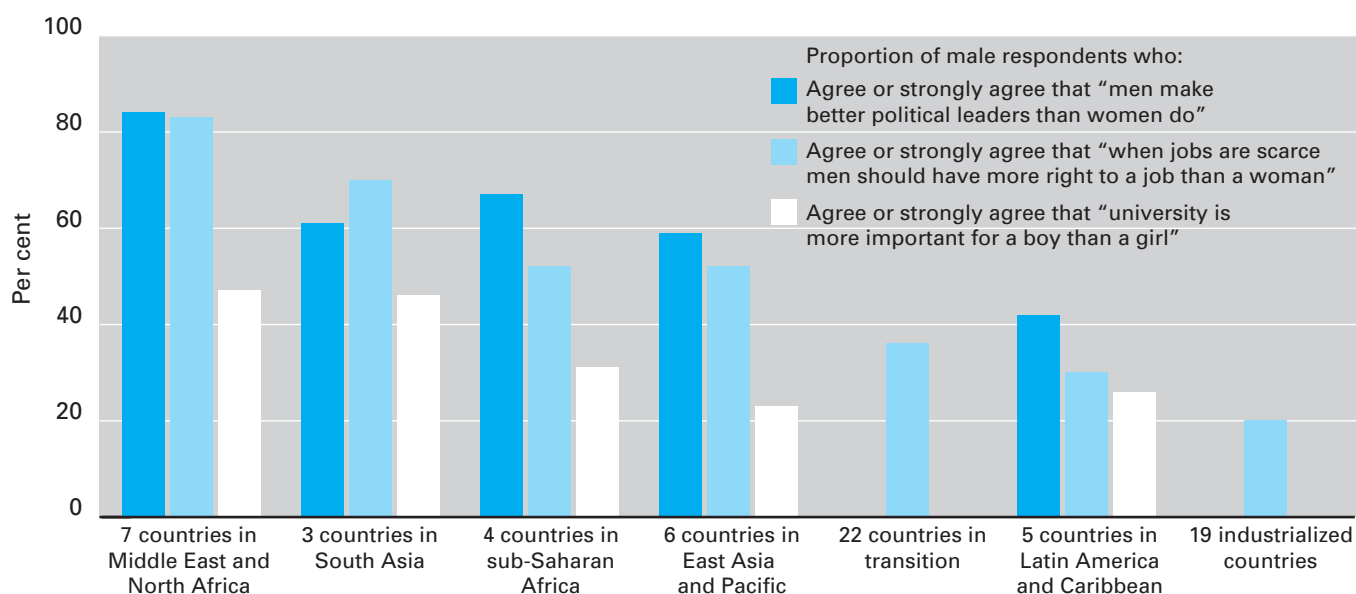
Enforcement of international conventions and national laws pertaining to women and children falls mainly to governments, and they must be ultimately held accountable for the slow pace of progress. But resistance by individuals, families and communities has also waylaid gender equality and children's rights. Male privilege, or the belief that girls and women must be submissive, can leave them last in line for food, health care, education and economic opportunity.

All obstacles to gender equality, regardless of origin, must be dismantled so that development can move forward. Although women and girls are most directly harmed by gender inequality, its pernicious effects reverberate across societies. Failure to secure equality for all has deleterious consequences for the moral, legal and economic fabric of nations.

The pernicious nature of gender inequality

Gender discrimination is pervasive. While the degrees and forms of inequality may vary, women and girls are deprived of equal access to resources, opportunities and political power in every region of the world. The oppression of girls and women can include the preference for sons over daughters, limited personal and professional choices for girls and women, the denial of basic human rights and outright gender-based violence.

Figure 1.2 Men's discriminatory attitudes towards women vary across regions but are significant everywhere



UNICEF calculations are based on data derived from the World Values Survey, Round 4 (1999–2004). Data for each country and territory in the regional aggregates are for the latest year available in the period specified. The following countries and territories are included in the regional aggregates cited: **Middle East and North Africa:** Algeria, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia. **Latin America and Caribbean:** Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Chile, Mexico, Peru. **South Asia:** Bangladesh, India, Pakistan. **East Asia and Pacific:** China, Indonesia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Viet Nam. **Sub-Saharan Africa:** Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania. **Countries in transition:** Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey. **Industrialized countries:** Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States. Notes on the methodology employed can be found in the References section, page 88.

Source: World Values Survey, <www.worldvaluessurvey.org>, accessed June 2006.

Inequality is always tragic and sometimes fatal. Prenatal sex selection and infanticide, prevalent in parts of South and East Asia, show the low value placed on the lives of girls and women and have led to unbalanced populations where men outnumber women.⁴

Despite overall growth in educational enrolment, more than 115 million children of primary school age do not receive an elementary education. With few exceptions, girls are more likely than boys to be missing from classrooms across the developing world. Girls who do enrol in school often drop out when they reach puberty for many reasons – the demands of household responsibilities, a lack of school sanitation, a paucity of female role models, child marriage or sexual harassment and violence, among others.

Violence against women and girls

Girls and women are frequently victims of physical and sexual violence inside and outside

the home. Although such assaults are under-reported because of the stigma of the crime, a recent multi-country study by the World Health Organization revealed that between 15 per cent and 71 per cent of women had experienced physical or sexual assault from an intimate partner.⁵ Domestic violence is the most common form of violence perpetrated against women.⁶

During armed conflict, rape and sexual assault are often used as weapons of war. When complex emergencies force people to be displaced from their homes, women and girls are at increased risk of violence, exploitation and abuse – sometimes from the very security personnel or other persons charged with their protection and safety.

Insidious forms of gender inequality

As despicable as deliberate negligence or brutal violence can be, insidious gender inequality may be equally destructive.



Gender discrimination and inequalities across regions

Attitudes, beliefs and practices that serve to exclude women are often deeply entrenched, and in many instances closely associated with cultural, social and religious norms. Surveys, opinion polls and case studies provide a good indication of the prevalence of gender discrimination in many countries.

A Gallup Poll conducted in five Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador and Mexico) found that half of the respondents believed society favours men over women. In Brazil, only 20 per cent of respondents, both men and women, believe that society treats both sexes equally, while more than half of respondents in that country, and in neighbouring Argentina, consider that women and men do not enjoy equal job opportunities. Although these results are drawn from a small sample, they may well be indicative of a broader recognition of gender discrimination in society.

Examining social attitudes on specific issues, such as access to education and income-generating opportunities for women, reveals even more clearly the extent of gender discrimination and how it compares across countries. The World Values Survey reveals that an alarmingly large number of men – who, as this report will show, often hold power in the household allocation of resources for vital services such as education and health care – believe that university education is more important for a boy than for a girl (see *Figure 1.2, page 6*).

Around two thirds of male respondents in Bangladesh indicate that university education for boys should be

prioritized over that of girls – an opinion echoed by around one third or more of male respondents from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mexico and Uganda, among others. In some countries, men's opinions on this particular issue were less discriminatory, with only 1 out of every 10 male respondents in China and less than 1 out of every 13 male respondents in the United States holding the same view.

These views on education are largely mirrored in attitudes to women's work and participation in politics. More than 80 per cent of men in seven countries surveyed in the Middle East and North Africa believe that when jobs are scarce, men have more right to work than women, and that they make better political leaders than women. In other regions, the proportion of men holding these views is lower, but still significant.

The survey revealed that women's views can also be equally discriminatory towards their own sex, if not quite as extreme. A surprisingly large number of women respondents from the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that men make better political leaders than women – including over half of women respondents from Bangladesh, China, Islamic Republic of Iran and Uganda, over one third from Albania and Mexico, and one out of every five from the United States. This underlines the fact that discriminatory attitudes towards women and girls are not simply held by men, but also reflect norms and perceptions that may be shared by the entire society. Research has shown that when women set aside these norms and the pressure to conform is relaxed, their choices and values are very different.

While such opinion polls and surveys offer a window into the views of societies, they cannot show the true extent of gender discrimination. Quantifiable indicators are needed in order to gain a clearer picture of the inequalities and inequities produced by gender discrimination against women and girls. But as many national and international surveys and censuses are often not disaggregated by sex, such indicators are relatively scarce. Nonetheless, the data available point to a clear conclusion: gender inequalities remain stubbornly entrenched in all regions of the world.

An attempt to capture gender discrimination in a single indicator is the United Nations Development Programme Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which assesses gender equality in key areas of economic and political participation in decision-making. The measure includes estimated earned income (a crucial determinant of a family member's influence on household decisions), the percentage of women working in senior positions and the percentage of women in parliament. Gender empowerment as measured by GEM is lowest in countries in the Middle East and North Africa and South Asia, and highest in industrialized countries, although there is wide variation across regions.

While poorer countries tend to have lower levels of gender empowerment, there is no clear evidence that gender inequalities automatically diminish at higher levels of income. Accordingly, low income need not be a barrier to higher levels of gender empowerment.

See References, page 88.



Institutional discrimination is harder to identify and rectify. Cultural traditions can perpetuate inequality and discrimination from generation to generation, as gender stereotypes remain accepted and unchallenged.

The unequal division of household labour, such as requiring girls and women to trek many kilometres to fetch water and firewood, or the uneven allocation of household resources, such as giving women and girls less food or medical care, are examples of more subtle forms of inequality. These ingrained forms of discrimination often keep individuals, families and societies trapped in poverty and undermine economic, political and social development.

If poverty is to become history, then gender inequality must first be eliminated. Bold initiatives and unflinching determination

are required to end individual and institutional gender discrimination. Attitudes, customs and values that are detrimental to women and girls must be confronted. No history, legacy, religion or cultural tradition can justify inequality and disempowerment.

The double dividend of gender equality

Despite ingrained gender inequality, the status of women has improved in the past three decades. An increased awareness of discriminatory practices and outcomes – including physical and sexual violence, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), disproportionate numbers affected by HIV/AIDS and female illiteracy, among others – has fostered greater demand for change. By promoting legal and social reforms, proponents of gender equality have begun to reshape the social and political

landscape. And while gender continues to influence people's choices and challenges, in many parts of the world a girl born in 2007 will probably have a brighter future than a girl born when CEDAW was adopted in 1979.

Today, women and girls have access to opportunities that were previously restricted. Primary school enrolment rates for girls have jumped and the educational gender gap is narrowing. Women are entering the labour force in greater numbers. And women's political representation is increasing in many parts of the world.

In 2006, for instance, Chile and Jamaica elected women for the first time as their heads of government. (Chile's president, Michelle Bachelet, is also head of state.) In addition, the Republic of Korea appointed its first woman prime minister in April 2006, bringing the total number of female heads of state or government in the world to 14.⁷

While that number is miniscule, considering that there are 192 UN Member States, female government leadership was unheard of less than 50 years ago.⁸

Gains in gender equality notwithstanding, far too many women and girls have been left behind and remain voiceless and powerless. Women are disproportionately affected by poverty, inequality and violence. It is widely estimated that women make up the majority of the world's poor,⁹ comprise nearly two thirds of the people who are illiterate,¹⁰ and, along with children, account for 80 per cent of civilian casualties during armed conflict.¹¹

All Member States of the United Nations, regardless of their political, religious or ethnic composition, spoke with one voice when the UN pledged to make the world fit for children at the General Assembly Special Session on Children in May 2002.



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Figure 1.3 In sub-Saharan Africa, young women are more vulnerable to HIV infection but have less comprehensive knowledge about HIV than young men

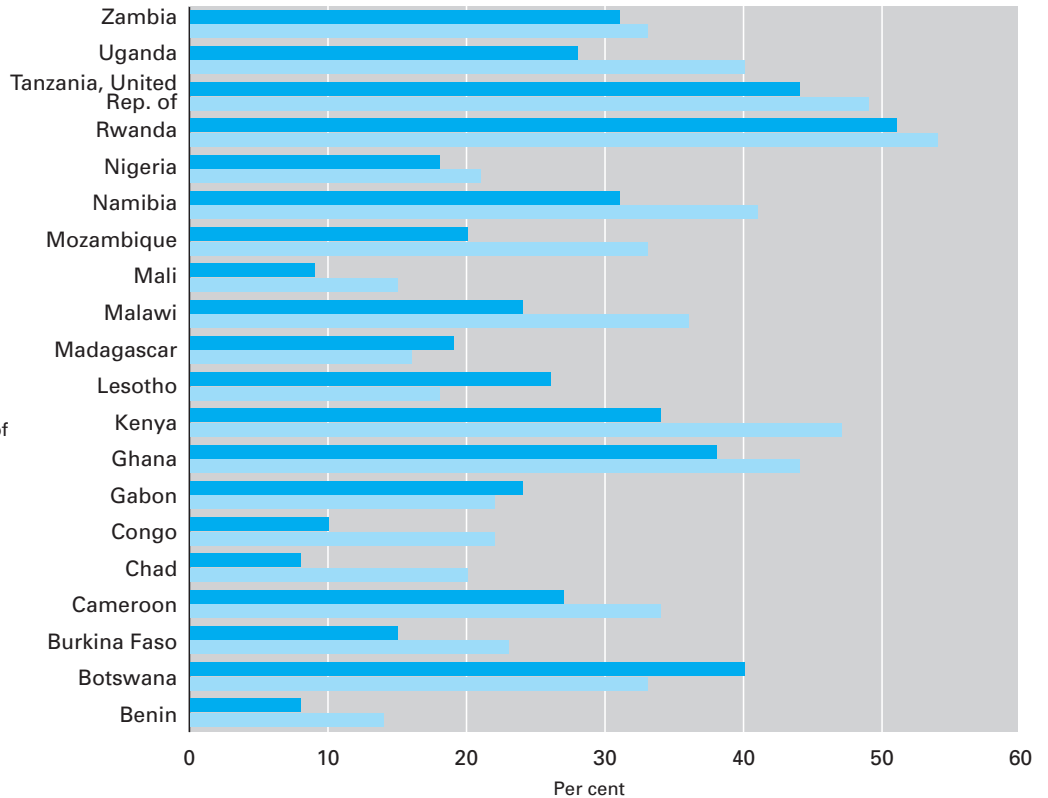
Young people (aged 15–24) in selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa who have comprehensive knowledge of HIV, 1999–2005*

■ Female
■ Male

Note: Countries selected on the basis of data availability for HIV prevalence and comprehensive knowledge of HIV for both male and female young people.

* Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified.

Sources: Demographic and Health Surveys, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, Behavioural Surveillance Surveys, Reproductive Health Surveys, and HIV/AIDS Survey Indicators Database. The underlying data can be found in the Statistical Tables of this report, page 98.

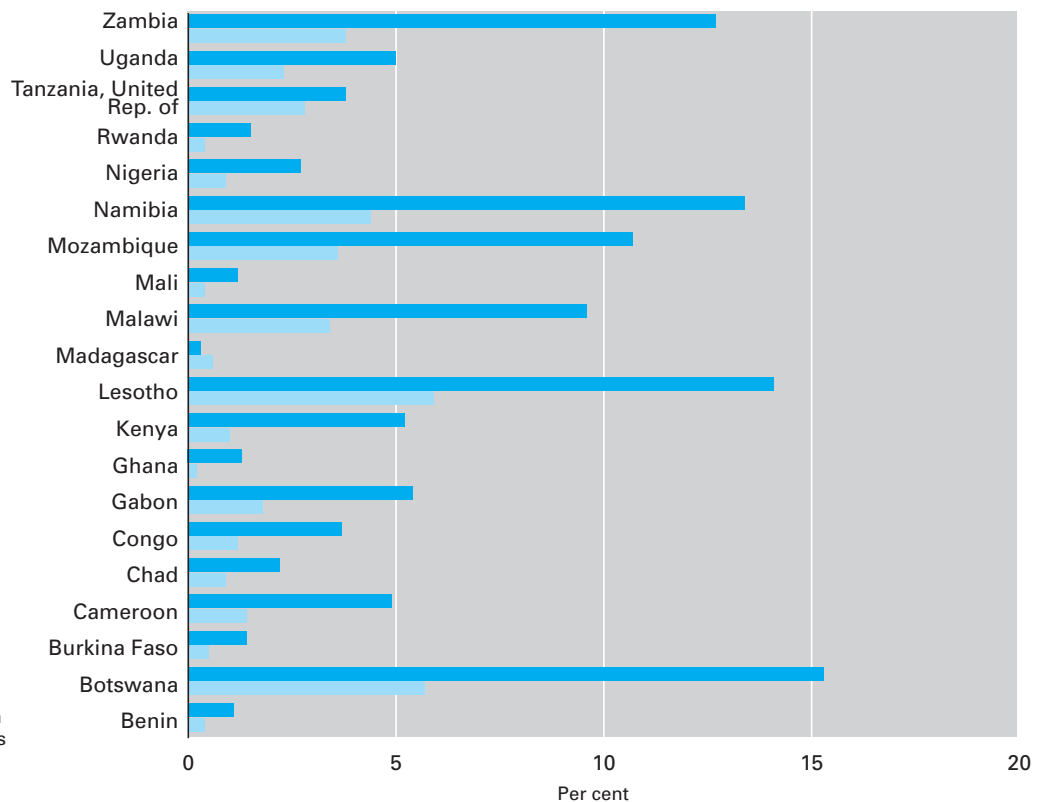


HIV prevalence among young people (aged 15–24) in selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa, 2005

■ Female
■ Male

Note: Countries selected on the basis of data availability for HIV prevalence and comprehensive knowledge of HIV for both male and female young people.

Source: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, *2006 Report on the global AIDS epidemic*, UNAIDS, Geneva, 2006. The underlying data can be found in the Statistical Tables of this report, page 98.



But rallying around the cause of children without championing gender equality is like stocking a sports team with players but failing to teach them how to play the game.

The intergenerational dividends of gender equality

Women are the primary caregivers for children and thus ultimately shape children's lives. This is especially true in the most traditional, patriarchal societies where roles and responsibilities are strictly delineated by gender. The well-being of women and children is inseparable. What is good for women is good for children with few, if any, exceptions.

Nations bear the consequences when women are disempowered and deprived of human rights. The cycle of poverty and despair is passed from generation to generation. Conversely, countries reap double dividends when gender equality is promoted and

ultimately attained. Women become healthy, educated, productive and able to help their children survive and thrive. These benefits are bequeathed to current and future generations.

To maximize gender equality's impact on poverty reduction, education and sustainable development, women must have influence in decision-making in three distinct areas: the household, the workplace and the political sphere. A change for the better in any one of these realms influences women's equality in the others. But halfway measures towards human rights are unacceptable. Anything less than unqualified support for gender equality in all three areas will sabotage meaningful progress towards fulfilling the MDGs.

Equality in the household (Chapter 2)

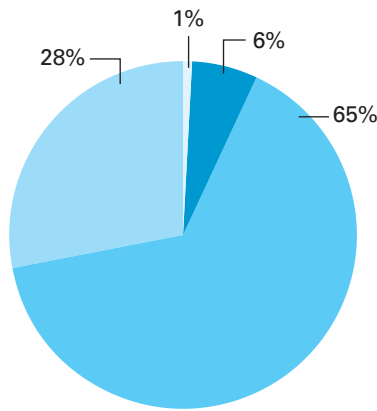
Women's access to power at the household level has the most direct impact on families and children. Here is where decisions are



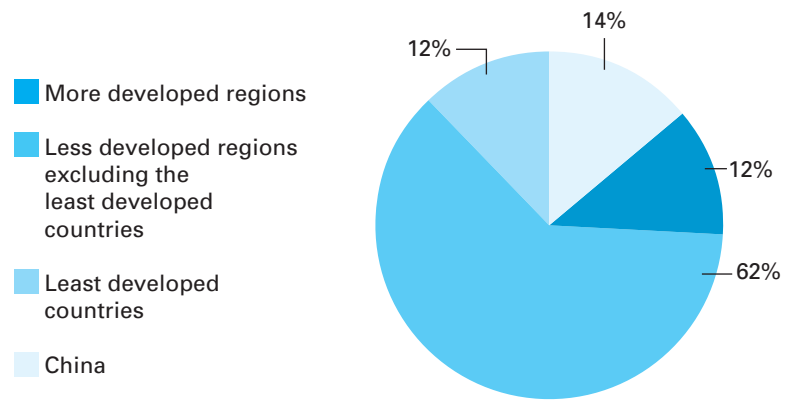
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Figure 1.4 More than 1 out of every 4 births to an adolescent mother (aged 15–19) occurs in the least developed countries

Global births by mothers aged 15–19, 2000–2005



Global population of female adolescents, aged 15–19, 2005



Source: United Nations Population Division, 'World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision Database', <www.esa.un.org/unpp/>, accessed September 2006. Note: The country composition of each regional group can be found in References, page 88.

made about the allocation of resources for food, health care, schooling and other family necessities.

When women are locked out of decisions regarding household income and other resources, they and their children are more likely to receive less food, and to be denied essential health services and education. Household chores, such as fetching water, gathering firewood or caring for the young or infirm, are delegated to mothers and daughters, which keeps them out of the paid labour force or school. When women share equally in household decisions, they tend to provide more adequately and fairly for their children.

Equality in the workplace (Chapter 3)

At work, women are often victimized by discrimination. They may be excluded from more highly remunerated occupations and are frequently paid less than men for the same work. Women and girls are often recruited into domestic work outside their own homes and may be forced to live away from their families, at times in oppressive, dangerous conditions. Destitute women and girls may find the sex trade their only option

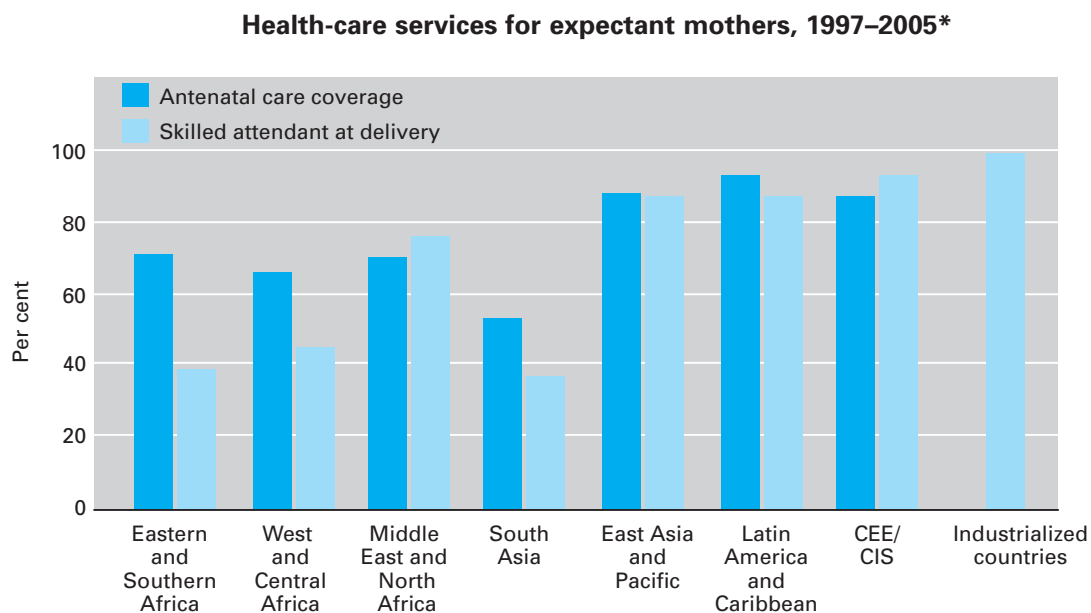
for employment when all other economic doors have been shut.

Ending the wage gap, opening higher-paying fields to women and allowing female workers more decision-making power will greatly benefit children. As women become economically productive, their spheres of influence increase. They become able to make choices not only for themselves, but also for their children. When a woman brings income or assets into the household, she is more likely to be included in decisions on how the resources will be distributed. Historically, when women hold decision-making power, they see to it that their children eat well, receive adequate medical care, finish school and have time for recreation and play. Women who have access to meaningful, income-producing work are more likely to increase their families' standards of living, leading children out of poverty.

Equality in government and politics (Chapter 4)

Increasing women's political participation is an MDG objective in its own right (MDG 3, Target 4, Indicator 12). Empowering women in the political arena can help change societies.

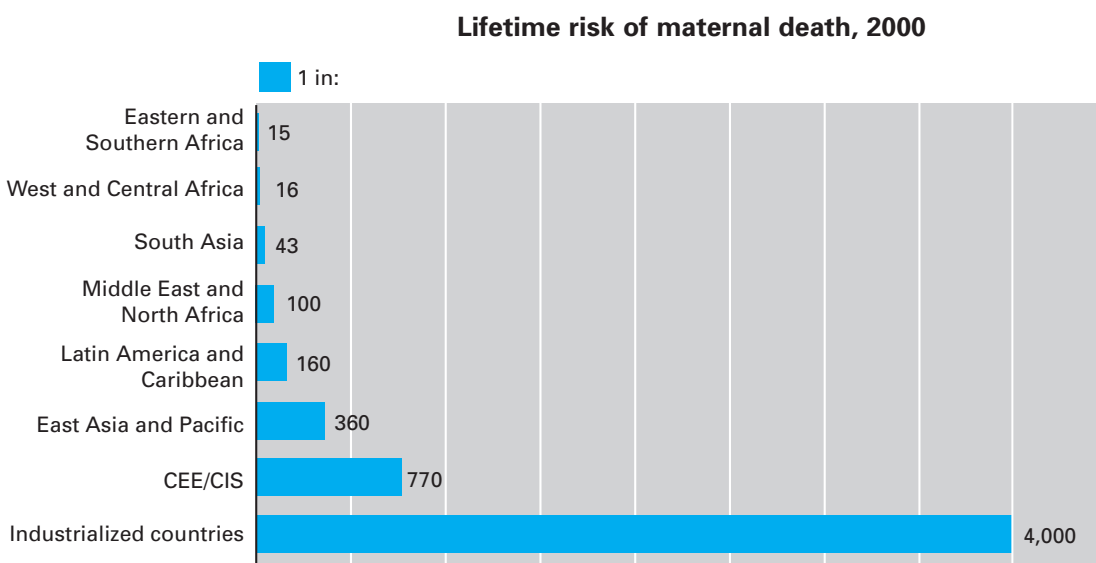
Figure 1.5 High rates of maternal death are associated with limited access to health-care services for expectant mothers



Note: Antenatal care coverage refers to the percentage of women aged 15–24 attended at least once during pregnancy by a skilled attendant (doctor, nurse or midwife). Data on antenatal care coverage are not available for industrialized countries. Skilled attendant at delivery refers to the percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel (doctors, nurses or midwives).

* Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified.

Sources: Demographic and Health Surveys, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, World Health Organization and UNICEF. The underlying data can be found in the Statistical Tables of this report, page 98.



Note: The lifetime risk of maternal death takes into account both the probability of becoming pregnant and the probability of dying as a result of that pregnancy, accumulated across a women's reproductive years.

Source: World Health Organization and UNICEF. The underlying data can be found in the Statistical Tables of this report, page 98.

Their involvement in governing bodies, whether local or national, leads to policies and legislation that focus on women, children and families. In a survey of 187 women who hold public office in 65 countries, the Inter-Parliamentary Union found that about nine-tenths believe they have a responsibility to represent women's interests and advocate for other members of society.¹²

Women can play key roles in securing peace. Female representation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction is vital to ensuring the safety and protection of children and other vulnerable populations. Women's direct influence on politics and public policy bodes well for peace, security and prosperity.

Empowering women and girls

The status of women is a crucial element for accurately gauging the state of the world's children and assessing what the future holds for them. Disaggregated data on life expectancy, infant and under-five mortality, educational enrolment and completion, as well as other quantifiable statistics, are necessary to assess progress towards the MDGs. But attitudes, cultural beliefs and ingrained bigotry are difficult to quantify; consequently, qualitative evidence and women's reporting on their experiences are also needed to promote gender equality, poverty reduction and sustainable development.

The following chapters will analyse both quantitative indicators and qualitative evidence about the status of women and its relationship to child survival and development. The final chapter of the report intends to provide a road map for maximizing gender equality through seven key modes: education, financing, legislation, legislative quotas, engaging men and boys, women empowering

women, and improved research and data. For only when equality is achieved will women be empowered, and only then will they and their children thrive.

It has been nearly 30 years since CEDAW was adopted by the United Nations. One can only imagine what the lives of girls born in 1979 would have been like had the convention been fully supported and implemented. A generation of empowered women would have made a world of difference.

As a Chinese adage says, "Women hold up half the sky." The next generation cannot wait another three decades for its rights. Women and girls must have the means and support to fulfil their potential and fully enjoy their rights.

A world fit for women is a world fit for children

Two years after the Millennium Summit, the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in May 2002 linked economic development to the creation of a world fit for children. A world fit for children is also a world fit for women. They are inseparable and indivisible – one cannot exist without the other.

Lofty ambitions, good intentions and catchy slogans will not produce human progress. The road to sustainable development cannot be paved with half measures. Sound investments and a resolute commitment to justice, gender equality and children are required.

If all citizens are allowed the opportunity to reach their potential, then nations will thrive. No argument against gender equality, whether based on traditions, customs or outright bigotry, can disprove the claim that women's rights are good for children and ultimately good for the world.